



Beat the Reaper

Josh Bazell

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Dr. Peter Brown is an intern at Manhattan's worst hospital; Pietro "Bearclaw" Brwna is a hitman for the mob.

And Nicholas LoBrutto, Dr. Brown's new patient who has three months to live, has a very strange idea: that Peter Brown and Pietro Brwna might - just might - be the same person ...

Dr. Peter Brown is an intern at Manhattan's worst hospital, with a talent for medicine, a shift from hell, and a past he'd prefer to keep hidden. Whether it's a blocked circumflex artery or a plan to land a massive malpractice suit, he knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men.

Pietro "Bearclaw" Brwna is a hitman for the mob, with a genius for violence, a well-earned fear of sharks, and an overly close relationship with the Federal Witness Relocation Program. More likely to leave a trail of dead gangsters than a molecule of evidence, he's the last person you want to see in your hospital room.

Nicholas LoBrutto, aka Eddy Squillante, is Dr. Brown's new patient, with three months to live and a very strange idea: that Peter Brown and Pietro Brwna might - just might - be the same person ...

Now, with the mob, the government, and death itself descending on the hospital, Peter has to buy time and do whatever it takes to keep his patients, himself, and his last shot at redemption alive. To get through the next eight hours - and somehow beat the reaper.

Spattered in adrenaline-fueled action and bone-saw-sharp dialogue, Beat the Reaper is a debut thriller so utterly original you won't be able to guess what happens next, and so shockingly entertaining you won't be able to put it down.

Beat the Reaper Details

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From Reader Review Beat the Reaper for online ebook

Gamma Mouse says

I'm a Charlie Huston honk. There, I admitted it. Like the first step out of twelve, I recognize my problem. And I feel unburdened. Free almost. I'm a Huston-holic. A junkie for Charlie's magical mushroom prose. And like every good Huston-holic, I'm always searching for writers with a similar style. Writers that'll grab me by the throat, worrying me like a dog.

Enter Josh Bazell.

A combination of Huston and Chuck Palahniuk, Bazell stuns with his debut novel *Beat the Reaper*, a brutal and humorous medical-crime griftest. It's *Goodfellas* meets *House*—with footnotes. Part hitman, part healer. But with a bedside manner that will have you running out of a hospital quicker than you can say "HMO." Though this big idea sounds odd, the novel works, beautifully. Like a virus that gets inside you, always consuming, always growing. Never stopping. If you don't have an addiction, *Beat the Reaper* will give you one. Namely a finishing-the-book addiction. It's like life. Once you start, you won't stop until you reach the end.

Dr. Peter Brown has a past he'd like to forget. Once a hitter for the mob—known as Pietro "Bearclaw" Brnwa—he got out when things went bad, testifying against his former employers before dropping off the face of the earth, courtesy of the Federal Witness Protection Program.

Relocated and re-imagined, Peter assumes a new life as an intern at Manhattan Catholic Hospital. Helping and treating patients. Including one patient who happens to be a mob father with a good memory. One who happens to recognize the Pietro in Peter. Suddenly Peter must move fast to stay ahead of a vengeful mob looking to mete out mafia justice. The type of justice that'll put him into the Manhattan Catholic morgue.

The narrative alternates between chapters. One plotline focusing on Peter's current predicament and one examining his past as a mob enforcer, both slowly teasing out the answers of why he left the life. And why he's on the lam. The action is intense, and the alternating nature of the chapters makes the book incredibly addictive. Like literary crack, it'll have you greeting the dawn, puffy red bags under your eyes. I stayed up most of the night, compelled to finish. Even better I was absolutely satisfied once I did.

Bazell never shortchanges the reader, peppering *Beat the Reaper* with a slew of unforgettable moments, leading to an ending so grotesque and badass you won't want to miss it. And you'll probably never be the same after you've read it.

Like Huston, Bazell creates dialogue with a street cadence. It sounds real, and even more importantly, it sounds cool. Really cool. Like you can use it to impress your friends. Make them think you're clever. Coupled with the odd-fact weirdness popularized by Palahniuk, and *Beat the Reaper* makes for a unique and humorous read. The mob and medicine have never been this engaging together.

Last Word:

Stunning debuts like *Beat the Reaper* do one thing—leave you wanting more. Like a kid stomping his foot, impatiently. More Pietro Brnwa, more streetwise dialogue, more intense, heart-stopping action. More Josh Bazell. After this gem, people will be eagerly anticipating Bazell's next novel. I know—I'm one of them. And that's the first step, admitting the problem. Admitting you're a Bazell-holic.

Jane says

3.5 stars for the Audible version.

Well, now. I'm not even really sure what I just finished listening to! Beat the Reaper was fast-paced, gritty, edgy, and funny. It also, at times, seemed to try too hard to be shocking. This is not a book for prudes nor for the squeamish.

It took me a bit to get into the rhythm of chapters that alternated between telling past events and those happening *right now*, but overall I enjoyed this book, and I think narrator Robert Petkoff was a perfect choice -- I'll definitely be looking for more of his work! Unfortunately, I found the music and sound effects, which seemed to have been added almost randomly, to be distracting. It's a shame, too, because the echoing voice effect was perfect when it was used, but other effects were less subtle, and every time the music started up it pulled me right out of the story.

I might consider giving the sequel a go despite its less than stellar reviews, but I won't be rushing out to get it.

Michael says

An outrageous novel that got me laughing a lot in between painfully gruesome situations, a plot worthy of comic books, and occasional absurdly implausible sex scenes.

A young intern of Polish Jewish background, Peter Brown, tries to save patients from gross incompetence at the "worst hospital in Manhattan" while popping drugs to keep awake. It turns out he is former mob hit man in Witness Protection, and his cover is in danger of being blown. Much of the tale corresponds to reflecting back on his unusual past that led to his current situation. His parents were murdered when he was a kid, and he works his way toward avenging their death in his teenage years. This attracts the attention of the mobster father of his school friend, who leads him take on work carrying out periodic hits for money on despicable people that truly deserve killing.

His brutal defense against a mugger on the way to work on the first pages reveals his special skills in violence and sardonic internal dialog that typically leans to medical annotation in excruciating detail. Because of my background in the medical sciences, I liked the collision of unrealistic plot violence with realistic coverage of consequences. To help you decide if this novel is for you, I share with you this piece from the opening scenario:

...the fuckhead can see the blue scrub pants under my overcoat..., so he thinks I've got drugs and money on me. And maybe that I've taken some kind of oath not to kick his fuckhead ass for trying to mug me.

I barely have enough drugs and money to get me through the day. And the only oath I took, as I recall, was to first do no harm. I'm thinking we're past that point. ...

I turn around, which rolls the gun off my skull and leaves my raised right hand above the fuckhead's arm. I wrap his elbow and jerk upward, causing the ligaments to pop like champagne corks.

Let's take a moment to smell the rose known as the elbow.

The two bones of the forearm, the ulna and the radius, move independently of each other, and also rotate.

You can see this by turning your hand from palm up, in which position the ulna and radius are parallel, to palm down, where they're crossed into an "X." They therefore require a complicated anchoring system at the elbow, with the ligaments wrapping the various bone ends in spoolable and unspoolable ribbons that look like the tape on the handle of a tennis racket. It's a shame to tear these ligaments apart.

Thus, you can see that the book is not for the squeamish, but as with me Bazell's imaginative over-the-top action and particular genius for humor in his delivery may appeal enough to get you past the tough parts.

Cheryl says

Peter Brown is not your normal Manhattan ER doctor. When it comes to skeletons in the closet, he has tons. One of those skeletons he forced him to enter into the Witness Protection Program. Peter has been fighting with his demons for years. Peter was ready to start his day out like any other morning...with a walk in the park but there he gets mugged, than he receives an invite by a sexy pharmaceutical nurse for some TLC, and finally as if Peter's day couldn't get any worse, he new patient has tie ins with the Mob and is someone who happens to know who Peter Brown really is from his prior life.

Now Peter his to keep his new patient from dying or pay the consequences.

Josh Bazell is one of the freshest new authors I have read. Beat the Reaper starts off 2009 the right way. Peter Brown lays it all out. He holds back no punches and tells it like it is...no bullshit. This is why I like Peter. I do have to admit that at first when Peter would travel back in time to his prior life and than the present I did get a little lost but I blame this on the fact that I was so focused and into the book that the storyline ran all together for me. Once I figured out what was going on after the first time, I really got back into the story again. The footnotes that Mr. Bazell inserted throughout the book with his medical knowledge were very informative and helped add a little something extra to the book. I hope to see another book soon from Mr. Bazell.

Robert says

Hey fuckhead,

Yep, you, the one with the track marks running down both arms trying to slide off into oblivion, with the tilted head and the faraway expression, staring at the sun like it's some four-headed monster ready to steal your dreams, twitching for your next fix like some random dog left out in the rain too long, with a stutter-stepping walk and attitude, veering off from the rest of the universe like a bad dream; you might want to sit this one out, otherwise you might have more than just a fogged-up brain on your hands. You may want to study a medical chart and have your CT scanned and actually study ligaments and tendons and muscles and bones and maybe even pass an anatomy class, although that might be too much to ask, because you're about to get your ass kicked, and you'll need to be able to piece yourself back together later, with the doctor's help of course. And frankly that's what you're going to need: loads and loads of help.

The medical industry is encased in a shitstorm the likes of which your coke-snorting ass has never seen, and it's about to get worse for you and your fellow fuckhead Americans. And if you can stop being a worthless piece of horseshit for more than one fucking minute, you might actually have a prayer at making it in this world, instead of ending up in some premature, unmarked grave all by your lonesome staring at the bottom

of a coffin at the age of twenty-two with your eyes wide open.

The good news is you'll die of lethal injection, probably at the hands of some no-name doctor, when all you did was go and see the man about a head cold. So at least you'll have that going for you. Because if I really wanted to kill you, I could shove a cork down your throat or jack you full of potassium until your eyes bleed, or I could have one of the Latvian nurses on my floor, who is really nothing more than a worthless piece of shit, who smokes more weed than she does rounds and surfs the Internet like she has a gun held to her head, ignore your ass for the rest of your miserable life, peppering your chart with the standard healthy readings when really you're secretly dying of stomach cancer.

And don't forget that I've worked for the mob, hell they brought me into their family, not the one where I had to prove that I'm worthy by killing some innocent individual while he was sleeping, or watching TV in the middle of the afternoon, but the one where I was sitting around the dining room table on a Sunday afternoon shooting the shit. I spent my formative years in dojos studying everything from tae kwon do to kempo, so I know over 100 ways to make your ears bleed, so if you don't get yourself straight and step the fuck off, I'll plant your ass at the bottom of a cesspool, and I'll work the next 120 hours without even batting an eyelash.

Yep, I might just be the craziest son of a bitch you ever met. I pop Moxfane tablets like they're caffeine pills; I take powernaps in a coat closet; and I'll smear a pint of blood all over myself for the right cause. I have what you might call a rapid-onset addiction to bloodshed, and I killed four men while I was still taped to a chair along with countless other fuckers that I'd rather not mention since I'm in WITSEC, so I really have no qualms about killing an innocent, or in your case, not-so-innocent individual.

And while you may not think you're a dumbfuck, and that you're actually being clever by trying to jump my ass while I'm wearing scrubs, there are at least forty different kinds of stupidity, and over the course of our less than five-minute interlude, you exhibited every single one of them, and probably about a dozen others that haven't even been medically diagnosed yet. So, yep, you're fucked, and that's even without your latest fix.

Oh, and whatever you do, don't go to Sicily. Trust me, you'll thank me later.

Sincerely,

Dr. Pietro Brnwa (Bearclaw), intern

P.S. If you know what's good for you, you'll get some Mexican hairless beaver before you die.

P.P.S. Don't be such a fuckhead, fuckhead.

DISCLAIMER - I really liked this book and this voice, so much in fact that I couldn't write this review any other way.

Cross-posted at Robert's Reads

Nathan Rostron says

Utterly ridiculous, gratuitously violent, highly improbable, totally engrossing, lightening-paced. Why don't more people write like this?

Kim says

Wow what a book. I only picked this one up for the Pulp Fiction book club and I never even looked at what it was about. Boy was I in for a surprise.

I started it tentatively as it kicks off with a doctor who seems rather handy in a fight and knows things a normal doctor wouldn't. From there it just ramps up and up and up. Part medical comedy, part gangster action this book floored me and I love every second of it. It feels like someone crossed Scrubs with The Sopranos. And it was smart. All the procedures and anecdotes are real. It's the first time in an action book I've had to stop and Google or Wikipedia things. It was great.

I can't wait to get the sequel and see where things go next. This was a really enjoyable, fast paced, intelligent action book and once you pick it up you won't put it down til you're finished.

One thing though. I'm not the most squeamish of people but there is a scene at the end of the book that really had me wincing. You've been warned.

Michael says

I was recommended this book last year, and while it looks interesting, I kept putting this book off. I'm not sure why I did, as this book was so much fun to read. Think mob book (in the style of Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels or Snatch) meets Scrubs but with a much darker sense of humour. Beat the Reaper by Josh Bazell tells the story of Peter Brown, an intern for Manhattan's worst hospital. Dr. Brown is in the Federal Witness Protection Program having previously been a mob hitman named Pietro Brwna. I know, the feds lacked imagination and yet the mob failed to find him until one of them ends up being a patient of Dr. Peter Brown.

Full reveiw can be found on my blog;
<http://literary-exploration.com/2012/...>

Erin says

ok, here's the thing... at first i didn't think i was going to like this book that much. it seems a bit pretentious, especially the opening few paragraphs. its obvious they were meant to grab you and throw you into a world. and it works, only maybe you're not so sure its a world you care to explore. but here's the thing: i just kept reading and reading. it was engaging enough to keep me up all night just to see where things were going to go. its a bit like an episode of 'er' with flashbacks to 'the sopranos.' maybe i've done a poor job expressing myself. maybe this is a guilty pleasure book. but i did learn things about the human body from this book. its like getting educated while you're mindlessly entertained. since i gave it 4 stars -- mainly for entertainment value -- i obviously liked it. my best advice is to pick it up and get through the first chapter or 2. if it doesn't grab you by then, it won't.

Rick F. says

I just finished BEAT THE REAPER by Josh Bazell- simply put- it is one of the greatest comic crime thrillers I have ever read- I am talking the Immortal Elmore Leonard/Carl Hiaasen territory - Bazell wrote this- his first novel while completing his residency at a hospital (he is now a full doctor I believe) I am still shocked at how perfect this book was- it had everything- even hilarious footnotes(a la Terry Pratchett) and a main character who is so endearing and lifelike that you cant help but love him- even though he is in WITPROTECT Program and a former mob hitman- I have never read a book with more laugh-out loud lines- This book gets my very highest rating I can give

Bonnie says

3 ½ stars (Note: Posting again since apparently not received via e-mail updates.)

A while ago I mentioned in a review-commentary that I was due for some light reading, some brain candy. After some back-and-forth discussion, *Beat the Reaper* won out over a couple of other suggestions. As it turns out, it's not a book I would ordinarily pick up, and if I had, after skimming the first few pages, I might have put it down once I saw that this author was hell-bent on inserting a lot of profanity and violent behavior in his narrative. But I persevered because I respect the opinion of the Goodreads friend who recommended it.

The book opens at 5:00 a.m. with Dr. Peter Brown watching a pigeon fight a rat in the snow when a mugger sticks a gun into the base of his skull. *It's cold, and it actually feels sort of good, in an acupuncture kind of way.* (I liked that line; will be sharing with my physiotherapist next week.) The mugger recognizes him as a doctor by his blue scrub pants, and must assume not only that the doc will do no harm, but that he must be carrying drugs and money. *I barely have enough drugs and money to get me through the day. And the only oath I took, as I recall, was to first do no harm. I'm thinking we're past that point.... I wrap his elbow and jerk upwards, causing ligaments to pop like champagne corks. Let's take a moment to smell the rose known as the elbow.* And during a medical explanation about the mechanics of what the protagonist just did, Josh Bazell takes the reader to his first footnote, and then ends the paragraph with: *It's a shame to tear these ligaments apart.* But the good doctor isn't exactly remorseful, and by the time the scene ends, we've read through a considerable dose of coarse language during the course of a vicious attack.

Turns out pill-popping Dr. Brown is the same person as Pietro "Bearclaw" Brnwa, ex-hit-man, whose story is told in third person past-tense. First-person narrator and present-day Peter is in a Witness Protection Program. When Peter returns to the hospital, he is recognized by a mobster who has cancer. It's either his life or Peter's; past and present meet up. The present-day lasts 8 hours, during which time Peter must Beat the Reaper. Flashbacks are used to show Pietro's life with the grandparents who raised him, and to them being killed when Pietro is not quite fifteen years old. Pietro, now working for the Mafia, justifies killing: he is avenging the murder of his grandparents. As a doctor, Peter is supposedly atoning for his previous "life", but as the opening scene shows us, he's not totally over it.

Weaving back and forth in time, scene breaks show tiny graphics of the Reaper chasing him on foot. When he falls in love ("at-first-sight") the graphics change to the Reaper on a tractor: *Plutarch says carrying new wives across thresholds is stupid because we don't remember that it refers to the rape of the Sabine women – and that's f-ing Plutarch, two thousand years ago. We still draw the Reaper with a scythe. We should draw him driving a John Deere for Archer Daniels Midland.*

The book is littered with these little scene breaks as well as footnotes. Sometimes the footnotes are informative; sometimes the author is just checking to see that you're awake, if you're paying attention; or

simply, **Like you care what this means*. The narrative also continues to be riddled with profanity; brutal acts; scenes that are grisly enough to make one wince; and others that make it difficult to suspend belief. One sex scene was particularly improbable. One minute I'm rolling my eyes, and the next, actually laughing out loud.

It is action-packed, but I found the book easy to put down. Nor is it great literature. Here are a few of the more noteworthy lines:

- *But the hounds don't shun the fox for being mangy. The mob theory was all I had to go on, so I chased it.*
- *Ah, youth. It's like heroin you've smoked instead of snorted. Gone so fast you can't believe you still have to pay for it.*
- *It worried me. Skinflick was as immune to shame as anyone I knew, but even he had his limits. And the journey from shame to resentment is the shortest one there is.*

Of course, Bazell is not pretending to offer good literature. Rather, what he gives the reader is a well-plotted story strewn throughout with bizarre ideas; that a one-legged girl might find a dance partner "down at the hop" is the kind of macabre humour we hear through Dr. Brown.

So, if you enjoy this sort of madcap action/thriller type of book, pick it up. As for me, I thought brain candy was something light and fluffy; cotton-candy for the mind. With *Beat the Reaper* I felt like I got black licorice.

Leah Craig says

I am now super knowledgeable about medicine, the mafia, the holocaust, and how to fight my way out of a bad situation using my own damn body parts. Thanks, Josh Bazell! Not sure I'll sleep tonight.

Eric says

lately my book reviewing reminds me of that old snl skit where the guy reviews porn: 'interested, interested, really interested, then i lost all interest.'

i don't know if it's me or not.

this book started off with a bang. the tone of the narrator was a little obnoxious -- although isn't that a requirement for crime fiction? and why is that? it's tired.

but that aside, the writer is entertaining and informative (truly some of the greatest hospital anecdotes i've ever read -- you almost wish he would write nonfiction) and funny and strange. i'm just not so sure he's nailed the narrative aspect, or the character development for that matter.

i got to where the novelty wore off and there wasn't much left to keep me going. again, it could be me. i'm in a weird place, reading-wise.

Jayson says

(B) 72% | More than Satisfactory

Notes: Falling apart at the end, it presents the most uncomfortable moment I've ever had reading in its penultimate chapter.

Nick says

This book is A-MAY-ZING. Straight up. Please read this.

It's hilarious and wildly disturbing all at the same time. Bazell is like the Chuck Palahniuk for sane people.

This will just be easier if I quote Ron Charles.

"Beat the Reaper is a hypochondriac's nightmare but a reader's dream. Josh Bazell concocted this comic thriller while working as a medical resident at the University of California, San Francisco, and if anything he describes here is true, we should all become Christian Scientists."

I want to tell you all about it, the ridiculousness of certain parts, other parts that made me seethe with anger and the vast cynicism throughout. But you just have to read it. The main character calls Lech Wa??sa a pig-faced bitch.

One of the other things I like, aesthetically anyway, is that throughout the chapters there are little pictures of the Grim Reaper running with a scythe, a tiny little thing used to indicate a break in the main character's train of thought. Until he has this thought:

"But rituals turn us all into fucking idiots. Like those birds that sleep with their heads facing backwards because their ancestors slept with their heads under their wings. Plutarch says that carrying new wives across thresholds is stupid because we don't remember that it refers to the rape of the Sabine women-and that's fucking Plutarch, two thousand years ago. We still draw the Reaper with a scythe. We should draw him driving a John Deere for Archer Daniels Midland"

And after that, the little Reapers throughout the book are featured driving a tractor. Genius.

Do yourself a favor and read this book. Unless you hate things that are awesome.

Tfitoby says

I finally received a copy of this book 5 weeks after the Pulp Fiction group chose it as their monthly read. Go AusPost! But it was an ugly copy that felt like it had been photocopied, including a glossy print for the flimsy cover. Must do better work at publishing actual books people.

About two thirds of the way through my interest was waning and I decided to check out the 1 Star reviews to

see if others were having the same problem I was having with it - the flashbacks were slow and largely uninteresting. And to my sheer horror I found myself compiling a list of some of the stupidly idiotic things that other readers said in a disparaging way about this book. Why do I torture myself this way?

This book is filled with swearing, duh, it's about a former Mafia hitman in the witness protection program working as a doctor in a hospital.

If you expected this to be a 1940s Hollywood movie think again, **if you're easily offended by the term fuckhead thrown around as casually as a sports jacket in a 5 star restaurant then perhaps the first paragraph should have been enough to warn you off.** Don't come around here complaining and dragging a books rating down with your social morals from a time long lost to the primordial soup.

This book is filled with gory descriptions of medical procedures, duh, it's about a former Mafia hitman in the witness protection program working as a doctor in a hospital.

If you expected some kind of daytime soap opera drama think again, I consider myself tough and there were a few moments (especially the denouement) where I lost it, **if the thought of a skinned knee without your mother coming to kiss it better makes you want to cry or vomit I suggest you steer clear of a book that unashamedly features an autofibulectomy.** Don't come around here crying about how crude and apathetic the portrayal of the broken US healthcare system is when this book was written by a practising medical resident at the University of California. I suggest you question your own perceptions of your broken healthcare system before criticising a novel.

This book features sexual encounters, unlikable characters and a zany/unbelievable plot, duh, it's about a former Mafia hitman in the witness protection program working as a doctor in a hospital.

I'm not joking here, read the synopsis, done it? Good, does that sound remotely normal? No! If you were expecting The Sopranos mixed with ER you're barking up the wrong tree. **This really is a book that takes every absurd thing the author has witnessed or heard about as a doctor in a hospital and puts it in to a story that takes place over the course of one day,** it's closer to Scrubs multiplied in absurdity by a thousand than it is to ER. This is no Robin Cook medical thriller either folks.

There's a quote on the back from Don Winslow himself about how cool and ferocious this book is and at times it felt like Bazell was heavily influenced by the guy but didn't quite make it, with the lack of substance to his story and characters. It's like Don Winslow light, **much funnier**, relentless in it's pace (aside from the middle section of flashbacks), but with an **arrogant, unlikable, confused, boy as the protagonist.**

One reviewer even suggested improving your life by reading a novel about a protagonist "*sincerely religious, gentle, and moral, i.e., resembling at least some people the real world.[sic]*" Which I found extremely naive on several levels.

But I'm not going to criticise them for believing there aren't people in the world who behave like the characters in this book (there are, we know there are, infact it's quite likely that we share many characteristics with Josh Bazell's characters) or for picking up a book about a mafia hitman in the witness protection program; it's the idea that for a story to have a moral and to work as an entertaining narrative the protagonist needs to be likable, not even holier than thou perfect (how dull would that be,) just plain likable. You don't need to like Peter Brown to know that **he is a man doing the best that he can**, to realise that all of his actions (and especially the denouement) are **attempts at self-flagellation and redemption for his past sins.**

Actually, perhaps there aren't many people in the world who are like that?

That's not even where it falls down, it's the slow and largely uninteresting flashbacks that take up nearly half of the novel, if that had been improved I would happily have thrown this an extra star.

I'm intrigued by the concept of a sequel (it's getting worse reviews) simply because surely there's no back story to plump up the page count.

Do yourself a favour, at least read a surgical manual before attempting to recreate some of the scenes from this book in your own home. Failing that, trial the procedure on some unsuspecting homeless guy first.

Patrick says

When I started reading this, I had the vague expectation that it was going to be some sort of urban fantasy.

It wasn't. But that didn't keep me absolutely loving it.

It's funny, clever, fast-moving, irreverent, and horrifying in turns. I highly recommend it. Unless you're a hypochondriac. If you are, you should avoid it like the plague. (heh.)

Stephanie *Very Stable Genius* says

Well, the style of this book is to be edgy. I have no problem with that in general when it works for the story, but this was just angry to be angry. I didn't see the point. I hated every character in the book, the author didn't see any reason to make anyone of them likable. I couldn't take it anymore so I stopped it. uuhhg.

Kemper says

Anybody who thinks the U.S. doesn't need health care reform should read this book. Since the author was a medical intern and the details about patient care seem horribly realistic, I think I'd rather read a *Surgery For Dummies* book and attempt my own future operations with a bottle of Jack Daniels, a carpet knife, duct tape and some rusty pliers rather than risk being admitted to a hospital after reading this.

Peter Brown is a harried resident trying to get through another miserable day at a large hospital and keep his med students from killing too many patients. But he's also a former mob hitman in witness protection trying to start a new life as a doctor. When one of his old colleagues shows up as a patient and recognizes him, Brown spends the day juggling his medical duties while trying to keep his old pals from finding out where he is.

This was a darkly funny and fast paced story with an original and outlandish premise. The author's medical background makes for some gross and scary details about the kind of medical things they never talk about on ER or House. The story of Peter frantically trying to keep the mob patient from blabbing about his whereabouts while dealing with a stream of medical problems is intercut with flashbacks to the background of how Peter became a hitman and why he turned on the mob and entered witness protection.

I loved this book until the ending. Everything was clicking right along, but it's as if Bazell just decided that it was time to end the whole thing and he just threw on the brakes and wrapped everything up in just a few pages. It was pretty jarring and I wish he would have spent some time on the resolution, but this was still a great (but gruesome) crime novel with a medical twist.

James Thane says

This is one of the most unique and entertaining novels I've read in a long time. At the age of fourteen, Pietro Brwna is orphaned for a second time when someone murders the grandparents who had raised him for much of his life. In school, Pietro befriends the son of a mob lawyer, Davide Locano, and the Locanos become his new surrogate family. But Pietro is determined to hunt down and kill the cretins who murdered his grandparents. With Locano's assistance, he identifies the killers and dispatches them.

It's apparent that Pietro has a talent for this sort of thing and he ultimately becomes a mob hitman. When complications ensue, as they often do in the hitman business, Pietro bails out and enters the witness protection program. Several years later, Dr. Peter Brown is an intern at a New York hospital when a new patient recognizes him as Pietro and alerts the mob. Now Dr. Brown must deal with several medical emergencies while the mobsters converge on the hospital, anxious to make Dr. Brown himself a terminal case.

This is at once a hilarious and gut-wrenching story. Josh Bazell has a wicked sense of humor and, as an M.D. himself, he writes a tale in which the misadventures that occur in the hospital are perhaps even more hair-raising than the criminal activity that takes place outside of it. Peter Brown is an inspired character, unlike anyone you've ever met in a novel before, and he narrates a gripping story with a climax that has to be read to be believed. Finishing the book, though, I came away with the feeling that I'd rather take my chances against mob hitmen hunting for me as opposed to going into a hospital for even a minor procedure.
