



## Bagombo Snuff Box: Uncollected Short Fiction

By Kurt Vonnegut

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### Bagombo Snuff Box: Uncollected Short Fiction By Kurt Vonnegut

Never-before-collected, vintage Vonnegut.

"Vonnegut said that his last book, **Timequake** (1997), would be his last, but no one as imaginative and in love with language and story can resist the lure of the page, and it's obvious that he had a grand time working on this collection of his vintage stories. **Bagombo Snuff Box** resurrects Vonnegut's earliest efforts, stories written during the fifties and sixties for such popular venues as **The Saturday Evening Post** and **Collier's**. In his engagingly autobiographical introduction, Vonnegut describes his stints as a Chicago journalist and PR man for General Electric in Schenectady, New York; his decision to supplement his income by writing; and his rapid success and evolution into a full-time writer. So, here are his literary roots, a set of stories that reflects their era's eagerness to turn the horrors of war into anecdote and to equate technology with progress. Unabashedly fablelike, they can be either sly or sweet, sentimental or vaudevillian, but all are quietly subversive. . . . Rich in low-key humor and good old-fashioned morality, Vonnegut's stories are both wily and tender." —**Booklist**

"You trust this voice . . . the pretentious are all brought to earth with his wit . . . These stories . . . speak only of simple truths." —**Chicago Sun-Times**

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

From out of the blue, here's a new collection of Vonnegut fiction--his first magazine stories from the 1950s in book form at last, with some charming reminiscences (and three new endings for old stories) by the author. Vonnegut says these tales were meant to be as evanescent as lightning bugs, and that image captures their frail magic. They're like time travelers from an epoch when stories swarmed in mass-market magazines, before TV dawnd and doomed them.

Later greatness glimmers here: the offbeat sci-fi of "Thanisphere" (in which an astronaut encounters dead souls in space) and the hero's bogus adventures in alien lands in "Bagombo Snuff Box" look forward to Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*, as do the war stories "Souvenir," "Der Arme Dolmetscher," and "The Cruise of The Jolly Roger," which incorporate and amplify Vonnegut's actual war experiences. There's authentic midcentury news here, even in the gentle *Saturday Evening Post* social satire of "The No-Talent Kid," "Ambitious Sophomore," and "The Boy Who Hated Girls," which pretty much nail the high-school marching band experience. The pieces are peppered with odd, true observations and neat little turns of phrase: one incompetent kid in Lincoln High's band marches "flappingly, like a mother flamingo pretending to be injured, luring alligators from her nest."

You can't miss the ironic humor and the humane, death-haunted melancholy of the young war veteran and tyro writer. This collection beats his first novel, *Player Piano*, and anticipates the masterpiece *Cat's Cradle*, whose tiny chapters resemble short stories. Young Vonnegut is derivative, mostly of Saki and O. Henry, partly because he couldn't think of endings, and their switcheroos offered a handy model. But from the start, Vonnegut's idiosyncratic voice is unmistakable. --*Tim Appelo*

#### From Publishers Weekly

Any new book by Vonnegut, especially since he has vowed to retire from literature, will be welcomed by his fans. But as the author himself says in his introduction, these 23 apprenticeship stories "were expected to be among the living about as long as individual lightning bugs," and they will be of most interest to completists and scholars. Vonnegut's best short stories from the '50s were collected in *Welcome to the Monkey House*. Those in this collection for the most part work humbly with formulas dear to mid-century middlebrow magazines like *Colliers*. Included are tales like "The No-Talent Kid" and "The Boy Who Hated Girls," both featuring a genial bandmaster named George Helmholtz, who has to deal with misfit high school boys while dreaming of owning a seven-foot-tall drum. In "Thanisphere," Vonnegut tries out a sci-fi themeA man is sent into space in a rocket and discovers that space is full of the voices of the dead. In a short, ironic piece, "Der Arme Dolmetscher," a soldier who recites a line from Heine's "Die Lorelei" that he has learned by rote is assumed to "talk Kraut" by a bungling officer. Pressed into service as a translator, he acquires just enough of the language to help his detachment surrender in the Battle of the Bulge. The title story concerns a man who visits his ex-wife and feeds her a cock-and-bull story about being an adventurer. In "Runaways," two teenagers realize that love is not enough to get married on, gently deflating the myth of the then-incipient youth culture long before the Summer of Love. Vonnegut's afterword, "Coda to My Career as a Writer for Periodicals," comments in his trademark style about his midwestern origins and the vagaries of writing for magazines. BOMC featured alternate.

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#### From Library Journal

Back before the web and before TV, recreational activity included reading short stories in magazines such as

the Saturday Evening Post. The 23 stories in this collection were published in magazines like the Post during the Fifties and are collected here for the first time. The topics covered include space travel ("Thanisphere"), which describes the first manned orbit of Earth; finding the American Dream ("The Package"), about a new home full of the latest accessories; and an attempt to impress an old girlfriend (the title story). Poking fun at pretentious individuals is featured in both "A Present for Big Saint Nick," where Christmas has been turned into a forced admiration society, and "The Powder Blue Dragon," in which the purchase of a fancy sports car is believed to be the key to a fantasy life. Although many of the stories are topically dated, the ironic insights and illumination of character are timeless, and no one does it better than Vonnegut. Highly recommended.

-AJoshua Cohen, *Mid-Hudson Lib. System, Poughkeepsie, NY*

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