

A collection of short stories filled with quirky characters striving to survive, or at least make sense of, this crazy world of ours.

The Last Night at the Jupiter Saloon and Other Stories

By Jim Driesen

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JIM DRIESEN

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2. Back in the Day

“Things were a lot simpler back in the day,” Bennie said into his mug of cool brew.

“How so,” I asked, leaning into the bar, turning toward him.

“Life was easier back then. A guy could fix his own car, for example. Things weren’t so crowded and rushed all the time,” he said, lifting his mug.

Mack, the barkeep, who was rinsing mugs and glasses in a basin in front of us, laughed. “Everyone says that,” he said. “Particularly guys like you.”

“Meaning - -?” I said.

“Coots,” he said. “Old guys, dinosaurs and the like.” He grinned.

“You respect your elders,” said Bennie, shaking his finger in disapproval at Mack.

“Really,” Mack said, “take cars, for instance. You worked on your car all the time just to keep it running, right.”

“Well,” I said, “I did have an MG. British electrical system, twin carbs, and a mechanic’s manual. But what about sane people in the Chevys and Fords? Now those were some fine machines.”

“Yeah,” said Mack, “if you like ten mpg and breathing deadly fumes every day.”

“Okay,” I said, “maybe cars do work better these days, though boring as Hell.”

“That time you spent on the cold ground along the interstate with your heap up on jacks could have been better spent having fun somewhere else more pleasant.”

“Then there’s the crowds everywhere. Traffic, pushing and shoving,” Bennie said.

“The population is growing, my friends,” said Mack. “It’s actually your fault, you know.”

We laughed. “How’s that? I asked.

“You’re the boomers with all the ‘love, sex and rock and roll’ going on back in the day. You were reproducing like bunnies. No wonder it’s getting crowded these days,” said Mack. “I’ve seen the grandchild pictures you guys drag out after your third beer. The grandchildren you two are responsible for could populate a small city.”

We laughed, “Guilty,” I said. “But without us you might not be here today. How old are you, thirty maybe?”

“Thirty-five,” he said.

“Geez,” said Bennie, “the two of us were probably sitting right here having a beer on the day he was born.”

"Your elbows fit perfectly into those grooves on the bar there," said Mack and laughed, turning to deliver a beer to a guy at the end of the bar.

"You know, Bennie," I said, "he may have a point. Were the 'good old days' when you and I got drafted by Uncle Sam? How about the Nixon administration, was that the 'good old days?'"

Bennie thought a minute, then said, "Maybe our present will be the 'back in the day' for people in fifty years."

"It is hard to believe, but that could mean things could be getting so bad that in fifty years people would look back on our polluted, corrupt and war mongering planet populated by fascists, crooks, bigots, and lunatics and say, those were 'the good old days.'"

"What if it were 1900," chimed in Mack who was back to refill our mugs, "would we be looking back to the Civil War and talk about how much better that was than the present?" He was smart for his age.

We decided to agree there was no answer. Each person lives their life in a way others may envy, and some will despise. We all travel through life on this ball of rock and water called Earth with the people that were born in the same time frame as us, forming a generation. We learn and grow and develop relations with our peers, and because we're young, we assume things will always be the same. When the bad actors float to the top as world leaders, we have the mess we have today. Corruption and

greed are not new, it has been here all along. We sat for a while staring into the mirror behind the bar lost in our coot thoughts when the guy at the end of the bar picked up his drink and slowly made his way over to us.

“Did you figure it out yet?” he said. “I couldn’t help but overhear.”:

Bennie turned to face the guy who was now standing right behind us. “So, what do you think,” he said. “Are these the bad old days for us but someone else’s good old days?”

“You’re both wrong,” the guy said.

“So, you know how it all works, I suppose,” I said.

“I do,” he said. I looked at Bennie and he winked and started laughing. Mack came over to see what was so funny.

“This guy says he knows all the answers,” I said, grinning, “the secret to life and all that.”

“I didn’t say that,” the guy said. “I just said you guys obviously don’t.”

“Okay,” said Bennie. “Enlighten us,” The people around us were watching us, and it suddenly got quiet in the bar.

“There is no future for you guys, or anyone else, for that matter,” he said. “You’ve had your life. You’re lucky you’re even still here.”

“So, the world is ending tomorrow?” I said.

"It's going to end someday," he said. "At least yours will. So will mine, and his and his," he said, looking at the people around us. Time runs out for all of us. In the end, nothing matters. Nothing. You are walking around for a brief moment of time, then you're gone. The earth keeps spinning without you. In fact, humanity eventually will vanish completely, and the earth keeps going around the sun."

We sat staring at the guy. "You are kind of depressing, man," Bennie said finally.

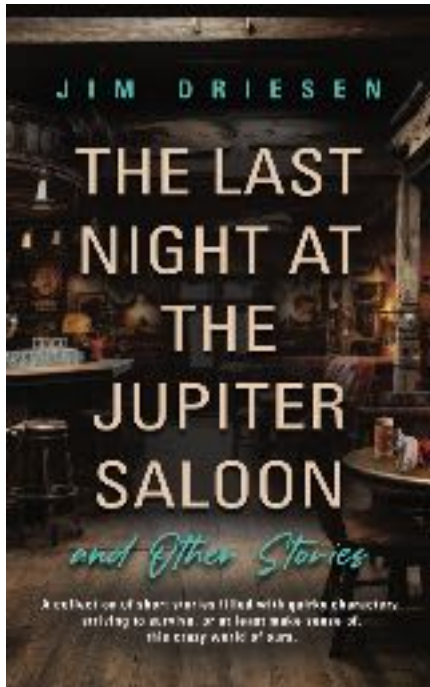
"I didn't make the rules," the guy said and turned and went out the door.

"Two more beers, Mack", I said as we turned back to the bar.

"Six bucks," said Mack, setting the frosty mugs in front of us.

"Remember when a beer was just a buck?" I said to Bennie.

"Yeah, those were the good old days," he said.



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