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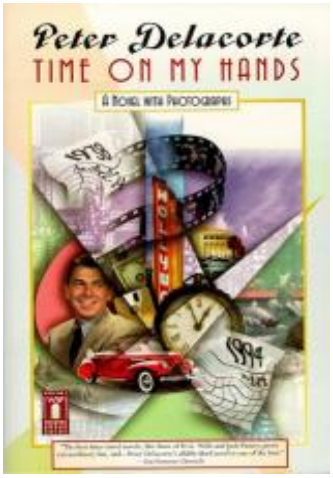
Time On My Hands

by Peter Delacorte



About the Book

While in Paris, Gabriel Prince, a somewhat jaded but charming writer of high-end travel guides, is offered the chance of a lifetime -- a trip through time. There's only one hitch: the left-wing owner of the time machine, quantum physicist Jasper Hudnut, wants Gabriel to perform an errand. Gabriel must go back to pre-World War II Hollywood -- a time when Howard Hawks was in his prime and Humphrey Bogart was still waiting for his break -- and somehow derail a young contract actor named Ronald "Dutch" Reagan from his track to the Oval Office.

When signing on for the trip, Gabriel couldn't have imagined the strange turns his life would take. He wouldn't have guessed he'd fall in love with a starlet, or that after landing a job as a screenwriter at Warner Bros., he'd discreetly plunder the future for script ideas. And he certainly couldn't have guessed he'd become friends with Dutch Reagan.

Gabriel learns quickly that altering history isn't as easy as it looks -- especially when he must stay ahead of several sinister characters from the future. Yet, despite numerous decade-tripping detours, Gabriel still has time on his hands -- time to discover what the world would be like had Reagan never been President, and whether or not his own future should ultimately reside in the past.

Discussion Guide

1. What is the significance of Gabriel's name?

2. Clearly, Gabriel's first screenplay for Warner Brothers, *Four O'Clock,* is based on *High Noon.* But what about *Operation: Rescue?* Is it too stolen from the future? And if so, from what movie?

3. What do the photographs add to **Time on My Hands?** How would the book have been different without them?

4. Judging from Gabriel's experience in its entirety, whose theory of time travel seems more accurate: the 1984 Hudnut, or the 1994 Hudnut?

5. Why do you suppose Jean-Baptiste runs down Dutch Reagan? Just because J-B's a nasty guy, or might he have another motive?

6. Gabriel thinks of himself as a pretty honest, moral person. Is he, in fact?

7. Gabriel wonders at a couple of points whether Hudnut purposely sent him to 1938 (as opposed to 1941), and whether Hudnut's true (or perhaps secondary) goal was to prevent Lorna's early death. In your opinion, was Gabriel's arrival in 1938 the result of the machine's malfunction or Hudnut's intention?

8. There are three junctures in the book when Gabriel must make crucial decisions regarding use of the machine: when he decides to return to 1994 after Dutch's drowning; when he elects to return to 1938 from 1984; and when he tries to travel back just a few days to un-kill Dutch again. Discounting the machine's erratic behavior, would you say that Gabriel's decisions were generally sound, or should he have acted differently?

9. On various levels, **Time on My Hands?** deals with questions of morality. One of these gets short shrift because of Gabriel's unplanned detours at the end of the book. In the course of telling Lorna about the future, he tells her that the world war to come will in some ways be more horrendous than the Great War of 1914-18. A bit later, Lorna asks Gabriel if he'll be able to do anything about the "awful things," and Gabriel responds, "Probably not." Do you suppose Gabriel would in fact have been able to warn the world effectively of such things as the Holocaust and the atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

10. Would you have preferred **Time on My Hands?** to have a happy ending? Would it have been a better book with a happy ending?

11. Would **Time on My Hands?** be accurately classified as a science fiction novel? As a comic novel?

Author Bio

Peter Delacorte is the author of Games of Chance and Levantine. He lives in San Francisco with his wife, Bonnie, two very strange cats, and one extremely well-adjusted dog.

Critical Praise

"Enormously fun. Delacorte's writing has a wonderful read-aloud quality, the plot is spiked with irony and action, and he manages period details perfectly."

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Publication Date: September 1, 1998

Paperback: 400 pages

Publisher: Scribner

ISBN-10: 0671023241

ISBN-13: 9780671023249