

Beat the Reaper

by Josh Bazell



About the Book

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.

Discussion Guide

1. There are many dramatically charged scenes in **Beat the Reaper**, but the story is also broadly humorous. What was the funniest moment in the novel for you, and why?
2. Near the end of the novel Pietro Brwna/Peter Brown's mentor Prof. Marmoset tells him, "Any time you can tell the

difference between something you can do something about and something you can't, you should thank God. Particularly if it turns out to be something you can't? (page 304). How effectively does Pietro/Peter tell the difference? throughout the novel? What do you think he's learned by the story's conclusion?

3. "As any other American child would, I picked Batman and Charles Bronson in *Death Wish* as role models" (page 26). In what ways is Pietro's early life a typical (or atypical) American childhood? Discuss his teenage induction into crime as a way of life.

4. The footnotes that the author uses throughout **Beat the Reaper** are at times informative, at times humorous, often both. Identify your favorite footnote and explain what you like about it.

5. Early in the novel Dr. Peter Brown observes that "humans hate being mentally strong and physically weak" (page 28). Do you agree? By the story's end, is it Pietro/Peter's mental or physical strength that has served him best?

6. Who was your favorite character in **Beat the Reaper**: Pietro Brnwa/Peter Brown? Skinflick? David Locano? Magdalena? Eddy Squillante? Did you find that your favorite had changed by the end of the novel?

7. Why did Pietro's trip to Poland in 1994 (chapter 8) become a significant turning point in his life? What surprising discovery about his grandparents did Pietro make on that trip? What did he learn about himself?

8. When Pietro meets Magdalena's parents for the first time, her father tells him, "You appear to have nothing in common with my daughter at all" (page 173), and yet in many ways Pietro and Magdalena seem a perfect couple. Why do you think they are so well suited to each other?

9. Discuss the character of Skinflick. Ultimately, how does Skinflick influence Pietro Brnwa's transformation into Peter Brown? How does Magdalena?

10. **Beat the Reaper** is filled with examples of doctors (and other members of the medical establishment) behaving badly. Name a few such episodes. How unlikely or outrageous do these episodes seem to you? Could there be a kernel of truth in any of them?

11. As a young hit man, Pietro Brnwa took pains to make sure that his victims were "killers whose deaths would improve the world" (page 108). Do you think murder is ever justified? Reconcile your answer with Pietro's observation that "murdering someone is bad for you. It murders something in yourself, and has all kinds of other consequences you can't possibly foresee" (page 59).

12. What do you think the future holds for Dr. Peter Brown? Do you think he will quit crime for good, or will he leave medicine and return to his old habits? What would you like to see happen?

Author Bio

Josh Bazell has a BA in writing from Brown University and a MD from Columbia University. He is currently a medical

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