

# Excerpt terms and conditions



This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

*Dramatic Publishing*

# **THE BARNHOUSE EFFECT**

**Based on  
"Report On The Barnhouse Effect"**

**by  
KURT VONNEGUT**

**Dramatized  
by  
PAT COOK**



**Dramatic Publishing**

\*\*\* NOTICE \*\*\*

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty fees are given in our current catalogue and are subject to change without notice. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. All inquiries concerning amateur and stock rights should be addressed to:

DRAMATIC PUBLISHING  
P. O. Box 129, Woodstock, Illinois 60098.

*COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES.* This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including but not limited to the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication, and reading are reserved. *On all programs this notice should appear:*

"Produced by special arrangement with  
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois"

SPECIAL NOTE ON SONGS AND RECORDINGS

For performance of any songs and recordings mentioned in this play which are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained; or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

©MCMXCVII by  
PAT COOK

Based upon the episode, "Report On the Barnhouse Effect"  
from WELCOME TO THE MONKEY HOUSE by  
KURT VONNEGUT, JR.

Printed in the United States of America  
*All Rights Reserved*  
(THE BARNHOUSE EFFECT)

*Cover design by Susan Carle*

ISBN 0-87129-758-2

© The Dramatic Publishing Company, Woodstock, Illinois

# THE BARNHOUSE EFFECT

A Play in One Act  
For 5 Men and 3 Women

## CHARACTERS

- VAUGHN E. GUTT . . . . . the narrator, mid-20s  
Prof. ARTHUR BARNHOUSE . . . . . a college professor,  
intelligent and naive beyond his years, early 30s  
MAUDE . . . . . a rather chunky, grey-haired cleaning woman  
MARGARET THARP . . . . . assistant dean of the college, 40s  
GEORGE McCOY . . . . . FBI agent, a real take-charge type  
General HONUS BARKER . . . a stereotypical Army general,  
mostly bluster and brass  
SONJA KROPOTNIK . . . . a Russian "visitor" with an agenda  
of her own  
SOLDIER . . . . . an Army private  
(to be doublecast with BARKER)  
SOLDIER 2 . . . . . another Army private  
(to be doublecast with TECHNICIAN)  
TECHNICIAN . . . . . an Army electronics engineer

TIME: Early 1950s.

PLACE: BARNHOUSE's office.

## THE BARNHOUSE EFFECT

*(There exists still, in a small midwestern college, this particular office once belonging to Prof. ARTHUR BARNHOUSE. It is locked up and never entered but watched constantly. Its tables, still cluttered with his writings, are undisturbed as is his Underwood typewriter and even the old television set used in that tragic or wonderful experiment, depending upon your point of view.*

*Before the LIGHTS come up, odd music, composed mostly of science fiction sound effects, chiefly those used in B horror movies of the '50s, is heard. As the "music" dies down, the following sound collage is heard.)*

LECTURER. And as we stand here on the brink of tomorrow, with the century half over, just what will this new atomic age bring? What have we to offer? And what have we to look for...*(This voice fades into the next.)*

MAN *(very melodramatically)*. And let me say to everyone: Watch the skies. People everywhere, listen to me. Everyone. Watch the skies! Watch the skies! *(This voice fades into the next.)*

WOMAN *(a gossip columnist)*. And here's a stat worth repeating. Marilyn Monroe receives over 5,000 fan letters a week. This according to her publicist. *(This voice fades into the next.)*

MAN (*commercial pitchman*). She liked the cut of his jib. He thought she was so sublime. But after using Burma...it healed that cut in no time. Burma Shave. (*This voice fades into the next one.*)

MAN (*sportscaster*). And Babe Didrikson Zaharias has won the U.S. Women's Open Golf Championship. She says she plays golf by "loosening up the girdle and belting the ball"! (*This voice fades into the next.*)

WOMAN. And today President Eisenhower and his wife, Mamie, celebrated their 38th wedding anniversary at the White House with a few close friends and selected guests. (*This voice fades into the next.*)

LECTURER. So the challenge is up to you and it is up to me. And all the responsibility for this new era. Just what new discoveries will the atomic age bring? And what dreadful secrets? (*This voice fades out.*)

(*A solitary LIGHT falls on VAUGHN.*)

VAUGHN. First, let me say that I really do not know where Professor Barnhouse is, or even if he's still alive. He comes from such short-lived stock. I can only guess that he is alive because every so often my electric razor acts up or my car will just, out of nowhere, start up and idle as if waiting for me. And, also, I would like to put down for the record, at our last meeting I would say that Professor Barnhouse was approximately 55 times more powerful than an atomic bomb. Also, I've discovered, there is an understandable tendency to look upon Barnhouse as a supernatural visitation. The First Church of Barnhouse in Los Angeles numbers in the thousands. Such is his legend these days, these...paranoid days. I remember vividly the day I first met him...

*(The LIGHT dims out on VAUGHN and comes up on BARNHOUSE in his office. He sits in his chair with his back to the audience.)*

VAUGHN. I had enrolled in Wyandotte Graduate School two years after the professor had rejoined the faculty. And I was assigned to him as a sort of temporary thing...*(He moves to the office and into the LIGHT. He looks around at all the debris and then, at length, clears his throat. This draws no attention from BARNHOUSE.)* Excuse me?

BARNHOUSE *(turns around quickly)*. What do you think is more important, crops or bombs?

VAUGHN. Hah?

BARNHOUSE *(jumps up)*. If you had your choice, what would it be? Raising fields of crops or laying out fields of explosive devices?

VAUGHN. The best way to be sure of peace is to prepare for war. That's kind of a reflex, isn't it?

BARNHOUSE. Uh-huh. *(He crosses his arms and studies VAUGHN intently.)*

VAUGHN *(to the audience)*. I had the feeling I was a new Buick fresh off the assembly line. Or, at least, that my fly was open. *(Almost as an afterthought, he turns around and checks his zipper.)*

BARNHOUSE. Do you believe that you can change your future with a roll of the dice?

VAUGHN. I...I don't gamble, sir.

BARNHOUSE *(suddenly)*. We all gamble! Every one of us take our chances from day to day, minute to minute without realizing the power we have to change!

VAUGHN. Well, I guess each decision we make could possibly alter...

BARNHOUSE. I'm not talking decisions, I'm talking the innate ability of each of us to rearrange, reconstruct and resurrect a brand new world...all with the simple act of getting the idea. *(He broadly and slowly taps his head.)* Dynamopsychism! *(He nods triumphantly and sits.)*

VAUGHN *(after a long pause)*. Ah.

*(MAUDE enters with her mop and bucket and begins cleaning the floor.)*

MAUDE. I won't be a minute, Professor, and then I'll get out of your way.

BARNHOUSE. Take your time, Maude, you are the hope of all future generations.

MAUDE *(shrugs)*. I just need to clean this one room, sir. *(She looks at VAUGHN.)* He talks like that a lot.

VAUGHN. So I noticed. What do I do?

MAUDE. Trust me, it helps to have a mop and bucket. *(She leans in.)* Whatever you do, don't act like you're interested.

VAUGHN. Is he mad?

MAUDE. He's a college professor, what's the difference? *(She continues to mop.)*

BARNHOUSE. Mad, is it? Listen! *(He jumps up and thinks about it.)* Well, I may be. *(He sits again.)*

VAUGHN. Well, here goes. *(He moves to BARNHOUSE.)*  
Sir, my name is Vaughn and I was sent here to assist you as part of my continuing...

BARNHOUSE. Assist, is it? You mean spy?

VAUGHN *(fearfully)*. Oh, I hope not.

BARNHOUSE. Sorry if I snapped at you. Getting a bit paranoid. These are paranoid days, my son. *(He rifles through some notes.)* Think there's gonna be another war?



VAUGHN. I thought we just fought the war to end all wars a few years ago.

BARNHOUSE. That's what they say about ALL wars. It's kind of an ad blitz, that's how they sell them in Congress. "This'll be the one!" they intone with all the reverence and sincerity of a revival meeting preacher. Sit down.

VAUGHN. Uh...sure.

BARNHOUSE. Now, let me pick your brain.

VAUGHN. And just what tools will you be using, sir?

BARNHOUSE (*breaks out in a hearty laugh*). Good, good, you have a sense of humor. Well, we all need that. Now. Dynomopsychism. You believe in it?

VAUGHN. Well, if my second year English hasn't failed me, that roughly means "Power of the Mind," right?

BARNHOUSE. Exactly. Exactly! And it IS a fearful power... if you have the key.

VAUGHN. And just what is the key?

BARNHOUSE (*reaches into a drawer and pulls out a pair of dice*). Right here. (*He hands them to VAUGHN.*)

VAUGHN. Dice?

BARNHOUSE. That's what showed me the way, son. As simple, as primitive as two sculpted cubes, dimpled on all sides for a rudimentary lesson of chance and the odds.

VAUGHN. You can win money with them, too, I've heard.

BARNHOUSE. And that's how I stumbled onto my discovery. It was during World War II, the one that was going to end them all?

VAUGHN. Uh-huh...

BARNHOUSE. I was lying on my cot, rereading a book on advanced calculus. It was at night, a night like any other yet one that I will never forget. Then the next thing I remember was hearing a friend of mine shout those deathless and time-honored words...

SOLDIER (*unseen*). Brainhouse, you got a few bucks you want to shoot craps with?!

(*LIGHTS come up L where two SOLDIERS are kneeling, each holding a wad of bills.*)

BARNHOUSE (*crossing to them*). Eh? What?

SOLDIER 2. You in or not?

SOLDIER (*rises and hands BARNHOUSE the dice*). We'll even let you go first. (*He winks at his kneeling friend.*)

SOLDIER 2. Just to pass the time. A few dollarinis, a couple of throws. It could change your life, Brainhouse.

BARNHOUSE (*looks back at VAUGHN*). Little did I know how prophetic that young soldier was.

VAUGHN. Brainhouse?

BARNHOUSE. Oh, that was their nickname for me. That's the way it is in the Army, they have nicknames for everything. You should hear what they call chipped beef on toast.

SOLDIER. Come on, all you have to do is make your point.

SOLDIER 2. ANY point.

SOLDIER. But you can't roll a seven in between or you lose.

SOLDIER 2. Unless you roll a seven or 11 first rattle out of the box.

SOLDIER. You can win that way, too.

SOLDIER 2. Let's not talk about it.

BARNHOUSE (*examines the dice*). You mean if I roll a seven with my first endeavor...

SOLDIER (*throws down a bill*). You win a five. (*He and SOLDIER 2 kneel.*) And coming outta shoot number one...!

BARNHOUSE. A dimpled cube, numbering one to six on six sides, multiplied by two...