

Book review

Cherry Red

Neil B Hampson

Ebook, 156 pages

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It can be said that we all have a book in us, but few of us have the commitment to follow through and bring it (or them) into the world. After a distinguished career in clinical medicine and medical science publishing, Neil Hampson began exploring new directions in writing with the 2014 publication of a true crime story with a family connection.¹ He has now moved into murder mystery fiction with *Cherry Red*. This book brings together his intimate knowledge of hyperbaric medicine, carbon monoxide poisoning and the Pacific Northwest into a who- and how-done-it romp. Those who know the American hyperbaric medicine community will recognize slightly obscured or partial names of many players in the field. The protagonist of the story, Dr Bradley Franklin, is a hyperbaric physician practicing in Seattle who finds intrigue in a rash of unusual cases of carbon monoxide poisoning. The good doctor bears more than a passing resemblance to the author (Neil Bradley Hampson), with several of the benefits that one can bestow on an avatar, including an adjustment of birthdate and character commentary describing him as looking 10 years younger than his old college roommate!

The book provides a peek behind the curtain into the practices within clinical hyperbaric units and hospitals, and a novel (yes, pun intended) tutorial on the hazards, presentation, management, and avoidance of carbon monoxide poisoning. Insights into the Pacific Northwest experience and regional history add extra dimensions to entice the reader. There are also a few shining moments of humour, the best one being between Brad and his wife, that are quite engaging.

While well crafted, the book is not without flaws. The most significant is the somewhat stilted dialogue, most noticeable when it is used to communicate more backstory than would be normal for a conversation between colleagues, or as unnaturally formal conversation between friends. These, though, are forgivable errors in a sophomore book. The minor editing issues are less so: the inappropriate use of “*insure*” in place of “*ensure*”, “*complimentary*” in place of “*complementary*” and the occasional missing or incorrect words. There is also a small amount of gratuitous character development. The most extreme example of this is found in the character of Candy, who adds little to the story with her breathless presence or her clothing choices.

I enjoyed *Cherry Red*. It is not high art, but it is a light vacation read that also serves to educate. It will be a good choice for those exposed to or associated with hyperbaric or diving medicine, those interested in medically-based mysteries, those who like education wrapped in a fiction package, and those wanting to check out fiction set in the Pacific Northwest. Even the flaws have grace, since they are certain to disappear in future creations by this writer.

Reference

- 1 Hampson NB. *Serial chase: a true story of the lives and deaths of a doctor and a deputy*. Seattle: Self-published through CreateSpace (Amazon); 2014.

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Key words

General interest; Carbon monoxide; Book reviews