



* **Cat's Cradle**

By Kurt Vonnegut

*“An apocalyptic tale of this planet’s ultimate fate, it features a midget as one of the protagonists; the father of the atom bomb; a dying dictator intent on turning his third-world island-nation into a tourist park for wealthy Americans; a religious theology created by a calypso singer; a powerfully destructive substance called ‘ice-nine,’ and a vision of the future that is sadly, tragically, and yet, somehow, hilariously bleak.”

***Story**

- * Written (and rejected) as a graduate thesis for his master's in anthropology from the University of Chicago
 - * Published 1963
- * Title derives from the string game of the same name and suggests the casual attitude we often have when “playing” both with science and religion
- * A comment on modern man and his madness, this is essentially a book about the history—and the historical cost—of human stupidity.

* **Background**

*Apocalyptic Satire

*Satire: Using humor to point out the flaws, foibles, and hypocrisies of humanity

*Dark Humor: Comedy that makes light of taboo or typically serious subjects

*Irony: When the opposite happens of what one can naturally or logically expect

*127 Chapters in 287 Pages

*Genre

* Ilium, New York

* General Forge and Foundry Company

* San Lorenzo

* Tiny, rocky island nation in the Caribbean

* Only one city, one hospital, one hotel, and one taxi

* A republic run by a dictator

* A Christian nation whose people practice Bokononism

* National Anthem: “Home on the Range”

* Highest Point: Mount McCabe

* Official Currency: The “corporal”

* **Setting**

- * John: writer and the novel's narrator
- * Dr. Felix Hoenikker: father of the atom bomb
- * Angela, Frank, and Newt: children of Hoenikker
- * Bokonon: former calypso singer and current spiritual leader of Bokononism, a religion based on lies
- * "Papa" Monzano: aging democratic dictator of San Lorenzo, enemy of Bokonon, and a practicing Bokonist

* Characters

- * Mona Aamons Monzano: “Papa” Monzano’s adopted daughter
- * Julian Castle: rebellious, hard-partying millionaire who, at 40, became a philanthropist and built San Lorenzo’s only hospital
- * Philip Castle: son of Julian Castle, he runs the island’s only hotel: Casa Mona
- * H. Lowe Crosby: loud and patriotic American who is travelling to San Lorenzo to set up a new bicycle company
- * Horlick Minton: American ambassador to San Lorenzo

* Characters

- * Games
- * Militancy
- * Christianity
- * Truth and Lies
- * Patriotism and Tribalism
- * Autocracy and Democracy
- * Consumerism and Capitalism
- * Contradiction and Hypocrisy

* **Motifs**

- * Science and Morality
- * Religion and Comfort
- * Meaninglessness and Absurdity
- * Nation and Identity

* Themes

* Science and Morality

* *The reckless science that propels the plot forward suggests the inseparable relationship between science and morality, and the limitations (perhaps even dangers) of truth-seeking.*

* Themes

* Religion and Comfort

* *The outlawed and invented religion of Boknonism ironically brings genuine hope through “shameless lies” to its impoverished people, suggesting humankind’s desire to bring order and meaning to its existence at any expense.*

* Themes

* Meaninglessness and Absurdity

- * *The ways in which science and religion are employed suggest the lengths to which humankind will go, the things we will build, the lies we will tell ourselves, and the hypocrisies we will endure in our effort to find happiness, purpose, and control in our lives.*
- * *However, the end result suggests the absurdity of such efforts.*
- * *And begs the question:*
- * *What does it mean to be human?*

* Themes

*Nation and Identity

- * *Vonnegut explores progress, prosperity, and the complicated (often arbitrary) mechanisms we build to achieve our idea of “civilization.”*
- * *Placing half the plot on the poor island nation of San Lorenzo and populating the story with Americans allows Vonnegut to explore the tribal, hypocritical, and often fabricated underpinnings of governance, politics, and culture.*
- * *Again, the apocalyptic nature of the novel suggests that none of these manmade constructions lead to peace and harmony and that some might even lead to our destruction.*

* Themes