# The Pub Optimizer

## Tim Lehnert

**SCENE:**               A pub

**CHARACTERS:**          **BRIAN** (male)
**COLLIN** (male, same age as BRIAN or older)
**BARRY** (male, small part)
**BARTENDER** (male or female, non or minimal-speaking role)
Depending on staging, this role may be understood by the audience rather than played by an actual person, or it could be played by a server who enters and exits.

**AT RISE:**            BRIAN is standing at a bar or high table, facing the audience.

<div align="center">BRIAN</div>

(*Looking at his phone and speaking to himself*). Perfect, eight-forty-two. (*Addressing BARTENDER*) Pint of red ale, please.

<div align="center">COLLIN ENTERS AND HESITATES BEFORE STANDING NEXT TO BRIAN</div>

<div align="center">COLLIN</div>

(*Gestures at empty spot next to BRIAN*) Anyone here?

<div align="center">BRIAN</div>

No, all yours (*Welcoming gesture*).

<div align="center">COLLIN</div>

Cheers.

<div align="center">BRIAN</div>

(*Looking at phone and speaking to himself*). Eight forty-three, and I'll be done by nine-oh-nine. (*Puts phone down on the bar and takes a sip from his pint*).

<div align="center">COLLIN</div>

Somewhere you have to be?

<div align="center">BRIAN</div>

Not at all, just a regular night at the pub, but I'm *optimizing*.

<div align="center">COLLIN</div>

Aren't we all?

BRIAN

I'm talking data-driven and evidence based. I have this new app, (*picks phone up*) the Pub Optimizer, it reads your biorhythms, weight, and body chemistry, and devises an *optimal* pub experience.

COLLIN

Really?

BRIAN

Stores all your data from previous pub visits, plus your schedule and any other preferences you input, and uses that to model the perfect pub, and after-pub, experience.

COLLIN

That court-ordered? You get in trouble with (*gestures as if drinking, then hands on a steering wheel*).

BRIAN

Oh no, never, I'm very careful.

Anyway, this goes *way* beyond blood alcohol level. It factors in reams of data about me physically, and psychologically. It knows what I want, and need, before I do.

COLLIN

You weren't mandated to use . . .

BRIAN

No, downloaded it myself; costs three bucks a month or thirty for the year. You can get a free version, but it's full of ads and doesn't have the advanced features. (*Shows COLLIN his phone*). See, it says IPA or red ale at eight-forty-two … and if you click on the food icon it--

COLLIN

Tells you what to eat?

BRIAN

It doesn't *tell* me, but you know how it goes: you have a couple of beers, you're hungry, and then you stuff yourself with a take-away that you regret later.

COLLIN

Sure.

BRIAN

It says after my second pint, stop, and have about 250 grams to eat, carbs are ok, but not too much fat. Maybe tomorrow it'll say have one pint and eat a little less, or not at all.

COLLIN

So the evening's all laid out for you?

BRIAN

More or less, that's why I ordered a pint just now. I reckon I'll finish it at nine oh nine, use the toilet, and then be home by nine twenty-eight for a few healthy munchies before bed. That's my strategy anyway.

COLLIN

Strategy for *what*?

BRIAN

To *optimize* my pub experience. Why be sub-optimal if you don't have to? By using the power of *personalized* data, I maximize my chances of meeting my pub goals.

COLLIN

You have *goals* at the pub?

BRIAN

Sure, I try to live with purpose, *intentionally*, know what I mean?

COLLIN

I just never thought of a bar as a place where, I don't know, *goals* are in play.

BRIAN

They're not complicated: I want to see people, have some laughs, enjoy a beer or two … and then go home and get a good night's sleep.

COLLIN

And that's why you need to order a pint at exactly eight-forty-two?

BRIAN

Give or take, I'm sure if I'd waited till quarter-to, it'd be fine.

COLLIN

But no sense in taking chances.

BRIAN

Works for me.

*COLLIN looks at BRIAN skeptically.*

Look, you ever get paralyzed by indecision? Should I have another beer? What kind? My usual, or something new? How long should I stay?

COLLIN

It's a real weight.


BRIAN

Yes, and you add those little decisions to everything else: Should I switch jobs? Sell my motorcycle? Reconcile with the Missus? Pull up the carpet in the bedroom? Get tickets for that concert next week? … It never ends.

With this (*holds up his phone*) you get concrete, actionable outputs based on real-world data … for the pub anyway.


COLLIN

But do you really want a *machine* telling you what to do?


BRIAN

Ever look at the weather forecast?


COLLIN

Sure.


BRIAN

Well, when you see the little rain drop symbol is your phone *compelling* you to bring an umbrella? No, it gives you information which you can use as you see fit.


COLLIN

OK, but let's say I have that app of yours and I'm *supposed* to leave at nine-fifteen but at nine-fourteen I bump into an old friend and want to catch up.


BRIAN

You *can* override.


COLLIN

That's a relief.


BRIAN

It keeps you focused is all. We live in the golden age of data, this app harvests that information so you can use it to your best advantage.

And don't forget, for every old friend you'd love to see, there's a pain in the ass you'd just as soon avoid.


COLLIN

Sure, but how's your AI, or whatever it is, going to help with that?

BRIAN

Easy, I put this guy Barry in here (*indicates phone*). Right now, I'm in a good mood and anticipate it staying that way. But let's say Barry's in the building and he's a little drunk, and he sees me. He's going to beeline over here and start with that conspiracy nonsense that he always does, and if I've had a couple of drinks I might start arguing with him and the night is ruined. With the app I get a little notification telling me Barry's afoot. It cues me to avoid him.

It plays defense *and* offense this thing; it's fantastic.

COLLIN

I can see that.

So is *my* presence throwing you off then?

BRIAN

No, not at all; random, idle talk with people I don't know is built into the program, this *is* a pub after all. If you were getting under my skin—it can tell from increased heart rate—then I'd get a notification and a little nudge to end the conversation.

But that's not the case. … (*Glances down at his phone*) What are you drinking? (*Takes out wallet*).

COLLIN

It *tells* you to buy me a drink?

BRIAN

No, again it doesn't *command* me, but it knows my budget and my GQ … that's generosity quotient. I'm trying to increase it a little; found out (*indicates phone*) I was a little tight-fisted.

Not proud of that, but I'm all about learning and growth.

COLLIN

In that case, (*addressing BARTENDER*) a … uh, Berwick Draught for me, thanks. (Addressing *BRIAN*) You having one?

BRIAN

Oh no, I'm right where I need to be, I think (*looks at phone*).

Oh, Christ … it says, uh … system not responding. … I can't believe this, I'm *in* the pub and the optimizer goes down. I *did* just check it, but it updates in real-time as new data comes in, so … I don't know. I guess I have to go with its most recent analysis, but that could be … sub-optimal.

COLLIN

Wouldn't want that.

BRIAN

No, not at all. (*Looks at phone*). *Sigh*. Still down.

COLLIN

Huh. Well I guess that's the price you p--

BRIAN

Don't say it, I don't need to hear it …. You shouldn't rely on these devices so much, right? I know, I know, *somehow* we managed to muddle through for millennia without all this, and now … *Sigh*.

I understand all that, but I'm just trying to get something *right* for a change, have things work *optimally*, know what I mean?

COLLIN

Let me have a look (*takes BRIAN'S phone*).

Uh huh …. you still have version one-point-four installed. You need the one-point-six.

BRIAN

Really?

COLLIN

(*Looking at phone*) Looks like the auto-update was off. I just enabled it and now one-point-six is loading. You have to restart for it to take effect, might be a minute or so.

BRIAN

Wow, thanks! . . . But how'd you know to do that? You seem pretty handy with this (*indicates phone*).

COLLIN

I am, I've been optimizing since the app hit the market; guess I'm what you'd call an *early adopter*.

Right now, I'm beta testing two-point-oh.

BRIAN

Why didn't you tell me you were optimizing? I wouldn't have wasted your time explaining it all.

(COLLIN RECEIVES THE BEER HE ORDERED)

COLLIN

(*Addressing BARTENDER*) Cheers.

Two point zero prohibits revealing that you're using the app. Turns out that *talking* about the pub optimizer is sub optimum.

                              BRIAN
Huh, but couldn't you have just changed the subject?

                              COLLIN
Yes, but then I would have denied you the pleasure of explaining it to me.

                              BRIAN
Still, I feel a bit silly, here I was telling you all about the optimizer when you're a two-point-oh man.

                              COLLIN
Not quite, still at the beta stage. But no worries, two-point-oh teaches you that there's no objectively *optimal* experience, it's up to you.

I could have been bored or annoyed, but I chose not to be. I focused on what was in front of me: the expression on your face, you checking your phone, the beer settling in the glass. I listened to your words without judging.

                              BRIAN
Two-point-oh told you to do that?

                              COLLIN
Nope. I just allowed myself to be here in the moment with you.

                              BRIAN
You figure it's better than one-point-six?

                              COLLIN
It's simpler, and therefore more advanced.

                              BRIAN
Oh, wow … I don't know if I'm ready for two-point-oh.

                              COLLIN
What you choose . . . is your choice.

                              BRIAN
I guess that's true.

(*Looks at phone again and shakes his head*). Huh. (*Puts phone on bar. Pause. Turns head to one side as if seeing/hearing something*).

Oh Christ, here comes Barry. I didn't get a notification because the app's down. Uggh.

<div align="center">COLLIN</div>

Two-point-oh.

<div align="center">BRIAN</div>

(*Matter-of-factly, almost mechanically*). Right, two-point-oh. I'm seeing Barry, he's walking toward me. . . . I'm hearing him talk about Taylor Swift, that she's been abducted and a body double put in her place. *I* choose how I react.

<div align="center">(BARRY ENTERS HOLDING A HALF-FILLED PINT GLASS AND STANDS NEXT TO BRIAN)</div>

<div align="center">BARRY</div>

How you getting' on, mate? You know how you can tell it's an actor? It's her feet, that's where they've slipped up, they don't reckon anyone will notice, but look at old pictures--

<div align="center">BRIAN</div>

(*Looks at phone on bar, speaking to himself*) Ah, there we go, one-point-six has loaded . . . and it says … time to go.

(*Breathing deeply, and then speaking calmly to BARRY*). Yes, the feet, of course, that makes perfect sense. Most people wouldn't catch that.

<div align="center">BARRY</div>

That's how they get away with it. Right now, the *real* Taylor Swift is—

Barry, great to see you, but I've gotta go. Before I do, let me get you a beer. (*Addressing BARTENDER*) When you have a chance, a pint for Barry, put it on my tab, cheers.

<div align="center">(BRIAN EXITS, BARRY AND COLLIN SAY THEIR</div>
GOODBYES)

<div align="center">BARRY</div>

(*Takes out phone and glances at it*). Huh. … I observe a half-full pint in front of me. (*Lifts beer to his nose and inhales*). It smells like … beer. (*Takes a sip*). It's taste is … optimal, and another is coming my way.

BARRY AND COLLIN RAISE THEIR GLASSES

<div align="center">COLLIN</div>

Two-point-oh.

<div align="center">BARRY</div>

Two-point-oh.

END