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KURT

VONNEGUT

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"Wry and trenchant...
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Book Review

"This is the indispensable
Vonnegut."

—*San Francisco Chronicle*



TIMEQUAKE

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藏书章

KURT VONNEGUT



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TIMEQUAKE

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PRAISE FOR KURT VONNEGUT'S TIMEQUAKE

"[A] quirky mix of fiction and biography . . . low whimsy and high seriousness . . . This is the indispensable Vonnegut, the old warrior who will not accept the dehumanizing of politics, the blunting of conscience and the glibness of the late-20th-century Western world."

—*San Francisco Chronicle*

"A word cartoonist, a wise guy, a *true subversive*! . . . Vonnegut is still making the pompous look silly and the decent and lovely look decent and lovely . . . The man's mind is racing, and it is exhilarating to give chase . . . [*Timequake* is] a highly entertaining consideration of the relationship between the writer's life and the writer's imagination. Some of its juxtapositions are unsettling, especially the fictional-nonfictional scenes of marriage. Some are hilarious . . . This work has been a blessing."

—Valerie Sayers, *New York Times Book Review*

"A remarkable display of authorial honesty . . . [a] puree of fact and fancy . . . a catalog of Vonnegut's suggested tools for successful navigation through a treacherous existence: humor, honesty, generosity of spirit and sufficient bravery to live as well as exist."

—*Detroit Free Press*

"A curious blend of wisdom and bitterness, wit and resignation, and the nose-thumbing at the universe."

—*San Diego Union-Tribune*

"Part autobiography, part meditation, part satire . . . Vonnegut is at his best."

—*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

Continued . . .

PRAISE FOR KURT VONNEGUT'S HOCUS POCUS

"Terribly funny . . . As good as the best of his novels."

—John Irving, *Los Angeles Times*

"*Hocus Pocus* is the most topical, realistic Vonnegut novel to date . . . He is a satirist with a heart, a moralist with a whoopee cushion."

—Jay McInerney, *The New York Times*

"His voice is one of the most original in popular American fiction . . . sharp-toothed satire . . . truly hilarious . . . *Hocus Pocus* is ample proof that his literary prestidigitation can still amuse and delight."

—*San Francisco Chronicle*

"Vonnegut is back, with plenty to say . . . Combining clever wit with keen social observation, *Hocus Pocus* re-establishes Mr. Vonnegut's place as the Mark Twain of our times."

—*Atlanta Journal & Constitution*

"Vintage Vonnegut, witty, startling, satiric . . . off-the wall brilliance. Vonnegut is a true original. *Hocus Pocus* is not only poignant and provocative, it is outrageous and very funny indeed. If Luck and Time are the two prime movers of the Universe, we are lucky in our time to have a Kurt Vonnegut to prod us, scold us, astonish us, unnerve us, entertain us and make us laugh."

—*Cleveland Plain Dealer*

"A king-sized relief valve of comedy. Every bit as humorous as *Cat's Cradle*, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *Breakfast of Champions*, or any of Vonnegut's other comic masterpieces . . . Vonnegut evokes the cynical chortle, the knowing grin, the inner laughter that soothes our troubled reflections . . . He's mad as hell and laughing all the way to the apocalypse."

—*Playboy*

"Vonnegut's best novel in years."

—*The Nation*

PRAISE FOR KURT VONNEGUT'S FATES WORSE THAN DEATH

"*Fates Worse Than Death* is honest and scarily funny, and it offers a rare insight into an author who has customarily hidden his heart . . . Mr. Vonnegut is perhaps more intimate with the reader than ever."

—*The New York Times*

"The kindred spirit of Mark Twain harpoons humanity with howling assessments . . . Vonnegut's genius for satire continues to shine."

—*Nashville Banner*

"An often insightful and always funny self-portrait that may be as much of an autobiography as we will ever get from Vonnegut."

—*Playboy*

"Mordantly funny . . . highly entertaining."

—*Newsday*

"Startlingly original . . . [The book] touches on actual 'fates worse than death' (Vonnegut concludes there are very few), pornography (several of his own books have been branded as such by religious zealots), Geraldo Rivera (Vonnegut's unlamented ex-son-in-law), Manhattan (Skyscraper National Park), and the fire-bombing of Dresden while he was a prisoner there during World War II (certainly the inspiration for the classic *Slaughterhouse-Five*) . . . Witty and warmhearted, *Fates Worse Than Death* offers a cornucopia of ideas, reminiscences, opinions, asides, anecdotes and flights of fancy. Although intensely personal, it embraces matters that touch us all."

—*St. Petersburg Times*

"Vonnegut freely quotes himself on everything from art and architecture to madness and mass murder . . . uncompromising."

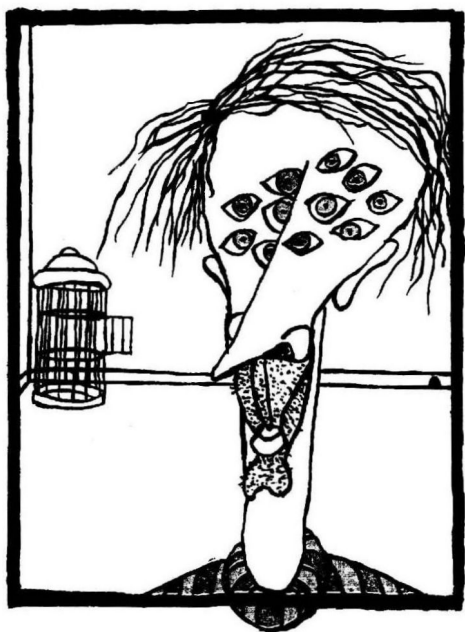
—*Los Angeles Times*

"He remains a happy pessimist and one of the country's most thoughtful and entertaining writers."

—*San Antonio Express-News*

By the same author

PLAYER PIANO
THE SIRENS OF TITAN
MOTHER NIGHT
CAT'S CRADLE
GOD BLESS YOU, MR. ROSEWATER
WELCOME TO THE MONKEY HOUSE
SLAUGHTER-HOUSE FIVE
HAPPY BIRTHDAY, WANDA JUNE
BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS
WAMPETERS, FOMA & GRANFALLOONS
SLAPSTICK
JAILBIRD
PALM SUNDAY
DEADEYE DICK
GALÁPAGOS
BLUEBEARD
HOCUS POCUS
FATES WORSE THAN DEATH



Out-of-print science fiction writer Kilgore Trout in Cohoes, New York, in 1975, having learned of the death of his estranged son, Leon, in a Swedish shipyard, having given his parakeet, "Cyclone Bill," his freedom, and about to become a vagabond.

*In memory of Seymour Lawrence,
a romantic and great publisher
of curious tales told with ink
on bleached and flattened wood pulp*

All persons, living and dead, are purely coincidental.

PROLOGUE

Ernest Hemingway in 1952 published in *Life* magazine a long short story called *The Old Man and the Sea*. It was about a Cuban fisherman who hadn't caught anything for eighty-four days. The Cuban hooked an enormous marlin. He killed it and lashed it alongside his little boat. Before he could get it to shore, though, sharks bit off all the meat on the skeleton.

I was living in Barnstable Village on Cape Cod when the story appeared. I asked a neighboring commercial fisherman what he thought of it. He said the hero was an idiot. He should have hacked off the best chunks of meat and put them in the bottom of the boat, and left the rest of the carcass for the sharks.

It could be that the sharks Hemingway had in mind were critics who hadn't much liked his first novel in ten years, *Across the River and into the Trees*, published two years earlier. As far as I know, he never said so. But the marlin could have been that novel.

And then I found myself in the winter of 1996 the creator of a novel which did not work, which had no

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point, which had never wanted to be written in the first place. *Merde!* I had spent nearly a decade on that ungrateful fish, if you will. It wasn't even fit for shark chum.

I had recently turned seventy-three. My mother made it to fifty-two, my father to seventy-two. Hemingway almost made it to sixty-two. I had lived too long! What was I to do?

Answer: Fillet the fish. Throw the rest away.

This I did in the summer and autumn of 1996. Yesterday, November 11th of that year, I turned seventy-four. Seventy-four!

Johannes Brahms quit composing symphonies when he was fifty-five. Enough! My architect father was sick and tired of architecture when he was fifty-five. Enough! American male novelists have done their best work by then. Enough! Fifty-five is a long time ago for me now. Have pity!

My great big fish, which stunk so, was entitled *Timequake*. Let us think of it as *Timequake One*. And let us think of this one, a stew made from its best parts mixed with thoughts and experiences during the past seven months or so, as *Timequake Two*.

Hokay?

The premise of *Timequake One* was that a timequake, a sudden glitch in the space-time continuum, made every-

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body and everything do exactly what they'd done during a past decade, for good or ill, a second time. It was déjà vu that wouldn't quit for ten long years. You couldn't complain about life's being nothing but old stuff, or ask if just you were going nuts, or if *everybody* was going nuts.

There was absolutely nothing you could say during the rerun, if you hadn't said it the first time through the decade. You couldn't even save your own life or that of a loved one, if you had failed to do that the first time through.

I had the timequake zap everybody and everything in an instant from February 13th, 2001, back to February 17th, 1991. Then we all had to get back to 2001 the hard way, minute by minute, hour by hour, year by year, betting on the wrong horse again, marrying the wrong person again, getting the clap again. You name it!

Only when people got back to when the timequake hit did they stop being robots of their pasts. As the old science fiction writer Kilgore Trout said, "Only when free will kicked in again could they stop running obstacle courses of their own construction."

Trout doesn't really exist. He has been my alter ego in several of my other novels. But most of what I have chosen to preserve from *Timequake One* has to do with his adventures and opinions. I have salvaged a few of the

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thousands of stories he wrote between 1931, when he was fourteen, and 2001, when he died at the age of eighty-four. A hobo for much of his life, he died in luxury in the Ernest Hemingway Suite of the writers' retreat Xanadu in the summer resort village of Point Zion, Rhode Island. That's nice to know.

His very first story, he told me as he was dying, was set in Camelot, the court of King Arthur in Britain: Merlin the Court Magician casts a spell that allows him to equip the Knights of the Round Table with Thompson submachine guns and drums of .45-caliber dumdums.

Sir Galahad, the purest in heart and mind, familiarizes himself with this new virtue-compelling appliance. While doing so, he puts a slug through the Holy Grail and makes a Swiss cheese of Queen Guinevere.

Here is what Trout said when he realized that the ten-year rerun was over, that he and everybody else were suddenly obligated to think of new stuff to do, to be creative again: "Oh, Lordy! I am much too old and experienced to start playing Russian roulette with free will again."

Yes, and I myself was a character in *Timequake One*, making a cameo appearance at a clambake on the beach at the writers' retreat Xanadu in the summer of 2001, six months after the end of the rerun, six months after free will kicked in again.

I was there with several fictitious persons from the

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book, including Kilgore Trout. I was privileged to hear the old, long-out-of-print science fiction writer describe for us, and then demonstrate, the special place of Earthlings in the cosmic scheme of things.

So now my last book is done, with the exception of this preface. Today is November 12th, 1996, about nine months, I would guess, from its publication date, from its emergence from the birth canal of a printing press. There is no rush. The gestation period for a baby Indian elephant is more than twice that long.

The gestation period for a baby opossum, friends and neighbors, is twelve days.

I have pretended in this book that I will still be alive for the clambake in 2001. In chapter 46, I imagine myself as still alive in 2010. Sometimes I say I'm in 1996, where I really am, and sometimes I say I am in the midst of a rerun following a timequake, without making clear distinctions between the two situations.

I must be nuts.



TIMEQUAKE

A stylized, handwritten signature or logo, possibly reading 'Kant' or 'Kant', with a large 'K' and a long, sweeping underline.

1

Call me Junior. My six grown kids do. Three are adopted nephews, three are my own. They call me Junior behind my back. They think I don't know that.

I say in speeches that a plausible mission of artists is to make people appreciate being alive at least a little bit. I am then asked if I know of any artists who pulled that off. I reply, "The Beatles did."

It appears to me that the most highly evolved Earthling creatures find being alive embarrassing or much worse. Never mind cases of extreme discomfort, such as idealists' being crucified. Two important women in my life, my mother and my only sister, Alice, or Allie, in Heaven now, hated life and said so. Allie would cry out, "I give up! I give up!"

The funniest American of his time, Mark Twain, found life for himself and everybody else so stressful when he was in his seventies, like me, that he wrote as follows: "I have never wanted any released friend of mine restored