

Lancer Lounge

233 East 7th Avenue
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“Rita, I’m sick of this shit,” Tom says of his Beck’s bottle, then orders a Smirnoff screwdriver. His friends and acquaintances smirk at the switch. “This guy ain’t fucking around,” Rex exclaims.

“You know,” Tom responds with mock irritation, “I’ve spent so much time learning how to drink, I oughta be able to do what I want.”

“Yeah,” a friend with a long white mustache snorts, “you’ve got a degree in drunk.”

“An advanced degree!” adds Ted.

“Eh. I’m still working on my master’s,” Tom retorts, ending the discussion.

But I’m not so sure. Judging from the indents they leave in the green vinyl chairs when they step out to smoke and the way patrons and staff alike regard them as semi-permanent fixtures, I’d guess each of these regulars has an honorary doctorate from the Lancer Lounge. The dean, at least on this particular Sunday afternoon, is Rita, no question. Whether for high marks or heavy pours, students worship her unceasingly.

“We love you so much, Rita,” an exuberantly intoxicated gay couple repeats eight or nine times in a span of two minutes.

“You’re the best-looking redhead I’ve seen all day,” a stocky fellow ordering an AmberBock pitcher admits.

“Love your nails,” a woman in a hooded sweatshirt remarks, clasping Rita’s left hand between both of hers for emphasis. Rita is flattered but not quite amused; she strikes me as a seasoned warhorse of a bartendress: friendly, gracious, but completely intolerant of bullshit.

Kind of like the Lancer in general. The wood paneling, low ceilings, cigarette machine, softball trophies, framed prints, football pools, bags of chips, random books, turn-page juke, Formica tables, sagging booths, even the Lord of the Rings pinball machine—it all says “Get your ass in here, but don’t make me throw your ass out.” The two modest-sized flatscreen TVs behind the pine bar are just

about the only accoutrements that don't scream backwoods Wisconsin lodge or 1970s basement, but even these are compensated for by the thirteen-inch relic in the back showing soundless episodes of "COPS."

"Lancer Lounge: Where Friends Meet" T-shirts sell for \$16 each and speak the simple truth. On the front patio, a dozen-plus people hoard every chair and share pitchers while carrying on at volumes almost loud enough to drown out the football game showing on the TVs inside. Down the bar from me, a young woman with a rusty-blond ponytail recounts for a captive audience how she lucked upon some kids in the alley smoking "the mar-uh-ju-wana" and, after helping herself, invited them to join her here. Tom offers his fellow scholars and me a round on him. And even though posted signs declare No Panic Bar (one complete hour of free well, wine and draft on Wednesday nights) Until After the Holidays, three separate happy hours each day are sure to keep the good times going. Graduation depends on it.



Games of Chance

Squeeze Inn

Kentucky Inn

Candlelight Tavern

Sidewinder

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