

Queasy like Sunday morning

Darryl W. Bullock celebrates the sabbath by stumbling around Bristol bars in a heroic attempt to test that classic hangover cure - the bloody mary.

Look, I know it's a cliché, but the thing about clichés is that they are invariably true: as a species, we hacks are rather fond of a tippie or two. And as Frank Sinatra once said: "I feel sorry for people who don't drink. When they wake up in the morning, that's as good as they're going to feel all day."

It's not by accident that we freelancers plan most meetings to take place in pubs, you know, so when I received an invitation from Big Tom tomato juice to come and sample their wares on a mini-pub crawl one Sunday afternoon, I jumped at the chance. I admit it, I'm a whore, and the thought of being in the company of several seasoned journalists from some of the city's other publications only increased my expectations of a messy, boozy day.

How was I to know that my mate Paul and I would be the only ones who could be bothered to get out of bed and turn up? I know it's the day of rest and all that, but as most writers are gin-soaked devil-worshippers anyway, why should that make a difference? Still, not wishing to let the side

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down (unlike staff from a certain local evening paper who didn't even have the good manners to phone and apologise), what else could we do but go for it? After all, Bristol's imbibing reputation lay in my own pudgy little hands.

The Big Tom company have been promoting their drink (with 21 different herbs and spices from 13 different countries) around the country for some time now, and the juice people reckon that relaxing in a stylish city bar surrounded by the Sunday papers is the perfect way to get over the excesses of a typical Saturday night. An effective hangover cure, it works by slowing down the sobering process by introducing yet more alcohol into the bloodstream.

We met at Revolution. The white ceramic bricks reminded me more of a prison cell than a fish market, which says something about my state of mind. Sophie and Matt from Big Tom had spent the previous evening on Park Street in the company of men in bad shirts claiming to be footballers and were feeling fragile, yet still happily extolling the virtues of Bristol's nightlife.



Big Tom tomato juice: handy for a hangover.

My first bloody mary of the day arrived, the juice as thick and spicy as an arrabiata sauce with a huge chunk of celery thrust in it. Revolution, the biggest vodka bar chain in the UK, has seen a dramatic rise in Sunday chill-out drinking in the last year, and, according to area manager Clive Greenhalgh: "The atmosphere is always relaxed and we do our best to ensure that our customers enjoy themselves, with soft lounge music and a pitcher of bloody mary."

Now when someone else is happy to stomp up for the booze, I'm just as happy to swill it back, and after three large BMs I was feeling pleasantly buzzy... but at £3.75 a glass, I guess I should have been.

Our little party ventured next to the E-Shed. The tomato juice was fresh tasting, and the cracked pepper gave an extra bite, but the surreal effects of 'Watership Down' on a constant loop as Kraftwerk played in the background was too much. The very helpful staff and incredibly comfy sofas invited us to stay longer but when Sophie, in all seriousness, asked if I could lip-read what the rabbits were saying, we decided that it was time to move on.

But not too far, as the next port of call was Bar Room Bar, some three doors away. I can appreciate how the space would work in the evening (it's completely rammed at night), but during the day it looks like a cross between a chip shop and a youth club with these odd, rubber-lined fluorescent-lit cuboids plonked down in the middle. Our visitors loved it, though. Great staff, but the BM was your typical pub fayre, serviceable but nothing special. However, the combination of the vitamin-rich tomato juice, alcohol and spices was working wonders on my three hangover-suffering companions.

A stroll through Queen Square brought us to the King William Ale House. What a great pub! The ancient-looking wooden booths provide just the right amount of privacy for diners and there's an excellent three-table pool room upstairs. The BM here was made with Scintilla tomato juice, the own-brand mixers provided by brewers Samuel Smith. Containing vinegar, salt, lemon juice and the ubiquitous Worcestershire sauce, this was the only serious rival to Big Tom's pre-mixed juice, and although it lacked the thick texture and spiciness, it still added to a perfectly fine drink.

Overall (much to the relief of the people paying), the Revolution bloody mary, containing Absolut pepper vodka and Big Tom tomato juice, won out by a mile, with the King William version coming in second - although, in all fairness, there wasn't that much between the three runners-up. Then again, after six or seven (or eight) doubles, I could just have easily been drinking paint.

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BIG TOM

Venue
Bristol, 2005