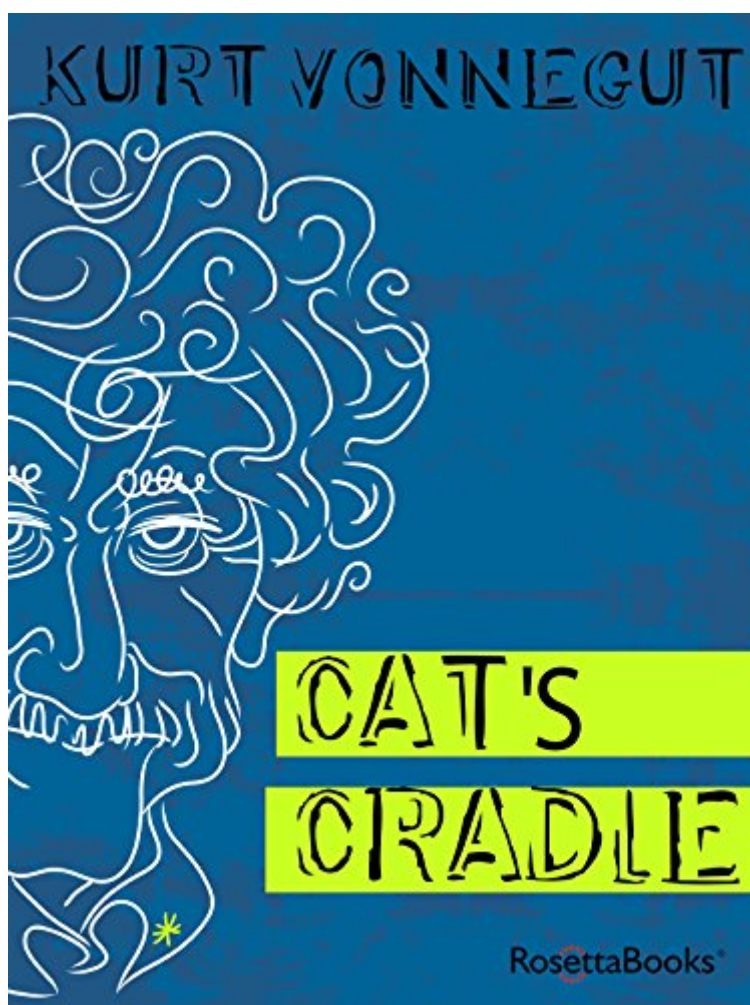


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Cat's Cradle



Synopsis

Catâ™s Cradle (1963) is Vonnegut's most ambitious novel, which put into the language terms like "wampeter", "kerass" and "granfalloon" as well as a structured religion, Boskonism and was submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for a Master's Degree in anthropology, and in its sprawling compass and almost uncontrolled (and uncontrollable) invention, may be Vonnegut's best novel. Written contemporaneously with the Cuban missile crisis and countenancing a version of a world in the grasp of magnified human stupidity, the novel is centered on Felix Hoenikker, a chemical scientist reminiscent of Robert Oppenheimerâ | except that Oppenheimer was destroyed by his conscience and Hoenikker, delighting in the disastrous chemicals he has invented, has no conscience at all. Hoenikker's "Ice 9" has the potential to convert all liquid to inert ice and thus destroy human existence; he is exiled to a remote island where Boskonism has enlisted all of its inhabitants and where religion and technology collaborate, with the help of a large cast of characters, to destroy civilization. Vonnegut's compassion and despair are expressed here through his grotesque elaboration of character and situation and also through his created religion which like Flannery O'Connor's "Church Without Christ" (in *Wise Blood*) acts to serve its adherents by removing them from individual responsibility. Vonnegut had always been taken seriously by science fiction readers and critics (a reception which indeed made him uncomfortable) but it was with Catâ™s Cradle that he began to be found and appreciated by a more general audience. His own ambivalence toward science, science fiction, religion and religious comfort comes through in every scene of this novel.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR Kurt Vonnegut (1922-2007) is one of the most beloved American writers of the twentieth century. Vonnegut's audience increased steadily since his first five pieces in the 1950s and grew from there. His 1968 novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* has become a canonic war novel with Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* to form the truest and darkest of what came from World War II. Vonnegut began his career as a science fiction writer, and his early novels--*Player Piano* and *The Sirens of Titan*--were categorized as such even as they appealed to an audience far beyond the reach of the category. In the 1960s, Vonnegut became closely associated with the Baby Boomer generation, a writer on that side, so to speak. Now that Vonnegut's work has been studied as a large body of work, it has been more deeply understood and unified. There is a consistency to his satirical insight, humor and anger which makes his work so synergistic. It seems clear that the more of Vonnegut's work you read, the more it resonates and the more you wish to read. Scholars believe that Vonnegut's reputation (like Mark Twain's) will grow steadily through the decades as his work continues to increase in relevance and new connections are formed, new insights made.

ABOUT THE SERIES Author Kurt Vonnegut is considered by most to be one of the most

important writers of the twentieth century. His books Slaughterhouse-Five (named after Vonnegut's World War II POW experience) and Cat's Cradle are considered among his top works.

RosettaBooks offers here a complete range of Vonnegut's work, including his first novel (Player Piano, 1952) for readers familiar with Vonnegut's work as well as newcomers.

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Customer Reviews

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.

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.

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