



Forget Yourself

Redfern Jon Barrett

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Blondee lives in a strange world without memories: just four walls, fifty huts and a hundred forgotten people. She came in with the food rations. Mind and body naked, like everyone. Now she lives in a triangular hut at the edge of everything. They say she was a thief - she has long fingers - and she certainly has a reputation for taking multiple lovers. But haunted by the ghost of a fat man and dreaming of a stone woman, Blondee knows she can reshape the world - she just needs to get the world to listen...

Forget Yourself Details

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From Reader Review Forget Yourself for online ebook

Jacopo Lanzoni says

'Forget Yourself' by Redfern Jon Barrett is a short story at the boundary between fantasy and sci-fi. Set in an imaginary world, which could be ours in a few decades, the book tells the story of Blondee, a young woman which one day wakes up in a large walled area with no memory of her past. She is not alone though, as the closed space is inhabited by other men and women who came to this new life in the same way. It is the story of an intimate research of identity, of the reconstitution of a society between savages which are aware to have been something else in the past, and of the intrinsic fight between social conventions and sexual and affective instincts. Neither the style is always smooth nor the plot pleasant, but the richness of the ideas discussed in this book definitely forces the reader to go on.

Mirza Lekker says

The novel seems a bit confusing while reading it, but in the end, you are able to get a complete picture. It is fast-paced, doesn't follow a linear narration, which adequately mirrors the idea of lost memory and flashbacks, leading to a full realisation.

As a reader, you are invited to lose yourself in Blondee's attempt to grasp her surroundings and (re)discover herself.

The novel also challenges certain structures considered to be "natural" by the society, e.g. monogamous relationships, and justifies polyamory as an alternative in harmonious coexistence.

Fran says

Forget Yourself: Redfern Barrett

A mask hides your face so that no one knows who you are and what you look like. But, what about hiding your past and plotting it out so that you have absolutely no memories of your life, who you are, your name or where you came from. Take a magic slate and create a picture or a simple design. With a flick of a wrist or just pulling the top of the slate the entire picture disappears as if it were never there. What would you do if your past was erased and you lived without an identity in a world that is defined by the four walls within your confined living space or within a community that has been created within its own caste system? What would you do if you wound up somewhere with other adults, devoid of their identity, confused and afraid? The place these people are confined to is referred to as The Collective and their names are based on a physical attribute that is indicative to that person as we meet and hear from Blondee, named because of her hair color. Others are named because of something written on their clothing or an attribute that might describe them. Each person within this world is there because they have committed some type of crime. Those with low-level crimes are separated from those who have committed moderate to more serious crimes. Each newcomer is placed and sentenced based on some type of sense of what they did or someone's intuition. Crimes against property, sexual, robbery and others are classified according to their severity.

Within this story each character has a book where they write down things they remember. It could be something dealing with the weather, an animal or even a moment that comes to mind. These memories are

placed in their book as if they are creating their own chapters and will be able to recreate what has been erased from their mind. Rules are made but who makes them? A community of people whose minds are as fragile and delicate as an eggshell and who could crack in seconds if not careful. When we meet Blondie we learn about her relationship with someone named Keradine and someone named Tie. Although these relationships are rather strange they help the reader get to understand her and know more about what her mind and thoughts are like from the little she reveals. Three men and a woman make up where she lives with all of their memories gone. However, for some innate reason all know how to care for themselves and understand their basic wants and needs yet have no idea why. As Blondie shares things she remembers like food, earthquakes or even the animals she remembers she records this in her Book in order to remember and hopefully build it. How do you establish law in an environment that is so chaotic and disorganized? What they all know and record is that they are all there because they committed a crime. Her fingers are long so she is deemed or labeled a thief. No one really remembers their crime or even committing one so how did someone or something put them where they are? Hearing Blondie as she receives her rations we understand that one person controls The Book, doles out the rations and decides on what you are allowed to choose to eat and if you are entitled to anything else. Living in a triangle or hut she has to find her own way. Finding friendship with two others and sharing the Book does help her to start remembering places, objects and things that can be added within the confines of the pages of this Book.

When Blondie's memory is triggered and she realizes she sees a vision within the opening of her hut that of a woman made of stone chasing dogs and other animals. The after mist and the stench of decay that follows reminds her of death but she has no idea why. From this experience and having possession of the book we learn more about what has been inscribed by others when they write about songs, music, recipes and the meanings of things that they might have known but have no idea why. In a world that has been created for them and their penance being administered by others who decide how they live, what they eat where and why this is a world filled with prisoners who are trying to break free as Blondie lives within her own world desiring to be alone, not take on a mate at this point and leaving what some would say is the security of her assigned area to find out more about those that are distances away. What will she learn about the Moderates and those that have been labeled violent? Is this real or is this something that someone is writing in this Book and making it happen? Water and food just appear! People decide on your lifestyle and yet your mind is clear, your thoughts make sense but nothing else does. How do you live in a world that has no past and is recreating its own present? Remembering and sharing your thoughts would be more meaningful if you had someone to share them with. But, when isolated and all alone with what you are creating and your memories what kind of life is that? Will Blondie remember her first days there and those that she met? Will she begin new relationships or pretend to talk to those not really there? Could these people have been drugged, brainwashed or part of some kind of mind control game that presented them with no memories and erased who they were and not really defining who they are? What happens when your every thought becomes what is placed between the pages of a Book where memories flood into different minds and are shared within its pages? Whose life is it anyway?

Within the next two books we learn about Frederick we hear his voice, visit the moderates and least with him and learn about her relationship with Burberry and her love for both her and Frederick. In this world the people that are living there exhibit the same grievances, problems and flaws that we do in our world today. From drinking to gambling to trying to remember their pasts each step of the way adding to the Book and then forgetting. As Blondie becomes more comfortable in her own skin and life we learn of the many changes in their community, how the rations change, the losses and the gains and we begin to see a different side of society. But, there is more for her and the others to inscribe in the book as you read it long with those living there you realize that each entry relates to something each one of us should remember: Don't pry into the lives of others. After a loss: Come back to yourself. There are many important entries that will make readers stop, think and pause for thought as you begin to wonder whether the author is trying to tell you, the

reader to embrace who you are, remember to appreciate those you love and understand it could vanish in a split second.

Within the story we hear many voices and Blondee presents several not really knowing which one she really is, which world she is in and why when wanting to create change for those living in this place she is shunned, criticized and told to leave things the way they are and that changing anything or the course of any events or writing in the Book would be harmful to the others. But, Blondee wanted more and she wanted her memories back and would do anything, and she did to regain them. Something happens and the author reveals what is buried and uncovered which sets off a chain of memories that flood her mind and the end result will take her into many worlds. Who is Blondee? Is she Tanned, Tie, someone's lover, wife, rich, poor, and a sister hoping to protect her brother? Who is she? That is something that you the reader will have to decide for yourself as you take the final steps and journey with her when she reveals the truth about what it means to Forget Yourself, have your mind and memories wiped out, why turning back is not an option, why the choices you make will affect more than just your life and how drifting between worlds might have taught her how to survive where she winds up!

Friends can change your life. Their thoughts can affect your every move. This is a story of love, hate, greed, despair, discontent, hope, and life, finding purpose, renewal and deceit. Living in squalor, living high, living moderate: Just living! Forget Yourself: Can you really? Some would like to but others like Blondee: will she ever remember? What happens when so many memories flood her mind and the reader takes many journeys to many places, meets many of her friends, lovers and learns some of the truths behind her life when you read this thought provoking novel. Forget Yourself: Why would you want to? Embrace who you are!

This is one novel that will make readers understand the importance of living your life as who you are. Following your own destiny and realizing that some people cannot deal with change, while others want to make this better. What will you write when it's your turn to inscribe in The Book!

Fran Lewis: Reviewer

Seregil of Rhiminee says

Originally published at Risingshadow.

Redfern Jon Barrett's debut science fiction novel *Forget Yourself* was originally published as an independent novel in 2012. It's great that Lethe Press has re-released it, because it's a thought-provoking and well-created novel. It's quite an extraordinary reading experience due to the author's multi-layered vision about love, hate, hope, change, society, renewal and finding a purpose for your life.

Because I recently read Redfern Jon Barrett's *The Giddy Death of the Gays and the Strange Demise of Straights* and found it excellent, I was eager to read *Forget Yourself*. When I began to read this novel, I immediately found myself fully captivated by the story and hoped that it wouldn't end, because its complexity hooked me from the start. I'm sure that it will have the same effect on many readers, because it's one of the most intriguing speculative fiction novels available for those who want to read something different and thought-provoking.

Forget Yourself is a not an easy science fiction novel, but it's a rewarding and satisfying reading experience.

It's an immersive and emotionally challenging novel that has a lot to offer for many readers.

Here's a bit of information about the story:

Blondee doesn't have any personal memories. She knows things, but her memories are flat and meaningless. She lives with other people in a compound. People who arrive in the compound have committed crimes and they're named by the clues they came with. Blondee may have been a thief, because she has long fingers, and she has a reputation for having many lovers. She has trouble finding new friends because of her reputation. She dreams of a stone woman, and she knows that she can change things...

As you can see by this short synopsis, *Forget Yourself* is not your normal kind of a science fiction novel, but something complex, delicate and meaningful. It has a soul and a strongly beating heart at its core.

Redfern Jon Barrett gives Blondee a unique voice that is a combination of uncertainty, hope, strength and curiosity. Blondee is not a conventional person, but someone who is a bit different. She lives inside a walled compound with others like her, because she has supposedly committed a minor crime and has been sentenced to live there.

The other people - Frederick, Pilsner, Ketamine, Burberry, Tanned, Tie etc - are similar to Blondee, because they also don't have any memories of what life was like before they came to the compound. They've also committed crimes and think that being in the compound is a punishment for their crimes. Although they live in the compound, they don't actually live in the full sense of the word, but rather exist inside the compound and try to get by as well as they can.

These people have created their own society and they have their own ways of conducting daily tasks. They have had to redefine themselves and learn to live in a new environment, because they can only remember bits and pieces of their previous lives. They live in huts and gather supplies. They have a class system that separates them by the nature of their crimes, and they have their own rules.

The people write down their memories in a book, which binds them together and serves as kind of a rule book to all of them. The book contains such writings as "If one person cheats, the other breaks up with them", "When it ends you have break-up sex once", "Criminals are confined" and "Criminals don't get the pleasures most do" (these writings tell people how to act in relationships and how to behave in various situations).

The author has created a delicate and satisfyingly complex vision of the walled compound and its denizens. His depiction of life in the compound feels believable, because he fluently writes about how people live their lives there and how they interact with each other. Bit by bit he reveals more about what happens at the compound and how people react to changes.

By creating his own vision of a closed society, the author has an opportunity to examine humanity and social behaviour in a realistic way. His observations about human condition and feelings feel fascinatingly accurate and humane.

Redfern Jon Barrett writes about difficult themes and issues in a confident way and doesn't resort to preaching about anything. Such themes and issues as love, sexuality, monogamy, polyamory, intimacy and class warfare are handled remarkably well and naturally, which is astonishing, considering that this novel is the author's debut novel. I like the way the author writes about sex and sexuality, because he addresses many challenging issues in a deep way and gives readers something to think about.

One of the best things about this novel is that the author writes excellently about various relationships. For example, what happens between Blondee, Frederick and Burberry is handled extremely well. I think that reading about the relationships will have a great emotional impact on many readers. It certainly had that effect on me, because everything was described in a realistic way.

It's great that the author shows how people deal with change. As in reality, some people are capable of accepting changes while others question them and try to keep to the old ways. He also shows that it's important to accept yourself as you are and live your life the way you want to live it.

Redfern Jon Barrett's literary prose is simultaneously beautiful, bleak and descriptive. His writing style has faint echoes of Margaret Atwood's writing style. (It's possible that readers may disagree with me on this, but in my opinion, there's also something in his writing style that is slightly reminiscent of Allen Ashley and Terry Grimwood.)

Forget Yourself is a science fiction novel that be recommended to literary fiction readers and speculative fiction readers alike. It will please both readerships due to its contents and excellent prose. It reads a bit like a mystery novel, because the story unfolds towards the end and intriguing things are revealed to readers.

Please, do yourself a favour and invest a bit of time into reading this gem of a novel. It's a fascinating, touching, heart-breaking and thought-provoking story that is worth reading. I consider it to be a prime example of how engaging and thought-provoking science fiction can be at its best and how deeply an author can address challenging and difficult issues by means of speculative fiction.

Highly recommended!

Rebekka Steg says

"It is important that you know: I love you.
Of course I have no idea who you are.
But I have no real idea who I am either, so it seems fair to me."

Forget Yourself by Redfern Jon Barrett is is a fascinating look into a dystopian future where people show up in a tiny world, naked and with no memories. How people shape and create societies, our often futile attempts to fit in, and the difficulties of not being mainstream, polygamy, wife classes, queerness and gender identity are just a few of the issues covered.

Although I felt the ending was a little disjointed, I really enjoyed the novel itself and devoured it in just a couple of days - greatly recommend it.

Quotes

"I think it's really sad that you can hate more than one person but not love more than one person."

"Blondee, you're interested in what you can get for yourself. You're interested in how you perceive yourself, who you are, what you are. You're interested in how others perceive you, in who they see you are, who they think you are. You're not interested in talking: you're not

interested in thinking. You're just trying to make an identity for yourself, trying to build a person out of the lump of flesh and hair which landed here. It's exactly the same as all the others. There's nothing left but you, because you're trying to build a whole new person, and if that doesn't take the whole of someone's time, the whole of someone's mind, then I don't know what does.

"Of course everyone here needs an opinion on that, someone to test that experiment on. Someone to judge their achievement. So they get their little lovers and spend all their time impressing them. They try to impress them with this whole person they've built. But it's pointless, neither is paying attention, neither is listening because really all they can hear is themselves. Each person trying to impress the other simply so they can impress themselves. Eventually it fails because no-one is really listening to anyone and they get angry, or frustrated, or bored, and the only time the other person then exists is as a nuisance they need to get rid of. And so they do. They get rid of each other and continue their experiment, searching for a whole new person to be a judge of it and start the whole fucking process over again.

"I don't think anyone does, not really."

"What?"

"What else is there to say?" she asked.

"No-one does? No-one has any memories at all? But what about the book, what about -"

"And they're memories, are they?"

"They're memories of the outside, of the old world, how things were, of the world before."

"They're not memories."

She sounded certain, spread before me as still as stone.

"Then what are they Burberry?"

"Inventions. Stories. Creations." She was quiet for another moment. "I'm sure people think they're real."

"I hear you, Blondie. I hear you. I know what you want. You don't just want to rebuild yourself like everyone else here. You want to rebuild everything, all we have, all by yourself. But you'll destroy it first, there's no other way. Do you know that? You'll destroy it. I won't let you. How could I let you? You're destructive. We were wrong, so wrong to label you a minor. You're the worst of anyone here."

He paused for a moment to catch his breath. His voice softened.

"Blondie, I'm aware I'm angry at you. And you're angry at me. Neither of us will listen – anger closes the ears. But you must pay attention to me: stop this. Stop this whole thing. What we have now is fragile, more fragile than you realise."

"I don't understand. Are you not happy?"

How would I know? Perhaps it's different outside, perhaps it's different in the real world.

Perhaps it's larger, it's bigger and better, perhaps every heart-jump and belly flutter is a feeble tremor compared to reality. Am I not happy? How the fuck should I know?

Christian Baines says

It won't be for all tastes, but Barrett's first book is a mind bending work of nightmare sci-fi that demands close, rather than casual reading. The layers inside, confronting notions of monogamy, capitalism, class

warfare, and discontent with middle class life make the effort well worthwhile.

Lana Del Slay says

This review won't be anywhere near as complex as the book, I promise.

The thing about Barrett's style is that he takes what makes a short story brilliant and keeps on writing like that for 145 pages (in my review copy, anyway). Pieces build on pieces -- the narrative builds -- the questions pile up. What if you had to build the world from scratch? How would that look?

Blondee's world is a world of criminals. Divided into least, minors, moderates, and severes, nobody comes to this particular dystopia knowing anything. Like many amnesiacs, they are generally aware of facts about the world, but when it comes to who they are? Nothing. Not even names. Blondee is so called because of her hair; a character called Tie was found with a tie around his wrist. Everyone lives by the rules of a book written by the criminals themselves, little bits and pieces of how society could be. Ought to be. And Blondee, ostensibly a thief, violates one of the most fundamental principles.

A POV shift mid-novel did throw me. Not that the quality of the writing changed, but it's unexpected, and really, Blondee's voice is so perfect for this story that I miss it when it's not front and center. The switch is a blazing neon sign: This Is Different. This Is Important. And what happens next... I don't want to spoil you for it. Dive into this world, luxuriate in the writing, and let the plot take you where it will. Where you will.

At bottom this is a conflict between memory and oblivion, tradition and novelty. What really holds us together as a society? What are we doing when we enact our little rituals? Why do some stand the test of time and others fade? Who decides what's worth keeping? We all have books of our own, rules to follow. Or rules to break. Would you have the courage to throw the book away? Tradition and novelty. Power, hierarchy: Barrett gives us a stark look at how we derive them. You build a world from scratch, the bones will show.

I think the one shortcoming here is the superplot, the reason why everything is the way it is. The reason ceases to matter once we've dug so far into the philosophy. The reason has to be a lot simpler than it turned out to be, so the message doesn't get bogged down in, well, story. There's a time for story and there's a time for message. I hardly ever say this, but *Forget Yourself* works so well as philosophy that I don't want an extensive fiction to back it up. The message is too important for the kind of clouding that comes with the reason behind the plot twists. Personally, I'd have kept it simpler.

But give it a go for yourself. You might disagree, and I'd hate for you to miss the message. Well worth any amount of confusion in the end.

Michael Coorlim says

I obtained a copy of *Forget Yourself* from the author. This review contains mild spoilers.

Forget Yourself is a dystopian speculative fiction novel by Redfern Jon Barrett, an author with a PhD in queer literature. It's a very polished and well written story that hits on many of my favorite themes – the

nature of reality, questions of identity, unreliable narrators, and the subjective nature of thought and idea. *Forget Yourself* is one of those books whose concepts stood out head and shoulders above the crowd, and upon reading it I was thrilled to find out that the writer possessed a skill equal to the task he'd set himself.

The novel presents a people without a past, without a context. They have, over time, found themselves in a defined space without knowing how they'd gotten there, who they were, or what they're supposed to be doing. New people appear adult, fully formed and bereft of identity, terrified and confused. The collective bestows upon them a name based on their physical features or what little they've brought with them. Blondie, the protagonist, is called so because of her hair. Frederick is named because that's what was written on the hem of his underwear.

It is also decided what crime a newcomer has committed to have been sent to this place, based on intuition. The nature of the crime – property, sexual, violent – is irrelevant, but its severity creates a class system.

From time to time one person or another remembers something, a fact about the world, which is written down in their book. These axioms provide a structure without context. It is known that “Recipes are invented by someone, who gives them to others”, but nobody knows why or how it came to be. The result is an artificial sort of society filled with arbitrary rules, one that is — as one character remarks — fragile.

As the story progresses you can see the shattering of this fragility taking shape, gradually, like a car wreck in slow motion. Where Barrett excels is the emotional authenticity of his characters, their reactions, their loves, and their hate as they struggle to make sense of the senseless.

It's an excellent book, and I highly recommend it with a five-star rating.

Gemma says

I really wanted to like this book more than I did but I felt the story never really went anywhere. I've given it a 3 star because it is an interesting topic but it's not good enough for me to recommend anyone else read it too. I will say it's a very quick read.

melissa says

'Forget Yourself' is an unnerving and enigmatic look into a dystopian world. Blondie, named for her hair color as all of the other inhabitants are named for characteristics or features, wakes not knowing who she is or where she is. She has no memory of her past, not unlike the other inhabitants of this world. For lack of another theory they all assume that they've been dumped in this strange place as a punishment for some crime. They are supplied with questionable goods and foods twice a month and left to 'live' on their own. The story is a journey for truth and memory; seemingly the most precious possession these people have. It was a very well written (and proofread!!) book and I was glad to have been asked to review it.

andy hill says

Thought provoking, but a little confused at the end

I wanted to give this 5 stars, but the end of the book lost me.

The rest of the story really had me thinking about my life, and the roles we are given by society. Male, female, husband, wife, lover, and the pressure to conform to the expectations and fears of others. But also how it is entirely reasonable to be true to love, to create the reality we want, so long as we can find the strength, perhaps in the truth of love.

I cried in a couple of places, seeing some aspects of my own experiences, when the love wasn't strong enough, and I found in this book new perspectives that helped me to finish grieving my loss and move on.

I recommend it to anyone who has ever considered monogamous marriage an absurd social-control relic in a world of infinite possibilities - despite the ending that I found jumbled.

M.G. Mason says

Blondee is in a prison, of sorts. She occupies on of fifty huts inside a walled compound. She has no memory of how she got there or where she came from but she does have flashbacks to a previous life and of people she might have been acquainted with. The people inside the compound tell her she is a thief, she must have been as she has long fingers. She's also highly sexed and is accused of being a "cheat" – something she doesn't seem to comprehend.

She lives in this compound with some bizarre and bizarrely named individuals – Burberry, Tanned, Gut, Pilsner, and Ketamine; none have memories of their time before the compound and all seem to be convinced that they are petty criminals. They are existing rather than living and those who have imprisoned them have no visible presence on the inside, no discipline, no rules, no guards... here's your prison, now get on with it.

Told in the first person (and more effective because of it), this tale grabs you from the first page. It is immediately disturbing and intriguing and though not brutal in content, the theme is oppressive enough that no violence is necessary to convey the world. It's just one of those books that really gets under your skin. Might not appeal to everybody because of it, but it certainly appealed to me and it put me in mind of Danny Boyle's confrontational style of cinematography, only in prose form.

The biggest appeal though is its strangeness. The people in the book are not conventional hero, villain, anti-hero. They are simply people and they have all (presumably) committed minor crimes which makes you wonder from the start why such minor infringements are deserving of such a harsh punishment in the form of prison – maximum security for petty criminals and fed on out of date food? Something's not right here...

I couldn't put this down - hence why I finished it in such a short space of time (over a weekend!). It reads incredibly well; all credit to the beta readers (and the author) because I spotted only one typo. The text did not grate on me with bad grammar or sentences that you often think could have been put so much better, no all of these have been ironed out. It flows well, the dialogue feels organic and the narrative fully absorbs you. One of the problems of first person narrative is often that we get too much observation and not enough reflection. Blondee though is satisfyingly self-reflective as a character so another thumbs up there.

Bad points? Not many if I'm honest. Despite the meticulous editing there are a couple of typos "peaked my

interest” stuck out a couple of times. The actual correct spelling is “piqued” – but this is minor. I didn’t feel the ending had a satisfactory conclusion; their reason for being there felt a little bit of a let down – almost mundane considering the intriguing nature of the plot.

A superb book though – if you only buy one indy book this year, you could do a lot worse than this!

See more book reviews at my blog

Mike Mantin says

'Forget Yourself' looks into an alternate reality both unnerving and spellbindingly enigmatic. We awake with Blondie, known and named only for her hair colour, who has as much idea of her bleak, primitive surroundings as we do. Her new community is a mixed bunch of people who live in ramshackle huts, gather the mysteriously replenishing supplies and live by a book full of scribbles of how to conduct yourself and your relationships: do not cheat, have break up sex once, never speak again. Redfern Barrett populates his sparse setting with characters who have become used to their surroundings but whose names offer scattered hints that something must have come before: Frederick and Jay mix freely with Ketamine and Pilsner. Blondie eventually becomes known as much for her "long fingers of a thief" and her multiple partners, and her ways threaten the rickety foundations the enclosed society is based on.

Barrett's style is often bleak but always captivating: the story unfolds with menace, with each of Blondie's new ideas, whims and relationships signalling a new phase in the group's hypersensitive world. Her recurring visions of a dead resident and a stone woman add further questions, and the book thrillingly follows the strands of what Blondie has been given and what she creates. But as with Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* - whose sinister social dystopia is an immediate parallel - there are clear warnings behind the mystery. The group's teetering dogma of human relationships becomes a canvas for Barrett to question how and why we follow them ourselves. Like Blondie - who we know had blonde hair and possibly did something wrong some time before all this - the grimly enclosed world of 'Forget Yourself' is grounded in something very real.
