

Features

Author Amy has cut out the middleman and won fans for her adventures finds Beccy Golding

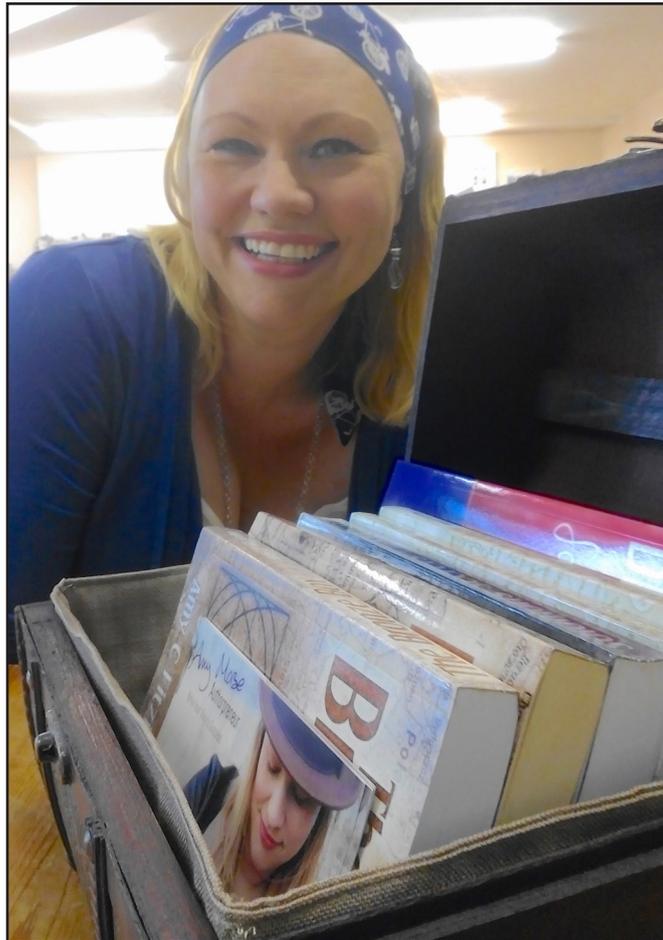
AMY Morse is an authorpreneur: one of a new breed of self-published, self-employed authors who have bypassed the traditional publishing scene to make a go of it on their own. The Bedminster author is also pretty prolific, having just completed the last of her four-book Sheridan and Blake fiction series.

I met Amy in a café in Knowle. From one of her canvas bags she pulled out what appeared to be a small treasure chest. Inside were her four novels – the Sheridan and Blake series - started in 2008 and completed this year. The first of the series is called *The Bronze Box* – hence the treasure chest – and starts this series of twisty-turny thrillers centred around archaeologist Sasha Blake, and Tim Sheridan, an operative of secret organisation *The Agency*.

The action starts in Bulgaria – which is where, in real life, Amy had her “what-if?” moment. Visiting an archaeological museum after moving to Bulgaria with her husband in 2008, she wondered what men would really do for a priceless artefact. The “epic global adventure” sees the pair following clues across the world to find the bronze box, which has been stolen from an archaeological dig. Somehow (you’ll have to read it to find out how) the pair end up in Bristol, where fun local plot-twists include a slow-car chase down Gloucester Road, action on Park Street, and a moment of peril on the Suspension Bridge where they’re panicking to find money for the toll!

Amy said the whole story is “written as a bit of a puzzle” with “Dan Brown-esque historical snippets and bits from all over the place that don’t seem to fit” until they are cleverly pulled together at the end.

She told me her writing process includes the back of a



Homely: The adventures feature Bristol settings PICTURE: Beccy Golding

Join Amy on her mission into mystery

door covered in Post-it notes with important scenes on them, moved about and linked until it all works as a whole. Add to this a classic “will they, won’t they” relationship between the two heroes and lots of big dramatic scenes. Amy clearly knows the

whole thing intimately, telling me about her characters and the action so vividly it’s like it’s all happened to her. When I asked her if she does book readings she said she doesn’t – because she knows the voices of her characters so well it doesn’t

Bristol Festival of Literature October 20-29

Amy is on the committee and thoroughly recommends anyone with an interest in reading or writing to go along. It showcases acclaimed authors alongside voices from across

the city. Open-mics, workshops, talks, storytelling and literature slams (hosted by South Bristol favourite Angie Belcher), with local events including spooky *Tales of the Crypt* held at Arnos Vale cemetery.
• unputdownable.org

sound right to her when she reads what they say in her own voice!

Though she started writing the first book in 2008, she didn’t publish it until 2013 – so the next three books have emerged in quickfire succession over the last three years. After the initial idea “the rest of the story was already written in my head, and I always knew it would be more than one book.”

The first book ends with a big cliff-hanger (another device Amy loves). *Solomon’s Secret*, the second book, includes revenge, traps and double agents, and an important manuscript housed at Bristol University. (Amy used Bristol-based crowd-funding organisation *Fundersurf* to raise funds for professional consultation on this one.)

Books three and four, jointly *Gabriel’s Game*, continue the story – part 1, *The White Queen*, with references to historical Bristol in the early 1200s, was published in 2015, and part 2, *The Black Knight*, wraps up the whole saga and was published this year.

I asked Amy why she decided to self-publish. “It was a big step to be a writer,” she said; something she’d always wanted but that perhaps hadn’t been taken seriously by others. Living in Bedminster since 2010, she feels embedded in the writing community in Bristol, from whose members she has drawn insights and advice.

She realised that contracts are hard to get and publishers take most of your money, so she decided to do it herself. With her background in business support she also decided to do it in a business-like way. “I had a product to sell, and proof (after the first book) that people like it.” She’s also written a non-fiction book *Blogging For Business*, published in 2013. She does a lot of blogging – it’s part of her promotional activity, as well as a way of helping businesses.

To date Amy has sold more than 5,000 copies of her Sheridan and Blake series. The books are published under her maiden name – Amy Fitzjohn. It’s also pretty unusual – which means it’s easier to Google!

Amy’s next book is a spin-off featuring a different character from the books. And Bristol. And plenty of adventure, plot-twists and cliff-hangers, no doubt.