



Wild Thing

Josh Bazell

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It's hard to find work as a doctor when using your real name will get you killed. So hard that when a reclusive billionaire offers Dr. Peter Brown, aka Pietro Brnwa, a job accompanying a sexy but self-destructive paleontologist on the world's worst field assignment, Brown has no real choice but to say yes. Even if it means that an army of murderers, mobsters, and international drug dealers-not to mention the occasional lake monster-are about to have a serious Pietro Brnwa problem.

Facing new and old monsters alike, Dr. Brnwa's story continues in this darkly funny and lightning-paced follow up to Josh Bazell's bestselling debut.

Wild Thing Details

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Author : Josh Bazell

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From Reader Review Wild Thing for online ebook

Amy Warrick says

First, I loved 'Beat the Reaper'. LOVED it. Made my friends read it.

But this is no 'Beat the Reaper'. I imagine Mr. Bazell said to himself, "I wrote a best seller, and I am beloved, and it's now time for me to write whatever half-baked story I want filled with my own political discourses masquerading as plot, and people will still love me...just watch".

Well, not so much. This book was a disappointment to me. The author is undeniably clever (just ask him) and well read (you don't have to ask, he'll tell you), but he forgot that pesky plot thing when he was putting this book together.

christa says

When we last saw Peter Brown, he was against the wall. Ripping one of the lesser-essential leg bones from his own body to use as a weapon against a mobster. It was a cackle-inducing scene of yuck that remains one of the highlights of my personal highlight reel of contemporary fiction. Eleven years later, he's still on the lam. Now he's working as a doctor aboard a cruise ship. His name is Lionel Azimuth and when he extracts the bum tooth of a cruise ship staff member, it crumbles into a brown liquid. Still with the yuck.

"Wild Thing" by Josh Bazell is the followup to his fantastically hilarious whiz-bang gag trip "Beat the Reaper," one of the best things that happened in 2010. This one has a lot of the same ingredients -- lunch-gurgling scenes, sassy banter, and some genuine what-the moments. But, while plot doesn't always have to matter in cases of great entertainment, this one is a little too loose, lacks impact in its bam! moments and goes off-roading to some pretty meh places. See: Completely unnecessary cameo by Sarah Palin.

It all starts on White Lake in the Boundary Waters where two teen couples are engaged in low-level petting, in one case, and full-on yelp mode in the other. Autumn Semmel dips into the lake and her boyfriend follows. When he doesn't come up from the water, she begins to fear the lake horror of having her leg suddenly grabbed by him. Then he does come spitting up, barfing a rope of blood and not long for life. As for Autumn: "The thing rams into her from behind, clapping shut her rib cage like a book and squirting the life out of her like water from a sponge."

Uh oh. Scary sea monster skulking in the lake with a taste for human blood and guts.

The character known as Lionel Azimuth is commissioned for a job, part security, part mythbusters -- by a reclusive billionaire called Rec Bill. The doctor is asked to accompany his staff paleontologist Violet in a trip to the lake to discern the truth behind the monster. They are part of a party organized by the owner of an outfitting company in a small town in Northern Minnesota, and the travel team includes a pop star, some persnickity Republicans and a celebrity judge who will verify the legitimacy of the beast, Sarah Palin.

There is a strong sexual attraction between Lionel and Violet, addressed the second they meet when she asks him, with less family friendly phraseology, whether they are going to consummate this thing on this trip. The

small town of Ford, Minn., is populated by a bunch of meth makers, meth heads and meth thugs. There is also a mystery surrounding who killed Autumn Semmel's father less than a week after her bones were crushed. And there is a shout-out to my little Northern Minnesota city:

"Right after we passed Duluth, which turns out to be a bunch of freeway exchanges between new-looking paper factories, every one of them pumping smog as big and opaque as clouds out of its stacks, we stopped at a Dairy Queen for lunch."

Where "Beat the Reaper" was clever and surprising, this one is more self-conscious in its efforts to be clever and surprising. The big reveal feels like an episode of "Scooby Doo," something Bazell must have been channeling a bit considering a conversation between Violet and Lionel that has her deconstructing the sexual relationships on the cartoon. For instance, that Velma is sneaking around with Fred on the side and faking gay so Shaggy will lay off of her.

Don says

Bazell's first book, *Beat the Reaper* was a fast-paced maddening thriller with awesome character's that are spontaneous, raw, ruthless and completely unruly when forced into action. Warning: towards the end of this tale, Dr. Peter Brown wins at all costs including self dismemberment to create weapons against foes. *Beat the Reaper* is an absolute guaranteed winner, if you can stomach the intensity. And about *Wild Thing*, the 2nd installment of Dr. Brown, it's pathetic, there is no flow, there is no vibe, there is no soul. Weak character's that we cannot identify with, stereo typical scenarios of "almost" sexual encounters blundered by new-found morals and self-restrictions, topped off by blatant lack of direction in the overall plot with infant attempts to interject preposterous and uncalled-for acts of bravado. Super duper disappointed here, I followed Bazell constantly in anticipation of the next big intellectual ride, damn, Bazell needs to fall back on what worked prior, it was new and fresh and unique, *Wild Thing* was bizarre, lack-luster and failed entirely when interjecting known political demons in an attempt to carry the plot, Fail.

Alan Houser says

[- The ending evokes a giant "Huh? Is that all there is?". (hide spoiler)]

Sam Quixote says

Josh Bazell's 2009 debut "*Beat the Reaper*" was a critically acclaimed novel following the adventures of an ex-Mafia hitman turned doctor in a Federal witness protection program. The follow-up, "*Wild Thing*", is a far less brilliant effort that doesn't measure up to the first book by any stretch of the imagination.

"*Wild Thing*" catches up with Pietro Brwna aka Peter Brown aka Lionel Azimuth (as he is calling himself in this book) to find him working as the ship's doctor on a cruise liner. That is until Marmoset, maybe the only person he can trust who knows his troubled past, calls him in with an interesting job offer - to escort a palaeontologist to a lake and determine whether or not there is a dinosaur in the lake which is eating people.

For one thing this novel isn't as fast paced as "Beat the Reaper", it takes things at a far more leisurely rate with Azimuth going to the lake, meeting the various characters, chatting, wandering around the lake, etc. etc. without too much happening. There are moments of potential conflict such as the drug dealing café owner with the short fuse, but nothing really happens until the third act when you find out whether or not the hoax is real or not.

And speaking of the ending, it's a real let down. Once you get past the shoot out and find out the real reason for the trip? It's jaw droppingly stupid. At first you think it's a poorly thought out plan, then a caricature of a Scooby Doo cartoon and then like a really dumb childish play.

Bazell does like to stand on his soapbox a lot and we get his views on religion via a conversation between the palaeontologist and the rich hick, followed by an appearance by Sarah Palin (yes THE Sarah Palin) and further ridiculing of religion, particularly Christianity. I didn't find it off-putting as I'm not religious but it does seem very transparent of Bazell to so poorly shoehorn these conversations into the plot for no real reason.

The novel is also followed by 50 pages of Bazell's non-fiction, writing about why America is stupid and expunging his own democratic political ideas. I don't object to his views but I feel they are out of place at the end of a novel.

Overall the novel is a very slow and dull story about some odd people going to the middle of nowhere to find out if there is a prehistoric monster alive and well or not. There aren't many scenes that stick out for their interest though I felt Bazell's depiction of Palin to be amusing enough to remember and realise that this is sadly the highlight of this book. That coupled with the ending killed the book for me and made this a very weak sequel to an excellent first novel. Hopefully Bazell's next book will focus less on making fun of peoples' beliefs and more on developing a story worth reading.

Jason says

You know who's a wild thing? Mike Reynolds.

Patrick Blackburn says

As an aspiring writer, I don't like to bash books. I believe in karma and don't want it to bite me when I release my first book. But I can't let Josh Bazell's Wild Thing slip by without adding some comments.

What a train wreck this book is. I'm so mad at Josh Bazell I can barely contain myself. So I won't even try...

Josh Bazell blasted onto the scene with his thrilling, hip, original, and darkly hilarious Beat the Reaper. I couldn't wait for his follow-up, and frankly, every book after that. Bazell was on to something, and his first book had set himself up for a great series.

And then he wrote his second book.

Look, I know there are libraries filled with sophomore efforts that don't meet the (often unrealistic)

expectations of the author's first books. That isn't what happened with Wild Thing. I can only come up with three reasons why Bazell decided to write Wild Thing as his second book:

- 1) While researching a section on meth,* Bazell decided to partake in his research subject and got a little carried away
- 2) Bazell suffered some kind of head injury, and if that's the case I apologize for this entire review
- 3) Bazell has decided that his first book was so good that he could do whatever the hell he wants with his next book and everybody will automatically love it**.

I'm going with option 3, and the rest of my review (rant) will be based on this conclusion.

For some reason, Bazell decides to set Wild Thing a full 11 years after Beat the Reaper ends. His protagonist in the former, Dr. Pietro Brnwa, has changed his name to hide from mobsters who want him dead. Now he is Dr. Lionel Azimuth, and he is sent to Minnesota on a bizarre expedition to find out if there is a Loch Ness-type monster killing teenagers in a lake. To add to the lunacy of the story, Sarah Palin arrives to help in the search for the monster. I couldn't make this up if I wanted to. The book feels like an unrelated story Bazell may have written ten years ago, and instead of writing a new one, he just plugs new names into the book and calls it a sequel.

The plotting is non-existent, as is the action. In fact, once the action starts to heat up, Bazell ends the damn book. Seriously—the last few pages were actually pretty good and I thought I was about to get rewarded with a fantastic finish. Instead, he ended the book and then served up almost 50 pages of source notes, most of them ridiculous rants about the Republican party that doesn't have anything to do with the story. It actually feels like Bazell has decided that he is popular enough that he can throw in 50 pages of his political philosophy and people will actually listen. I have plenty of political books on my shelf, Josh. If I want to read about the current state of our government, I'll read about it from someone who actually knows something about it.

Beat the Reaper was so good that I may give Bazell another chance with his third book. But I am going to spend a little time with it in the bookstore before I buy it. If he goes off on another ridiculous tangent like he did in Wild Thing, I'm going to leave it on the shelf and put Bazell out of my life forever. If he apologizes for it and gets back to Brnwa's original task (escaping the mob), I'll be inclined to accept his apology and move on. I mean, everyone makes mistakes. Even Kevin Smith apologized for Mallrats***.

*-Bazell, Josh. "Wild Thing" p. 355, source notes.

**-for more on this phenomenon, see Anthony Napolitano's excellent book, "A Nation of Sheep."

***-at the 1996 Independent Spirit Awards and in the credits at the end of Chasing Amy.

Note: This is not the correct way to use footnotes (asterisk, dagger, double-dagger), but I couldn't figure out how to translate these codes into HTML, and I've already spent more than enough time on this book, so I'm leaving it this way.

gert says

ok, i don't know what happened to mr. bazell between finishing the first book in this series ('beat the reaper') and starting on this one. but i imagine it was severe. perhaps a head injury?

same protagonist, so you'd think it would flow along as quickly as the first. but nope. peter brown feels like a shell of his former self (and not just because he's been stuck as a cruise ship dr. while on the run). the quips aren't as quip-y, he's not as intense or interesting. perhaps we're to rely heavily on our earlier experience...? but that doesn't seem fair, and it sure felt lazy.

the storyline meanders quite a bit, allowing quite a put-down-ability that was not there for the first book. i don't want to give anything away, but the intimation of some science fiction-y stuff just fell totally flat.

listen, if you loved the first one, you'll have to read this one. if only to keep ahead of the third book. which better be as good as the first, or i'm calling the game.

Marialyce says

What a huge disappointment. This book was dumber than dumb....

Sebastien Castell says

I really enjoyed Josh Bazell's debut novel, *Beat The Reaper*, and after finishing it and going on to something else, found myself almost immediately missing the bold voice and skillful prose he brings to the action/mystery genre. I devoured this one in just a couple of days and now I wish Bazell had written more.

It's hard to describe *Wild Thing* because it contains a ton of contradictions. The plot, right from the get-go, is kind of preposterous: former hitman in witness protection who's working as a doctor on a cruise ship gets asked to be part of a trip to find a rumoured monster lurking beneath the surface of a small backwoods lake. So right there, you'd think this would either be farce or that brand of poorly-written "men's adventure" story that still shows up in bookstores only with better covers. The thing is, everything – and I mean everything – in Bazell's book is meticulously researched. The back of the book contains a huge chapter detailing the research behind every fact (and half the jokes) in the book. So there's something wonderful about knowing that someone went to that amount of work to construct a credible story that on the surface seems ludicrous.

Though there's plenty of humour and brazen tough-guy material in Bazell's books, there's also a somewhat self-conscious deconstruction of those tropes. It's an odd and precarious balance, and yet the book keeps it together, simultaneously unbelievable and yet credible. It's like watching an especially skilled writer decide to cut loose – almost daring the reader to see the flaws – while still retaining all of their talent and savvy. I suppose in the end that's what makes *Wild Thing* so strange to read: given what Bazell's chosen to write, you wonder why he goes to all the trouble of writing it so well. It's like suddenly finding an episode of *Scooby Doo* written by Aaron Sorkin.

If you love James Patterson, you'll probably dislike Josh Bazell for seeming as though he's mocking the very genre he's writing in. If, on the other hand, you keep wishing you could find a really good, really brazen adventure thriller that's both entertaining and treats the reader as if they might actually care about the details? Josh Bazell's your guy. I sure hope he writes another novel soon.

Lynnie says

I wanted to love this book as much as I loved its prequel- BEAT THE REAPER. The problem is that this book was really, just barely a sequel that I'm not sure why Josh Bazell bothered. In BEAT THE REAPER, Dr. Peter Brown was living a double life- medical intern/reformed hitman- trying to hide from the mob who wanted him dead. And it was FASCINATING! A book that went a mile a minute and refused to be put down.

In WILD THING, which takes place several years down the road, it's as if Bazell said, "I have a successful character, & since he's in WITSEC I can do anything with him" which is sort of true. But not. This book isn't about a man hiding from his past. It's about a monster in a lake. Every once in a while, there is a flash of the character that was so interesting before, but it's so brief (& frankly kind of out of no where).

This could be an interesting mystery if allowed to develop on its own, but its reliance on the few characters from BEAT THE REAPER is almost a hindrance. I expected more from them than they delivered. It read more like a miniseries than a novel frankly. And the very strange inclusion of Sarah Palin as a character truly had me scratching my head.

RandomAnthony says

Apparently *Wild Thing* is a sequel to *Beat the Reaper*. According to a review from a couple years back I, uh, liked *Beat the Reaper* a lot. But I can't remember anything about the book. In fact, I thought *Beat the Reaper* was Lavelle's *Big Machine* so I was confused when weird urban religious sects didn't play a role in *Wild Thing*. In turn I think it's fair to say that you don't need to read *Beat the Reaper* to like or understand *Wild Thing*. Although, like I said, apparently I liked *Beat the Reaper*. Shut up. You've forgotten entire books, too.

Wild Thing primarily addresses a mob-killer-turned-witness-protection-participant who gets invited by a reclusive billionaire to check out a sea monster legend in rural Minnesota. Bazell's lightning-quick dialogue and well-constructed set-pieces (e.g. a shootout in a cheap diner fronting crystal meth dealers) allow him to go *completely* bonkers with the plot in a couple instances. Like, "I cannot believe THAT real life person showed up in this book" bonkers. *Wild Thing* reads like a movie about which you don't want to over-analyze the plot because the deus ex machina parade runs fire-engine loud through the center of the novel's coherence, especially when Bazell wraps up loose ends. I laughed more than once and kind of anticipated the (real, more on this in a second) ending because my kids watch a shitload of the History Channel. But the novel's cardinal sin is a bizarro political rant tacked onto the end for no reason other, than I can tell, for Bazell to spew about politics in the guise of a character's voice. I didn't sign up for a political rant, so I skimmed that part. But the rest of *Wild Thing* is better than most novels that aim for the smart and funny target. I just wish Bazell hadn't cheap-shot the coda. Not cool, sir. Save the political crap for a blog.

David says

I liked this even more than Bazell's *Beat the Reaper*, and that was a tough debut to follow. Some of what I enjoyed about this book reminds me of Vonnegut and Pynchon. It involves an absurd plot, dark humor and

plenty of political and social commentary sprinkled in. I love the use of footnotes, and the book's appendix alone is worth the ride! I'm surprised Josh Bazell isn't a more well-known name.

Ned says

Wild Thing is a perfect example of an author's first book being too successful. Beat the Reaper was so popular (and I did enjoy it, too) that Bazell didn't feel the need to consult an editor for the sequel.

The first act of this theoretical editor would have been to cut the 49 (!) pages of extra material tacked on to the end of the book. 49 pages of blog-level political punditry and some allegedly explanatory notes do not belong at the end of a thriller, let alone one as slight as this. It veers way past the realm of self-indulgence and comes to rest firmly in the land of the masturbatory.

While I agree almost completely with Mr. Bazell's myriad political opinions, he frames them in such a condescending and peremptory manner as to alienate even this sympathetic reader. There is no nuance in Bazell-land, either you agree with him or you're an idiot who hasn't read the right books. The contemptuous tone of the appendices of the book is more suited to 10th-grade civics students, or readers who have never heard of a country called Israel.

More troubling than this post-novel indulgence is what it reveals about the narrator, Pietro Brnwa. Namely that there is no authorial distance between the often obnoxious voice of the narrator and his creator. This makes him much less sympathetic as a character.

Even had an editor made quick and painless work of addressing my complaints above (which could have been accomplished with one simple click of the delete button), there are deeper problems with Wild Thing. For some reason, Bazell has chosen to take Pietro Brnwa out of the world of doctors and the mob and plop him down in the wilderness with only the flimsiest of backstories to justify it. The fun of the first book, Beat the Reaper, was listening to the medical asides of the narrator intertwined with a good dose of humor and frenetic action sequences. There is little of that humor or fun in this novel, and very little doctoring to do. The narrator still tries to do his authoritative asides but as they're no longer about medical things, they often fall flat. (Even flatter when you read the excruciatingly detailed source of these asides in the appendix.)

Another poor choice was including a real-life politician as a character in this book, to no real comic effect or benefit. All it did was drag me out of my suspended disbelief. The narrator claims to be sick to death of this politician. So are your readers, author, so why subject us to stale commentary with absolutely no bite?

One can only hope the sales of this book are disappointing enough that Mr. Bazell has to start returning the calls of his editor. Getting Pietro Brnwa back into the medical world may just save his life. People like brusque, imperious doctors when they actually know their stuff (see House). When they're just some asshole in a canoe, not so much.

Genine Franklin-Clark says

I love this guy's writing, stories, characters ... and this book has a bonus! The Appendix and Sources are a minibook in themselves; fascinating reading all on their own.

Please, sir, write more, sir!

Josh says

Bazell's protagonist in Peter Brown aka Pietro Brnwa aka Lionel Azimuth finds himself in a vastly different situation as he continues to evade the mobsters who want him dead following the events of 'Beat the Reaper'. Nothing is what it seems in the wild and entertaining sophomore effort by Josh Bazell, 'Wild Thing'.

The plot is centered around what seems to be an elaborate hoax of a monster hunting unassuming swimmers in White Lake. Supposedly a descendant from a dinosaur, this monster has been caught on film dismembering a man and terrorising a community. How Peter Brown became involved in this hoax is drawn from 'Beat The Reaper' and his witness protection detail. Professor Marmoset pulls Brown from his cruiseship doctors position and hands him over to the eccentric and ludicrously wealthy Rec Bill to act as a body guard and myth debunker of the happenings at White Lake. Accompanied by sexy paleontologist Violet Hurst, Brown embarks on a journey which threatens to expose not only the White Lake monster, but the monster of his former self.

There is a cringe inducing cameo from a prominent US personality that actually works well with the quirkiness of the novel. Bazell is brazen in his transformation of Brown from doctor to debunker with the surface perception of the novel leaning towards commodity over strong continuity yet confirming to both in a round about way.

With a cast comprising monsters, crazy tour guides, local drug manufacturers, love interests, mysterious benefactors, and the occasional mobster, 'Wild Thing' is far more diverse and light-hearted than 'Beat the Reaper'.

The mobsters, while not paramount to this instalment added a sense of continuity to the Peter Brown story. Being on the peripheral and referred to with some frequency kept the embers of 'Beat the Reaper' burning enough to satisfy the craving for a true sequel. Comparatively, 'Wild Thing' is an entirely different beast and is a far more enjoyable story when read in isolation. This is a fine example of modern day pulp fiction - 4 stars.

Marty Beaudet says

I've had a love affair with Pietro Brnwa aka Peter Brown, the protagonist of, first, Bazell's "Beat the Reaper," and now also "Wild Thing," ever since I read the first of these.

What sets Brnwa apart from his don't-fuck-with-me macho counterparts in other action thrillers is that Brnwa doesn't take himself seriously. His sardonic wit is almost unintentional, as he makes wry observations about himself and the improbable situations he finds himself in. Instead of trying to impress you with his Rambo-skills, he leads you to believe that he'd rather be anywhere else, instead of fighting bad guys and monsters.

He's also unabashedly carnal, like most men when they are among their own and free to say what they're really thinking, but—also like most real men—spends more of his time fantasizing about the girl than "getting" her. He's more of a reluctant hero than an anti-hero. 'Cause really, he's an awesome hero, not only

to the plot, but to me as a writer. I can only aspire to Bazell's genius in his creation.

If I could have given this book 4.5 stars, I would have. But the only reason I give it less than 5 is in comparison with its predecessor: "Beat the Reaper" (which I have read three times). "Wild Thing" was less than that genius work for two reasons: 1) Pietro didn't have the vested interest in this story that he did in the first book; namely, his own survival. Sure, he's threatened with death at some point in the story, but for most of it he's a detached investigator; and 2) in his first novel, Bazell stayed strictly within the First Person narrative of Brnwa, whereas in this book he cheats, having Brnwa narrate scenes in which he was not present, breaking the flow to distracting effect. He also inserts the first person narrative of other characters in places, with the same result.

I have to admit that, since I listened to the audio version of both books, I'm almost certainly prejudiced by the awesome talents of reader Robert Petkoff, who conveys Brnwa's cynicism perfectly, yet is able to make you believe that all the other characters are present in his voice as well.

I will read anything Bazell writes (probably multiple times), as soon as it is published (or sooner, if I ever get my hands on it!)

Ann Collette says

Like countless other readers, I adored Bazell's first novel, BEAT THE REAPER. Its' plot was so preposterous, so over the top, if you told it to someone no one would believe a writer could pull it off. But Bazell made it seem effortless, and damned entertaining, too. WILD THING continues the story of Dr. Pietro Brnwa, a former Mob hit man on the run from his one-time employers. Under a new assumed name, Brnwa, bored and frustrated, is now working as a doctor on a cruise ship. A reliable contact who's helped him out of tight situations in the past gets in touch with him about a secretive job offer from a reclusive billionaire. On the surface, the job involves working as a bodyguard for the gorgeous Dr. Violet Hurst, a paleontologist also working for the billionaire interested in either proving or denying forever the existence of a Loch Ness-like monster living in a lake in Minnesota. Together they join an exclusive, invitation only team, made up of various people also interested in establishing the truth about the monster. Each person has his or her own reason for being a part of the team, from the Justin Timberlake-like commercial pop star who wants to save the creature, if it does indeed exist, and Sarah Palin (yes, THE Sarah Palin), who wants it killed for Biblical reasons. The crazy ass plot actually holds together but the truth, when it's revealed, is anti-climatic. The author's brains, wit and insanely snappy prose and sense of pace pull the reader through the book. But its depressing world view drags the book down and the footnotes, initially a fun touch, become a trial to read, as they keep pulling you out of the book. This overly intellectualized novel just never takes off and in the end is a disappointment but so what? I'd need to read a half dozen crappy books in a row by this author before I'd give up on him. He's brilliant, and certainly not the first to fall victim to second book syndrome.

Kemper says

Well, that was.....odd.

In Josh Bazell's first novel Beat the Reaper we met Dr. Peter Brown, an intern at a large hospital. It turned out that Peter's real name was actually Pietro Brnwa, and he was a former Mafia hit man. Events had caused

him to testify against his former employers, and he was trying to build a new life as a doctor when an old associate recognized him and led to a few problems.

Peter is sporting a new name and a phony medical degree that's only good enough to get him a job as the doctor on a cruise ship. He's still got enemies and is trying to come up with enough cash and a plan that will let him settle his old business. Peter's government contact hooks him up with a weird job offer from a reclusive billionaire that involves protecting a beautiful paleontologist named Violet while they investigate rumors of some kind of creature living in a remote lake. And things just get stranger from there.

I absolutely loved *Beat the Reaper* with it's original story, gruesome violence and dark sense of humor so it's disappointing that *Wild Thing* isn't anywhere close to matching it. This one is still entertaining and very funny in spots, but it's also wildly unfocused. This is a book that asks you to buy into the notion that a former Mafia hit man turned doctor is looking for the equivalent of the Loch Ness monster, but then it's also engages in a lot of mocking of the lunatic fringe of America's political right wing as well as throwing random bits of science at you.

Bazell includes an appendix for his sources and it cites papers and books on everything from climate change, corporate and political corruption, canoeing, John Gotti, meth production, Sherlock Holmes, dinosaurs, human cryogenics, Tiananmen Square, Harry Houdini and the number of golf balls at the bottom of Loch Ness. It's as if Bazell spent a long weekend Googling different subjects and clicking on any link that struck him as interesting and then incorporated all of it into the book.

What's interesting is that he almost pulled it off, but by the time he added a real political figure into the action, this story was going in too many different directions to come up with a satisfactory resolution.

I half suspect that Bazell may have wanted to do this one as a stand alone book, but used his Peter Brown character at the urging of his publisher since they prefer series these days. Peter really doesn't fit in this story. He's still a funny and engaging narrator, but this wild ass plot is just too far removed from the history established in *Beat the Reaper*. Bazell could have established a new lead character with minimal effort and probably been the better for it.

Still, I prefer to see new writers biting off more than they can chew rather than play it safe and repeat what worked before. There was still a lot I liked in this one, and the ending gives me hope that the next one will return Peter to a story more suited to his unique talents.

Artak Aleksanyan says

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