



9.25pm

Victoria Hotel, 27 Smith St
TO KILL time, I sit in the Vic with a gigantic jug of beer sold to me by a small, pretty barmaid. I don't think I can drink it all, but I'll have a go. I've nothing else to do. The Vic is quiet and orderly, which is annoying. In the corner, an old bloke shouts, "You've lived here 47 years, and you still can't speak English!" at another old bloke. Silence descends again.

10.45pm

Mitchell St
WITH the contents of the beer jug now inside me, I try again. A glance inside the Carlton Hotel reveals there are still two people on the small stage — now playing to nobody.

10.46pm

Hippy Club, Top End Hotel, cnr Daly and Mitchell Sts
FINALLY, a busy place packed full of young people. There are semi-psychedelic drawings all over the walls and a five-sided pool table. Some tables are attached to naked female mannequins, painted blue. Which is good, obviously.

Jocelyn, 22, is a sweet blonde wearing a tight white top and a disappointed expression. "Are you here for the swimsuit competition?"

ONE GIRL SHAKES HER TINY ARSE IN THE FACE OF A GUY AT THE FRONT. HE LOOKS PLEASED

she asks. This is good news. "I entered, but I went out in the first round." This is bad news. "The next round is at 11." This is good news again.

At 11.25, the next round of the swimsuit comp starts. In the 10 minutes leading up to it, the male:female ratio has miraculously become 99:1, and the Hippy is packed to critical levels.

Seven girls in little red crop-tops and white shorts come out onto the stage. They do a small routine. It goes down well. One of the girls shakes her tiny arse in the face of a guy at the front. He looks pleased. The girls go off again.

No-one was wearing a swimsuit, which probably doesn't matter much. I can't tell who's made it to the next round, but that's in an hour, and I have to get out before my ribs cave in.

11.40pm

The Lost Arc, 89 Mitchell St
THE Lost Arc is a wine bar, not a pub. It's dark and busy, although thankfully less busy than the Hippy Club. At least I can move my arms and breathe in. On the dance floor, a guy wearing dirty trainers and a ponytail is honouring Kylie's "Can't Get You Out of My Head" in his own, special way. There's a scrum at the bar and a few people at high tables, on which red candles flicker.

It's a slightly smarter, older crowd here, but like every other place the dress code is very loose, and there are far more men than women. Bored Jim looks at the dance floor as though babes might suddenly appear on it. "I've never been here before. I'm only here because it's free to get in."

So is everywhere else, I point out. "Yeah."

11.50pm

Mitchell St
THE centre of town is now reassuringly full of drunk people. The busker is still strumming at the same insane pace he was an hour and a half ago, but now two pissed blokes crouch nearby, watching him closely.

11.52pm

Shenannigans Irish Pub, 69 Mitchell St
SHENANNIGANS has wooden booths

full of drinkers down one side, a long wooden bar, a little wooden dance floor and a wooden stage. Not far above my head are wooden beams. The place smells of perfume and sweat, rather than wood. I've heard Shenannigans is a meat market, but, of course, no-one here will admit it.

Tenil and Nikki are in the corner near the dance floor. "I come here because it's a great place to meet everyone," says Nikki. "And the bar staff are really friendly, and the service is quick."

What are Darwin guys like? "Really good," she says with a smile. "There's a lot of them."

On the dance floor, a pretty girl called Kaylene is dancing while about seven guys watch with undisguised interest. She says something possibly devastating and accurate about Darwin, but is drowned out by a horrible crash as the band starts playing.

It's at this point that I say, "Over there is a humanahumana." I still have no idea why, but I'll keep thinking.

12.10pm

Rorke's Drift Bar/Café, 46 Mitchell St
THE place is now half-full of people singing along to Neil Diamond's "Sweet Caroline". When they stop, they sing along to The Monkees' "I'm a Believer" [written by Neil Diamond, too]. Up on a stage at the front, a DJ in his