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THE BEST JOKES ARE DANGEROUS,
AN INTERVIEW WITH KURT
VONNEGUT,
PART TWO.

by J. RENTILLY

[Be sure to read [Part One](#) of this interview.]

Q: Before speaking with you, I read over many of your books and came across one of the most heartbreaking paragraphs I've ever read in *Timequake*: "I was the baby of the family. Now I don't have anybody to show off for anymore."

KURT VONNEGUT: (*Long pause*) Yeah... Where do you fit into in your family?

Q: I'm the oldest. I have one younger brother.

KV: You're certainly very different people. Chances are he's a helluva lot funnier than you are. The only way he could get attention at the dinner table is by being funny.

Q: You have outlived your ancestors, and many of your colleagues in letters.

KV: Yes, well, that's the reason that I don't want to be in New York any longer. I don't want to go to parties any more. There are no familiar faces anymore. You know, you go to a party and you hone in on the couple people you know. There are none of those people for me at parties any more. I've lost my sister, my brother, my editor, my publisher. It's a whole generation gone by. Old war buddies of mine, my colleagues, my family.

Q: Joseph Heller, in 1999.

KV: I took that one very hard.

Q: You were one of the few people to walk out of Dresden. Now, some fifty years later, you're among the last men standing.

KV: Every so often I run into someone on the street who announces to me that they are really a survivor. I mean, who the fuck isn't? If you're not dead, you're a survivor. (*Laughs*)

Q: You seem quite sure that there is no afterlife. But do you think it's even worth the wishing?

KV: Well, yeah. I've met a lot of interesting people in this life, and I've lost most of them — friends and relatives. I'd like to see some of these people again. I'd love to see my old war buddies. I'd like to see my college roommate. And my brother and my sister. On the other hand, they probably all died because they were sick of my old, familiar stories. (*Laughs*)

Q: When I was reading *Dr. Kevorkian*, I was reminded a bit of a Japanese film from a couple years ago called "Afterlife."

KV: I haven't heard of it.

Q: Its premise is that those who have recently died are taken to a waiting room for one week, during which time they must choose only a single



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memory from their entire lives which will endlessly replay for them, while all of their other memories are erased.

KV: So everybody's fucking, right?

Q: See, that's the peculiar thing. Maybe in your world or mine, everybody's fucking. But in this movie, some of the memories are much simpler, almost elegant. Many people can't choose a memory at all.

KV: See, that's a whole different culture. I don't know anything about it.

Q: Any idea what memory you might choose?

KV: (*Long pause*) I think it would be the moment where I was doing everything right, where I was beyond criticism. It was back in World War II. It was snowing, but everything was black. The trucks were rolling in. I was surrounded by my buddies. And my rifle was between my knees, my helmet on my head. I was ready for anything. And I was right where I belonged. That would be the moment. It would *have* to be the moment.

Q: There are not many moments in a man's life like that, I would imagine.

KV: No. But you know who gets those kinds of moments all the time? A musician. They're doing exactly what they're supposed to do. I look at a symphony orchestra and everybody's doing exactly right. How the fuck do they do that? It's like watching somebody's who's just inherited a big bunch of money. "Well, enjoy yourself.... I'm just gonna fuck off — you know what I'm saying."

Q: You made it to the Timequake [scheduled, per Vonnegut's book, for February 13, 2001]. In that book, you also guessed that you'd be at the novel's climactic clambake in 2010. Do you still think you'll be there?

KV: Oh, I hope not. I killed Kilgore Trout. I'd kill myself if I only could.

Q: Do you think our atomic toys might even cut the party short?

KV: Yeah. We're only animals, but special animals at that. Every animal has fought and killed to survive, even before the dinosaurs. We're the only ones that do it for fun. That's why I don't know about Darwinism. Supposedly evolution and natural selection are all about survival, but we haven't gotten smarter over the years, only more dangerous. I think the big winners are the ones who get off of the planet first. (*Laughs*) And so I have trouble with Darwin. I mean, if they can kill Christ, they can kill anybody!

Q: Underneath the humor and the humanism of *Timequake* is the chilling prospect of having to relive the last ten years of history. Who wants to deal with Rodney King, O.J. Simpson, Tania Harding, and the Clinton Impeachment all over again?

KV: Do you know what I think? I think O.J. did it. They claimed the evidence was only circumstantial, but that's because he didn't bring the heads home. (*Long, backing laughter*)

Q: Well that is, in fact, the thing: Rodney King didn't deserve a beating, but he was under the influence and speeding. O.J. may or may not be a killer, but he did make a lot of bad movies. Bill Clinton, beyond a shadow of a shadow, got a hummer in the oval office.

KV: The oval office. (*Laughs*)

Q: Everything is merely circumstantially evidential these days. No one's guilt or innocence can be proven irrevocably.

KV: Yeah, that's all anyone can take. No one wants hard facts.