



# Formaldehyde

*Jane Rawson*

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## **Formaldehyde** Jane Rawson

Lives are turned upside down by a bureaucratic error in this Kafkaesque work of neo-absurdism.

‘Original, intelligent and compelling – a rare combination. Formaldehyde pulls off a complex narrative with frequent time and point-of-view shifts without ever losing the reader. For a novella that borders on the Kafkaesque, it has a good deal of heart. The interconnecting stories are handled adroitly – the clever structure never gets in the way of the writing, which is sharply observed, assured and witty. Smart but never showy. The most original novel I’ve read for some time.’

- Graeme Simsion

‘Immerse yourself in Jane Rawson’s Formaldehyde if you like the seriously weird or the creepily wonderful. This story has small but persistent claws; under cover of its smooth, conversational narration you will be clasped and dragged into some tough, strange places. Let it take you there. Let it blow your tiny mind.’

- Margo Lanagan

‘Skipping across different times and genres, Formaldehyde is a wonderfully strange and inventive story of love, loss and severed limbs.’

- Ryan O’Neill

## **Formaldehyde Details**

Date : Published August 2015 by Seizure

ISBN : 9781921134609

Author : Jane Rawson

Format : Paperback 188 pages

Genre : Fiction, Short Stories, Novels, Fantasy, Cultural, Australia

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# From Reader Review Formaldehyde for online ebook

## Christy Collins says

I loved this strange book about identity, love and lost time. It's not an easy read but is written with an enviable assuredness and its strong voice kept me turning pages. It's funny, punchy, filled with pop culture reference. If you are looking for something a bit different to read I would highly recommend it.

Full disclosure: Rawson and I share a publisher.

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## Suzie says

Gave up on this one, clearly not in my wheelhouse

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## Sarah says

This book is insane and I loved it. Potentially the weirdest thing I've ever read.

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## Tsana Dolichva says

Formaldehyde by Jane Rawson is a weird book. I picked it up at Continuum because I've heard lots of good things about the author and because I was unlikely to see it in paperback form again any time soon. I have A Wrong Turn at the Office of Unmade Lists in my TBR but haven't gotten around to it, so this was my first experience of Rawson's work.

This was, as I have already said, a weird book. I have to admit, I was expecting more speculative fiction than I got, but there wasn't zero. The story follows four people, two each twenty-two years apart, and some of the ways in which their lives intersect. There's Paul, whom one could call the main character, although the story doesn't really revolve around him. Paul's story starts when he finds himself declared dead although he clearly isn't (actually, this confused me for a little and had me thinking he might be a ghost or something), and leads him to embark upon trying to get the paperwork fixed so that he can exist again.

Along the way, he meets a girl called Benjamin and has a brief fling with her. The other two characters, whose stories are mostly told twenty-two years earlier, are Paul's parents, Derek and Amy. The two women have the most speculative elements in their stories, surrounding Amy's pregnancy and Benjamin's age, but I probably shouldn't say more than that. The book masterfully ties the lives of four people together in unexpected ways.

Although this is not quite the kind of book I would normally read, I enjoyed it. I am definitely interested in reading more of the author's work, although I imagine I will lean more towards more speculative stories than this one. Meanwhile, I recommend Formaldehyde to fans of absurdist or Kafkaesque stories.

4 / 5 stars

You can read more of my reviews on my blog.

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### **Wendy says**

I read Jane's book in draft form about 15 years ago and was surprised and delighted by it. Great fun to read it again and be reminded of those times so many years ago.

Jane's book is weird. Arm transplants, Dostoyevsky, football (or rugby), impossible pregnancies. You just have to go with it and enjoy the funny bits and the poignant bits.

I do miss the mixtape though. In a fit of frustrated anti-nostalgia, I threw away all of my old tapes, not sure if I kept that one. Maybe I should have kept the liner notes.

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### **LC says**

Weird but brilliant.

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### **Rachel Watts says**

Rawson's winning novella is funny in the darkest, driest way possible. I laughed out loud and I was confused and I was shocked and a little bit sad. It's surprising, quietly political and has a freshness that I enjoyed so much.

Full review here: <http://leatherboundpounds.com/2015/10...>

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### **Corrina says**

This is the second of Jane Rawsons' books that I've read and I love her style: quick, current, appealing characters and the ability to warp time effortlessly. That said, I've felt let down by the endings in both stories. They seemed to dissipate rather than close. I'm totally ok with loose ends but these seem more to lose momentum and drift off.

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### **Eugenia (Genie In A Book) says**

A really unique, short read about an intertwined cast of characters across time - quirky, funny and satirical. After this I definitely need to read more from Jane Rawson!

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### **James Whitmore says**

Like all great books this feels like it has a whole strange world bound inside it. It made me laugh and surprised me, all while keeping to its unsettling internal logic. It also has a whole heap of heart, as four characters seek each other out across time.

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### **Tania Chandler says**

This little book (it's a novella) blew me away. Magic realism is probably too old-fashioned a term to apply to such a modern story, which I think defies labelling. It crosses genres as well as times from 2000 to 2022 with its clever structure.

It kicks off with what seems like a Kafkaesque bureaucratic bungle at the Identity Office, which is hilariously similar to Centrelink. The story covers love, loss, severed limbs and impossible pregnancies. Surprising, shocking, heartwarming, heartbreaking, insightful, absurd ... just wonderful. So original. And so well-written.

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### **Rebecca says**

Another tightly-constructed gem from Melbourne author Jane Rawson.

Told across two time frames (the years 2000 and 2022) and via four voices (Paul, Amy, Benjamin and Derek), the plot is a puzzle box of a mystery with a severed arm at its heart.

The stand-out, as always with Rawson's work, is the wry, worldly narrative voice. Paul has just had his identity erased from the system and being "dead" has ceased to exist:

"So I walked into the office and it was ten to ten, and no one even looked up, and no one yelled at me and I thought, really, this is what's wrong with modern society. No goddamn discipline. How can I be expected to act like a decent human being when no one defines and enforces the boundaries of my behaviour?"

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### **Lucrezia says**

I won this book in a giveaway and I'm very happy of it!

First of all, I wanna thank the author for this copy.

I really loved Formaldehyde. It's a very strange book, I must say.

Four points of views, four characters, a intricate and funny and punchy story, in a gothic mood.

It's interesting and different from any book I've ever read, so I recommend it to anyone!

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## **Wayward Fancy says**

Dear Jane - firstly, this was on my "Currently reading" shelf for ages but that doesn't mean I took ages reading it - I kept lending it to other people! FINALLY I GOT TO READ IT!!!!

Jane Rawson's writing makes me miss my tram stop, makes me laugh out loud (guffaw even) and in the next paragraph will make my heart feel grazed with astute hurt and then soothed with tender insights. I know - that is no mean feat. She can somehow straddle emotion and mind freaking plots without being pretentious or over sentimental.

I can't recommend ANYTHING Jane Rawson writes highly enough. I find her concepts just delightful and her characters and internal emotion completely engrossing....and then there are laughs. In comparison, her bright contortionist mind reminds me of Atwood. Our own contemporary Australian sort of Atwood. Best of all, Rawson invents a future that despite freaky slip stream brain-fryingly strange happenings, is underpinned with characters are hopelessly flawed and definitively human. It makes everything else in the narrative accessible.

What a brilliant, original, mind blowing, jam packed, delightful and utterly readable novella.

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## **Gemma Mahadeo says**

3.75/5 why don't they set texts like this for high school English?!

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