

Paradox

written by

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SET:

A BAR and bar STOOLS. (You could change it slightly to set it in a cafe or similar so you could get away with chairs and a table) A few lines here and there would have to be tweaked but the overall story wouldn't be altered. It would lose some of the fun value in places though as I have called the beers fun names like 'Endless loop.'

The perfect set would be a long bar with a few stools in front of it. A few beer PUMPS on tap and a couple of GLASSES of beer. In front of the bar; a table with a couple of chairs around it. Somewhere that people would usually sit to eat, or just to be away from the hustle of the bar.

Then you just need a PEN and a plastic BAG with a little SUGAR in it, or anything that will dissolve in the drink and be safe to consume.

CAST.

The three leads need to be the same gender and of a similar height and build. They need to be around 20 years apart in age. So if your person 1 is 40, then 2 is 20 and 3 is 60. Clothing is not really relevant but it would be nice to have a similar style going on between the three. The same style glasses would be a nice touch but with the generational differences between them as they have evolved in style over 40 odd years.

Person 1 - 40

Person 2 - 20

Person 3 - 60

The Barstaff are just there to bounce off at times and to wrap things up, they serve drinks and join in with a few lines so how they are cast really doesn't matter.

Curtains OPEN.

Lights ON.

We see a bar with PERSON 2 and PERSON 3 sitting at it.

PERSON 3 (OLDEST)

You know exactly what you have to do?

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)

Sure, sure. I told you I've got this.

PERSON 3 (OLDEST)

Just don't mess it up. You know how important this is.

Person 3 hands a BAGGIE with white powder to person 2.  
Person 2 LOOKS at it and then POCKETS it.

Person 3 STANDS and LEAVES.

Person 2 SITS alone for half a minute or so; LOOKING at their beer as they SIP it. They FEEL down in their pocket; feeling for the baggie like a junkie checking they still have their score, or anyone checking they have their keys or wallet.

Person 1 ENTERS and WALKS to the bar. They check the pumps. READING the beer labels and alcohol content.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)

I'd steer clear of the 'endless loop,' if I were you; it's starting to go.

Person 1 LOOKS at person 2; giving them a quick once over. Just a GLANCE at the barfly who spoke to him.

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)

How'd you know that was going to be my choice? I could've gone for the 'hole.'

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)

Educated, or, perhaps a lucky guess I suppose, it was the one I picked at first.

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)

You sure it is turning? I liked the loop. They usually keep the beer pretty well.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)

Tell you what; a deal for you. You go ahead and buy a loop; if it is not going off I'll buy your next. If its going, then, if you want, you can buy my next.

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)

Ah, I don't know. I am not much of a gambler.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)

It's your call. Worse case you buy an extra pint, best, you get a free one. But sure, I get it, how about this, If it's off you sit here and listen to a story I have to tell.

(MORE)

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST) (cont'd)  
 It's only a short yarn. I fancy  
 you're a risk taker. Someone who  
 wants to push the boundaries.

Person 1 looks at their phone or WATCH; checking they have  
 time.

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)  
 Sure, screw it. Why not.

Barstaff ENTER.

BARSTAFF  
 Evening, what can I get for ya?

Person 1 POINTS at the pump as they order.

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)  
 I'll have a pint of the loop  
 please.

Barstaff GRABS a glass and starts to PULL the pint.

BARSTAFF  
 Anything else?

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)  
 Nope, that's it. Thank you.

Person 1 PAYS for the drink once its poured.

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE) (cont'd)  
 Cheers.

Barstaff EXIT, Person 1 takes a large GULP of the beer,  
 swallows and then waits for a moment. They TURN to person 2

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE) (cont'd)  
 This had better be a damn good  
 story.

Person 1 LOOKS over the bar, and to where the staff EXIT,  
 trying to see if they can CATCH the barstaffs eye.

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE) (cont'd)  
 So what's the story about?

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)  
 Ah you know the usual. Boy meets  
 girl, girl and boy fall in love.  
 Boy and girl fall out of love, oh  
 and the end of the world.

The barstaff RETURNS to clean glasses/whatever. Person 1  
 SIGNALS to them.

BARSTAFF  
 Problem?

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)  
 Yeah, look sorry to be a pain in  
 the arse, but I think that's going  
 off.

The barstaff SPEAKS to Person 2

BARSTAFF  
 You thought that didn't you? Cant  
 see anything wrong myself, but, hey  
 ho, you're the boss. So I can do  
 you a 'black hole,' or a lager.  
 Sorry I can't do anything about the  
 'loop' there is still half a barrel  
 left and it's not my call to pull  
 it.

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)  
 No worries, I'll have a black hole  
 please.

The barstaff PULL a fresh pint, REPLACE the old one and then  
 LEAVES again.

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE) (cont'd)  
 This what you're on?

Person 1 takes another LARGE gulp from the fresh pint.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)  
 Yeah. Better?

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)  
 Much. End of the world huh? How's  
 it start?

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)  
 Okay, so two people walk into a  
 bar.

Person 1 gives them a STRANGE look, and SIGHS slightly.

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)  
 Really?

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)  
 No, of course not. Look, how it  
 starts isn't important. I can go  
 through lines and lines about  
 people meeting, what they got up  
 to. Falling in love, falling out of  
 love, but all that would be  
 irrelevant to the overall story. So  
 let's start with a job. For  
 example, what do you do?

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)  
 I'm in IT.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)

Really? Me too. Don't say you're in repairs as well?

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)

Programming...

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)

Damn that's something I always wanted to get into, it never seems to stick.



PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)

Give it time, I used to be the same. Started in repairs but then I hit thirty and it just seemed to fall into place. Things that were once a jumbled mess became readable, and understandable.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)

Maybe, maybe. You never know what the future holds, right? Are you any good at it?

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)

I do alright, I don't want to brag, but yeah, I am doing alright.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)

Awesome; in these times it's always good to know we are doing alright! Back to stories, do you know what a paradox is?

Person 1 takes a SWIG of beer

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)

Sure, don't go back in time and screw your grandmother, or as Fry once put it "Do the nasty in the pasty."

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)

There are loads of them but that is the grandfather paradox. You understand the theory, you can't change things without causing giant butterflies to spring into existence and consume us all. You go back, kill Hitler, then the world splinters and you have two worlds. Hitler lives in one and one without him.

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)

Who's to say the new world won't be better? Maybe the risk is worth it.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)

You can never know, it could be worse. Two world wars in twenty odd years. Take Hitler out and maybe they carried on fighting decade after decade. You can't ever know for sure...

(beat)

If you never know, do you still go back and kill Hitler?

Person 1 THINKS it over

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)

Me? Yeah I would. I mean things would be different, but could they be worse than the holocaust?

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)

Right... right.

Person 2 takes a DRINK.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST) (cont'd)

We think along the same lines. World War 2 may have happened, heck number three and four, may have happened but the horrors of events that we know. The things we can point at and say, 'that happened,' they can't be surpassed, can they?

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)

I suppose you can look at it being the start and the end of people using nuclear weapons. People saw the horror, true real horror, and thankfully it has not been used since.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)

You may never have even had them if Hitler didn't exist, that then may lead to not having nuclear energy.

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)

Could be a better world, new technology discovered to replace what we once knew, but now don't.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)

What then, if you're Hitler? Do you realise your mistake and go back and kill yourself? You're in those last moments in the bunker, you have a sudden moment of realisation and you have the chance to go back and stop yourself.

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)

Then you're in paradox land, You go back kill yourself, then you never exist to go back and kill yourself.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)

Quite, this was where I got stuck.

It is all hypothetical obviously,

(beat)

Who's to say what won't happen is time just resets to that event then plays out from that point. Maybe the past can never be changed, or the world splits but one is stuck in the thirties and the other is running along from this point. Stuck and never advancing.

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)

So you are saying time is... what's the word, flexible? Capable of being reset? Malleable?

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)

Who knows? I am just throwing it out there. Musing the idea. Right, so, we have a computer programmer.

Person 2 POINTS at person 1

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)

So we've gone from Hitler and paradoxes to me, hold on are you saying I'm...

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)

No, god no. I am only framing some ideas. Okay, then let's take two guys, ones a programmer and ones a tech guy. No that doesn't work. Okay, one guy. Started in tech, that's me. Ended up in programming, that's you.

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)

Okay, so the guy starts a world war?

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)

Nah, nothing so bland; he ends the world.

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)

As you do. He wipes out everyone? Nobody left? Everyone is dead?



PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)  
 Pockets of people. I suppose, but overall the world is dying and dying quickly. End of the world, everyone dying? All seems a bit cliché doesn't it?

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)  
 I've often said things are a cliché because they are true.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)  
 I'll have to remember that one.

The both CHUCKLE. Sharing a laugh.

Person 2 takes a PEN from a pocket and starts TWISTING it around in their fingers. Holding it down by their side, just twirling and twisting.

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)  
 How does he do it? How does he end the world?

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)  
 I don't think it matters. Some stories are about the journey, some start at the end and work on from there. Perhaps that story is for another time. This one starts with the end of the world. Given our guy is some IT genius lets say he creates an AI that decides to save humanity, but to do so, it has to wipe most of it out, overpopulation, lets keep it topical. Then the people rebel against it and well, you've heard it all before.

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)  
 So it could be a chemist with a virus, AI in our case, or just a deadly pandemic?

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)  
 Any of em, all of em, doesn't matter. Point is what he did leads to humanity holding on by a few threads and those threads are starting to snap, one by one. Is it worth the risk of a paradox to save the world?

The pen SLIPS from person 2s fingers as they twirl it. It FALLS to the floor. Person 1 LEANS over to pick it up, getting of the stool as they do so.

They TURN their back to the bar. As they do this person 2 GRABS the BAGGIE from their POCKET and EMPTIES the contents into person 1s pint.

Person 1 gets back up and HANDS the PEN to person 2.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST) (cont'd)  
Cheers, sorry about that. Butter fingers.

Person 2 puts the pen AWAY.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST) (cont'd)  
I'll put it away, I am awful for fidgeting at times.

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)  
World ends, gets taken over by robots, butterflies.. Whatever, who wouldn't fidget?

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)  
It was a mistake, it is important to know that. They did not intend for it to happen. Like creating a paradox may be, it was an unknown consequence of their actions. They thought everything was safe and they were doing the right thing.

Person 1 takes a large GULP of their beer.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST) (cont'd)  
They had a deep regret and decide, you know, as you do, to build a time machine, and he dedicates his life to it. It takes him nearly twenty years but in the end he gets there, he decides to go back and stop himself from ever doing it.

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)  
So there is a paradox.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)  
Right, like I say it could be any disaster in the story, but the issue of time, is always the same.

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)  
If they go back and...

Person 1 YAWNS

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE) (cont'd)  
Sorry, that was rude of me. If they kill themselves then they won't exist so it doesn't work.

Person 1 FINISHES the pint and puts the glass down on the bar a little heavily.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)  
Hey, are you okay?

Person 2 LOOKS over person 1.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST) (cont'd)  
You've come across quite pale.

Person 1 WIPES their brow.

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)  
God, I actually feel like I've had a skin full. I feel so drunk all of a sudden.

Person 2 GETS up from their stool.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)  
Come here, sit down over here.

They MOVE to the table and chairs. Person 1 is WOBBLY, person 2 HELPS them along. They SIT at the table.

The barstaff come back, they LOOK at the two at the table.

BARSTAFF  
They alright?

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)  
Bit too much I think.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST) (cont'd)  
(to Person 1)  
Want me to get you a cab?

PERSON 1 (MIDDLE)  
I think, I.. Yes I think you'd better.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)  
(To barstaff)  
Any chance you could call them a cab, I've left my phone at home.

BARSTAFF  
Sure, where you heading mate?

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)  
Civic Close.

BARSTAFF  
Cheers.

Barstaff LEAVES.

Person 2 SITS at the table and FINISHES their beer quite calmly.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)

Then I thought, what if I go back further. Collect my younger self, take them forwards

Person 1 COLLAPSES on the table, head in arms, down looking at the table. Face obscured.

Person 2 does not even flinch.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST) (cont'd)

I collect my younger self, go forward and my younger self does the deed. So worse case I still get to live my life for another twenty years. Best case we cut to another universe but the disaster is averted.

(beat)

It's the question that is so addictive; not 'should we,' but 'could we.'

Person 2 STANDS, PICKS UP their glass, WALKS between the bar and person 1. They LEAN over and check the pulse of person 1 then they turn their BACK so they are facing the bar. CUTTING of the view between the bar and the table/person 1.

The bar staff RETURN, GLANCE over but they can't see enough of the table.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST) (cont'd)

I think they needed to sleep it off.

BARSTAFF

You having another?

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)

Nah, I've got to go. Cheers though. If he wakes tell him I said goodbye.

BARSTAFF

I couldn't help but overhear. You do know that is still a paradox right? They just can't kill themselves without it becoming paradoxical, what about the oldest version, what do they do? They can't go back that world wont exist.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)

Aye, it's true. Who knows maybe they walk outside into a brave new world they live a life as a recluse and never bother anyone ever again. I don't think it matters really. The oldest and youngest may keep on living, they saved the world and nobody will ever know. What is one life when weighed against billions?

BARSTAFF

Pfft, bit cliche ain't it.

PERSON 2 (YOUNGEST)

Ah, its a cliche because it is true.

Person 2 LEAVES. The barstaff PICKS UP the empty pint glass and TURNS away.

FIN.