

The ambulance chaser

By Richard Beasley

Pan Macmillan, 2004

I wonder how many failed novelists there are at the New South Wales Bar? By that I am not limiting it just to those barristers who have written novels but who have been unable to have them published. I would include all of those who have commenced novels, but have failed to complete the task. Throw in for good measure all of those novels never even started. There must be many in this category – I have not started a couple of hundred novels myself. For a full-time barrister to produce a successful novel must require a lot of discipline.

So I start this review from a position of unqualified admiration, mixed with a healthy dose of envy, for the author of *The ambulance chaser* – the barrister, Richard Beasley.

This is Mr Beasley's second novel; his first, *Hell has harbour views* was a success and is currently being made into a movie. The first novel centred on the angst suffered by a young lawyer, emotionally and professionally compromised by the collision between promises of success in a large law firm and diminishing personal standards. *Hell has harbour views* took a number of tales from contemporary legal gossip, mixed those up with some just-recognisable pen portraits of prominent legal figures and wrapped it all around a barely believable plot.

This second novel follows much the same pattern.

The central character, Chris Blake, is a struck off barrister. The circumstances which led to the striking-off were more the cause of another party, but Blake was sufficiently personally

culpable so that his eventual bankruptcy (combined with a bit of drinking and other matters) warranted his removal from the Roll. There are complications in his personal life as well. With his trustee on his back, Blake is compelled to take a job as a claims manager at a new, but startlingly successful, insurance company, South Pacific Insurance.

The senior management of South Pacific are not very likeable people and their management practices (like their advertisements) are questionable. You can see where this is going. Blake finds himself at the centre of a mystery / investigation / adventure. He is (at least by my standards) very brave – maybe foolhardy. He receives some help from unlikely sources. The plot gradually acquires momentum until – well, the denouement I found a little strained – in legal terms, a little far-fetched.

The narrative is chatty and humorous. The central character, Blake is likeable, cynical, self-effacing and complex. I think he is a bit too brave to be a barrister. Many of Blake's observations on his life and on the world made me laugh. The other characters are a little clichéd, although maybe necessarily so given they only provide a backdrop for the insights of the central character. All in all, it is a light and entertaining read.

I think you will enjoy *The ambulance chaser* – I did.

Reviewed by Geoffrey Watson SC