

No Dad, no-one wants to hear your rendition of "Khe Sanh"

The girls soon tired of requests for Blowflies

She made quite a splash

87

Vocalist Tania Doko is pacing, deep in concentration. I put a stop to that with a well-timed West End Draught. "Inoffensive," she pronounces. "I don't normally drink. I could drink all of this, but do you want me to be sane afterwards?"

Bachelor Girl have only knocked two beers off my list. I've got an hour and a half and 18 beers left if I'm to meet my quota of 50. I tuck into a mild, creamy Cooper's Dark Ale, then nibble at a Toohey's

The Hahn Light is like drinking fizzy air. I leave half on the bar and try a Eumundi Lager, then Robinson's Old Dark Ale, about which I notice a reddish tinge, but not much else.

I apparently drink a Tawny Ale, as well, but don't remember it. The bartender hands me a Boag's Premium Light. I don't want it, but I drink it because, well, it's a beer.

I think my watch says 12.20. Bachelor Girl have finished. I will too. I have to get home.

Jefferson and I'm a reprobate." He must practise in front of a mirror.

"Why do I like Pilsner? Why is one thing better than another? It's a philosophical question..." No it isn't, I interrupt. It's just a beer.

Another guy called Steven is examining a breathalyser. "I'm not driving; I just want to see how far I can get up. The limit's point-oh-five, the furthest I've got is point-one."

How did you feel?
"Shithouse." His mate Gavin

beer. It's three times busier than yesterday. The queues are eight-deep and everyone's carrying jugs. I fret that I won't be able to get through my quota, and start buying two pots at a time. Then three.

I plug down a smooth, delicious Cascade Special Stout, a St Peters Amber Ruby Ale and a Stella, but who's counting? Oh, yes, I am. Number 52 (I think) is a Pale Blonde. At three per cent, it's crap.

The next few pots bring a James Squire that's nearly as good as Jefferson reckoned, and something called Carbine Stout that's so bad the barman doesn't want to sell it to me. James Squire India Pale Ale is described in the program as "rich and robust with the earthy, floral dry-hop character of fuggles hops." Just what I would have said.

Lifesaver Lager is so nondescript, it's like liquid amnesiac. I have a Yarra Valley Gold, which sounds like something you'd smoke in an Amsterdam coffee house. I have two Boag's in a row and they're both excellent.

The crowd is getting a bit aggro,

I sample a Yarra Valley Gold, which sounds like something you'd smoke in an Amsterdam coffee house

New. New tastes unusually good. A mainstream beer suddenly tastes like the professional product it is. To underline the point I try a Cooper's Sparkling Ale – which is sparkling and an ale – and a Sunshine Coast Bitter, which tastes like stale milk.

I'm now so pissed it's all I can do to get a beer, let alone remember what number it is. Beers 36 and 37 are optimistically passed over in favour of the more convenient 38.

Next day, with a greasy meal and several painkillers behind me, I can almost face drinking again.

I start with a Redback. It's a beer I know and like, and I don't want to scare my liver too early.

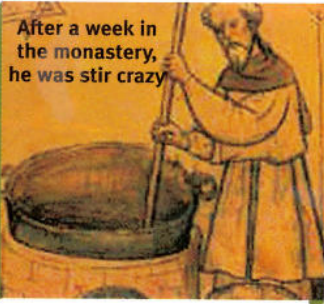
I'm collared by a middle-aged Canadian bloke with a big straw hat and a voice like someone who enjoys the sound of it. "James Squire Pilsner is the hit of the show," he says so only half the bar can hear. "My second name is

blows into it and gets a blank reading. You're dead, I tell him.

I find a stall for the Blowfly brewery. I'm sure it wasn't there yesterday. It's like one of those magic shops that's vanished when you go back. But in reverse. The name puts me off. The beer tastes like there's crushed, well, blowflies in there. It's served by an extremely cute Irish girl, so I drink it anyway.

I have a Boag's Premium that's excellent and stand in line for more

999 YEARS AGO
INGENIOUS Belgian monks become the first to use hops to flavour beer. The hops stabilise the brewing process, bringing the amber fluid closer to the product we worship today.



After a week in the monastery, he was stir crazy

500 YEARS AGO
DIM-witted peasants blame bad batches of booze on evil "beer witches", who are using their dark powers to thwart the God-fearing grog makers. Accused beer witches are burnt at the stake.

179 YEARS AGO
BEER is first produced at Australia's oldest brewery, Cascade, in Van Diemen's Land. In 1855, an early attempt at rebranding goes wrong when the beer's new name, Tasmania, is accidentally applied to the island instead.

160 YEARS AGO
BOHEMIANS (from Bohemia) subject the local Saaz hops to an extremely cold "top-fermentation" process. The result is a pale, refreshing beer called "pilsener" – after Pilsen, the city where it was first brewed.

147 YEARS AGO
A BRILLIANT Aussie journalist (yes!) James Harrison becomes the father of the "coldie" when he applies for a refrigeration patent in 1855. This breakthrough enables beer production to take place all year round, even in Australia.