



The Smithsonian Institution

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It is 1939. Crisis looms in Europe and Asia. A young math genius, known to readers only as T., is summoned from St. Albans School in Washington, D.C., to the Smithsonian Institution. There he learns that the “mannequins” in the American Presidency exhibit come to life, and that high level experiments are underway in quantum physics, time travel and cloning, not to mention the atomic and hydrogen bombs. Soon T. is a close, if uneasy, associate with Robert Oppenheimer, Charles Lindberg, and the not-quite-late Abraham Lincoln, snatched at the last moment from Ford’s Theater.

Only the imagination of Gore Vidal could have summoned up from the vast deep this combination of science fiction/fantasy, historical possibility, and brilliant artistry. Vidal’s clear, lucid prose is the perfect vehicle for the magical realism that allows an alternative history where Franklin Delano Roosevelt is not crippled by polio, famous architect Shekel Grubert is not the dictator known as Adolf Hitler, and Leon Trotsky is President of the Soviet Union. It is also a future where T. ventures into the future to save himself from a horrible death on Iwo Jima in the (apparently inevitable) war with Japan.

THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION is more than a fantasy. It is an engaging and intriguing meditation on the time travel and history we engage in ourselves: am I still the same person I was yesterday? What if I had not (or had) done such and so? Given T.’s chances, we would be tempted to alter history, and for the same personal reasons.

Imaginative, inventive, darkly humorous and wryly observant, THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION is Gore Vidal at his deft, intellectually, and historically razor-wielding best.

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