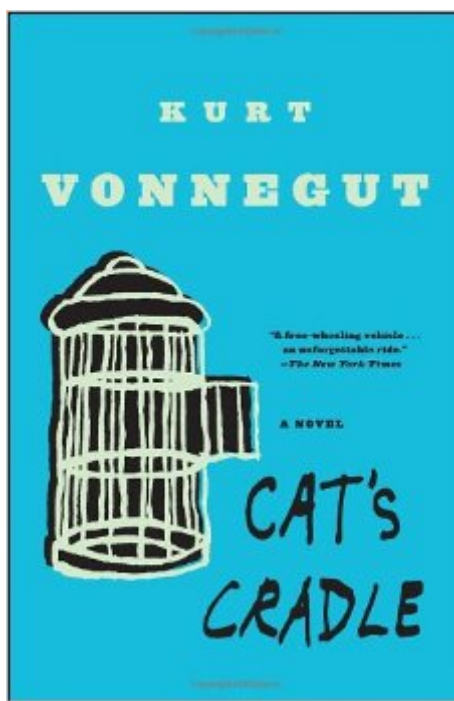


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Cat's Cradle: A Novel



Synopsis

Cat's Cradle is Kurt Vonnegut's satirical commentary on modern man and his madness. An apocalyptic tale of this planet's ultimate fate, it features a midget as the protagonist, a complete, original theology created by a calypso singer, and a vision of the future that is at once blackly fatalistic and hilariously funny. A book that left an indelible mark on an entire generation of readers, Cat's Cradle is one of the twentieth century's most important works—and Vonnegut at his very best.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Cat's Cradle is by far the best Vonnegut novel that I have yet read. Blending his patented wry humor with acute social insight presented in an absurd fantasy world, Vonnegut has written an exceptional novel of love, lies, and the self destruction of mankind. The story centers around the narrator, Jonah, who is called by name once in the entire book. We are told in the beginning that he is writing a book on the events of the day the first atomic bomb was dropped on Japan. His research leads him to a correspondence with Newt Hoenikker, the midget son of Doctor Felix Hoenikker, father of the atomic bomb. After meeting with Newt, destiny leads our protagonist to the impoverished island republic of San Lorenzo, where among other adventures, he finds religion, falls in love, and becomes president. All of this by itself would make for a very entertaining book, but it is not in the story line that Vonnegut's genius lies. Cat's Cradle is rife with painfully accurate insights into the institutions that our society holds so dear, such as, religion, politics, and science. Vonnegut invents for the inhabitants of San Lorenzo a brand new religion based completely and admittedly on "foma",

or lies. This wouldn't be so shocking, except for the fact that this "bokonism" seems to make perfect sense. Other Vonnegut ironies pervade the book and are too elaborate to go into. Kurt Vonnegut is my favorite author of all time. *Cat's Cradle* is one of his funniest, most absurd, and frightening novels. This book truly causes one to stop and think about the things that one holds as unquestionably true. All of the incredible people, places, things, and ideas in *Cat's Cradle* are intricately woven into a perfect tapestry that sums up and spells out many of mankind's self-created problems in 191 pages.

I don't like sci-fi, but I loved this. This is the first Vonnegut I've read (I took a chance after reading so much praise for it) and it definitely won't be the last. It's one of those rare and wonderful books in the same vein as *Animal Farm*: simple prose, easy to read, yet with ironic tinges and thought-provoking depths; a novel that can be read and enjoyed at many different levels. *Cat's Cradle* is narrated through Jonah, an author who aims to write a book on the single day the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. On investigating the atomic bomb's main founding father (and his three children) he is told about a *non-existent* substance with the capacity to provide all water on earth with a different molecular structure, turning it into Ice 9 (ie, a substance that could bring about the end of the world). A different assignment takes Jonah to the small island of San Lorenzo where he encounters Felix Hoenikker's three children and a society where the religion of choice (a religion that everyone knows is based on lies, yet still has utter faith in) is punishable by death, for the simple fact that it adds excitement to the dull lives of the inhabitants. I won't go any further...The thing that delighted me most about this book was the way in which it was written. A lot of great and influential books are ones that (on the whole) you enjoy, but take a while to get into, and at times you feel like giving up on: you know the book in question is good literature, but the style and plot make finishing it seem a chore. Similarly, a lot of fast-paced books hold little impact, don't challenge the mind and are forgotten the instant you read them. Kurt Vonnegut has managed to write a powerful and memorable novel in a short, snappy style: this book has everything that makes a compelling, challenging read. Vonnegut lets you get a feel for the characters without going into lengthy descriptions, he manages to make sharp, subtle criticisms of religion, human nature and society without rambling or whining, his plot is exciting yet not unrealistic, he creates a hellish world that plays on everyone's fear of obliteration in precious few words. I thought the ending was too abrupt, but it fitted well with the rest of the story (and it would have been even more disappointing if he'd created a satisfying, everything-tied-up-nicely ending). I found this impossible to put down, and highly recommend it to any fan of literature.

Vonnegut writes the book with the question that "God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater" plays with on a different level, all the while throwing in philosophies, wit, and things to ponder on and about during the COLD WAR. The narrator (first-person incompetent) is somewhat vacant, and being so, maneuvers the story the best way possible. The narrator is writing a book on the atomic bomb and he travels about meeting strange people who know the creators of the bomb. The characters he meets are funny and strange (You would have to be an oddball to be toying with doomsday.). In his journey he finds the sons and daughter of the inventor of the A-bomb. He finds that these three are an eccentric and foolish trio. The daughter and sons hold with them ice-nine, a weapon that makes the a-bomb seem infantile. Ice-nine was an attempt by their father to make battlefields (mud) solidify, making battle easier on soldiers. It winds up making any moisture it touches solid and blue, but its one flaw is, once put into the atmosphere it regenerates without stopping, freezing everything in its path(including human beings). Vonnegut throws in the element of Bokononism, a quirky, weird religion spawned by an eccentric, self-made prophet named Bokonon. This angle plays in the mind of the reader as it debases the relevancy of all religions, thus, for example, making Catholicism or Islam just as strange as Bokononism. Bokononists chant about man being born of the "mud." Symbolically the three children holding ice-nine, a single flake of which will end mankind as we know it, stand for three world superpowers. It shows that anyone, no matter how high in power, can be foolish, and should have no access to such an element of destruction. The ice-nine is just a symbol of the end of mankind through the folly of science, for the ice-nine turns things bluish white, like ice--putting man in another ice-age, destroying all "mud". The island of San Lorenzo is like Cuba--through its history no one really cared about anyone else ceasing it, but since there is an odd belief there(Bokononism/Communism), people poke around there now. It shows how such a small place, like Cuba, in the Cold War, could be ground-zero for the end of humanity, and warns against intervention there. Being that the Cold War is over, this is an era piece that some may think is stagnate. Yet the tools to end civilization are still out there, so this book is relevant as long as science and government have and look for a greater means of destruction. Though this book is funny and eccentric on surface, it is ultimately found to be a political warning. This humorous look at what could be the end, parallels Orwell's "Nineteen-Eighty-Four" in the field of political writing for the sake of warning (Orwell warns about the threat of Totalitarianism, Vonnegut warns about man's acute closeness to his own demise). This book is not as hard-nosed as "Nineteen-Eighty-Four." It is funny, but this is done to show the folly and incompetence that mankind's demise is handled with: Vonnegut's use of juxtaposition is without flaw. Bokonon adds a religious facet to this novel. He

ultimately shows folly and incompetence in the creation of something other than doomsday devices--religion. After the reader drops the hypocrisy of thinking their religion is "the one," Vonnegut brings up the question: Were people like Jesus or Mohammed just fools out spreading nonsense for the sake of an ego-trip? This book touches on so many intense questions. It puts forth a vehicle for such deep introspection, yet it is hilarious. I only wish I were to have read this in the mind set of the world in the early sixties, when this book was first published. Vonnegut was way ahead of his time with this one. His writing, when dissected, makes me think he is one of the great thinkers of the twentieth-century into the twenty-first...

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