

The Boy in Formaldehyde

Michael Antony

AuthorHouseUK (Apr 8, 2016)

Softcover \$28.92 (482pp)

978-1-5246-3096-6

This disturbing thriller focuses on underground child abuse rings with eerie connections to the real world.

In Michael Antony's *The Boy in Formaldehyde*, Camilla, an advocate for victims of child abuse, comes across a macabre art installation that puts her on the fast track to discovering a dangerous ring of child prostitution, pedophiles, and danger involving the wealthy and powerful. This book is not for the faint of heart, as it describes unspeakable acts of torture involving young children. In doing so, it brings to light some of the crimes of real-life pedophiles.

Camilla cares deeply for the victims of child abuse, and she uses her blog as a platform to raise awareness of the issue. When she becomes intrigued by a seemingly real boy suspended in formaldehyde at an art installation, she, with the help of her French tutor, inserts herself in the frightening, horrific world of child pornography and pedophilia, in an effort to stop the artist and those responsible for the atrocities.

Scenes are well-set from the first in this shocking and disturbing thriller that peers closely into a protected, secret world with unfortunate ties to reality. As Camilla and Romain infiltrate the hidden world of pedophilia and child abuse, the detailed descriptions of the abuse and torture of young children make for difficult, chilling reading, but are convincing and well written. While the references to trendy clothes, phones, and watches may date the story prematurely, the scenes' details are bizarrely fascinating. The plot is exciting, though it does sometimes get bogged down by an overreliance on unnecessarily cumbersome vocabulary: "He knew that trendy English intellectuals always equated any attack on modernist art with ignorance and philistinism."

The character of Camilla is sharply drawn, and she proves to be exactly the type of person who is capable of taking on the monsters she encounters. Her passion and drive to help at-risk children, coupled with her own past abuse, make her the ideal heroine and allow her to push past what she witnesses with her ultimate goal in mind. What she sees does impact her, but it also fuels her determination to put a stop to the horrors.

The horrors themselves may limit the book's potential audience, as a strong stomach is required. The volume is presented and packaged well, with cover art that alludes to the plot—masks that reinforce the hidden, covert nature of the story.

The Boy in Formaldehyde is a well-written, disturbing thriller that incisively confronts horrifying subject matters.

LYNN EVARTS (July 25, 2016)

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