



Review by
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DEATH BY CARBS

AUTHOR: PAIGE NICK
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Tim Noakes is a not-shy professor of exercise physiology from Cape Town in South Africa and has lots to say on diet. More on this later. However, it is amazing that he has just become the main murder victim in a crime fiction book, despite being very much alive. It is some tribute to him that there are enough South African readers of the completely made-up plot of his murder, to put the book into the Top 10 sales list for March 2016. The book *Death by Carbs* bizarrely describes the fictionalised characters involved and affected by the unreal death of a real nutritionist.

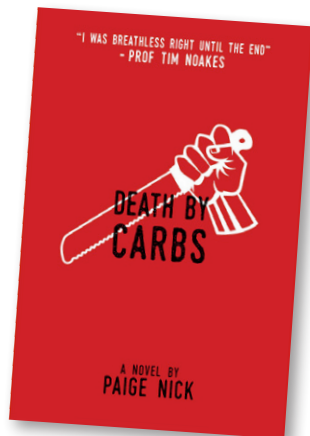
The story starts with the discovery of the body. The overweight policeman hands the corpse to the ambulance men, but they are car-jacked, and two gangsters have to handle the disposal of the valuable dead person. So who killed Professor Noakes?

who is quick to push meal plans on the internet, which she claims to have been TN endorsed.

Actually, this is a who-cares who-dunnit novel and the revelation of the culprit and surprise final twist is the least interesting part of the book. Of greater interest are the personalities and plots around diet promotion, which *Death by Carbs* offers very interesting insights into.

Many of the fictional characters in the book make their money from the diet industry, and it is revealing that there is not even the slightest hint of dietetic input into the (fictional) discussions. But there are rich descriptions of Facebook and other social media discussions of weight loss. The creation of multiple online personas to promote diets and the planting of half-truths and muddle to push products, was very insightful, illustrating the way that bubbles of opinion can develop without any science anchor.

The author, Paige Nick, has researched the weight loss discussions that occur online in depth and reflects these back in her fictional writings - including by one character called Nicky



*We have four signed copies of **Death by Carbs** by Paige Nick to give away. For your chance to win, [click here](#) . . .*

There is a spaghetti plate of weaves and clues on who-dunnit. Was it the ex-publisher who had rejected the low carb cookbook that launched the 'banting' craze in South Africa? Was it Tim Noakes' wife, who seems to have disappeared? Was it the CEO of a snack company that was facing decline because of public carb-rejection? Was it the jealous co-author of the cookbook, a secret-pasta-eating chef, who was facing poor attendance and financial ruin at his low carb restaurant? Or was it any of thousands of crazy trolling TN fans; there is particular suspicion of a woman

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Paige, which is a clever joke. The book even has a cover endorsement by Professor Tim Noakes: "I was breathless right until the end," which is a comment best appreciated once you have read the book.

THE REAL TIM NOAKES

So, who is Tim Noakes and why is he such a rich source of fictional delight? He is a doctor (with three doctorates) and has spent his career researching metabolic homeostasis mechanisms during extreme exercise, or activities in extreme conditions, such as super-cold environments. He wrote a very successful, thousand-page book for runners entitled *Lore of Running*, but from that point, he has made very sharp U-turns in his opinions, which are now almost opposite to those of most of his colleagues. He thinks that athletes (and everyone) should have diets based on protein and fats, and that intakes of all carbohydrates should be tightly controlled. In recognition that William Banting (died 1878) was the original advocate of this style of eating, Tim Noakes labels the dietary rules he promotes as 'banting'.

His book entitled *Waterlogged - the Serious Problem of Overhydration in Endurance Sport* described his research into exercise-associated hyponatraemia and strongly challenged the promotions of the sports drinks industry. His next book was a popular diet book describing recipes for Low Carb High Fat (LCHF) eating, entitled *Real Meal Revolution*. The book has been a crazy success in South Africa with sales at 250 thousand, and was followed by a book launched in 2015 describing LCHF eating for children: *Raising Superheroes*.

The battle between high fat or high carb strategies to optimize sports performance (in exercisers) or health (in overweight public) are

not unique to academics in South Africa, but nowhere else has this debate spilled over into popular fictional literature, or popular judicial reporting.

The prompt for Prof Noakes' most recent confrontations is due to a twitter spat. A breastfeeding woman tweeted him on whether the LCHF diet was suitable for her and he replied that it was, and to, "wean baby onto LCHF". This was a final straw for Claire Julsing-Strydom, the President of the Association for Dietetics in South Africa, who reported him to the Health Professions Council of South Africa on the basis of unprofessional conduct. The legal case balances the full body of nutrition science research against a tiny tweet and while hearings took place in February 2016, final sessions are due in October 2016. No doubt lawyers of both sides are spending much highly charged-for time, reviewing nutrition science journals.

This feature is about a fictional book, rather than any review of nutrition science debates prompted by Professor Tim Noakes. Perhaps the observations that the (mostly black) runners fuelled on fried chicken often won races over the (mostly white) runners fuelling on glucose drinks, started Tim Noakes' contrarian views. However, the involvement of professional conduct hearings broadens the issues into those of professional free speech. And what better way to handle such delicate topics, than in a book of fiction.

Death by Carbs is a quick-flick book that cannot really be recommended to any book club. However, it is an interesting and fun tackle of crazy diet-talking characters, and reveals many of the peripheral forces that have so much sway on public opinion around weight loss. For this reason (only), it is an interesting read for dietitians.