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*'Beer, it's the best damn drink  
in the world.'*

*Jack Nicholson*

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# DON'T BE A BEER MUG

You cannot have failed to notice, even in dreary old supermarkets, that there's something afoot in the beer aisles. Raise your line of sight above the BOGOF (buy-one-get-one-free) packs of lager, depressingly cheaper than bottled water, and you will see bottles brimming with possibilities: beers flavoured with basil, watermelon or chestnut; ales aged in old whisky or cognac barrels; ales brewed by monks and fermented with wild yeast (*Brettanomyces bruxellensis*, no less). Nowadays, beer labels are singing the praises of hop varieties with names like music hall acts (Fuggle and Golding), and in Restaurant Le Posh you might even be presented with a 'beer list' by a young and happening 'somm-ale-ier'.

There are various drastic measures you could take to be mistaken for a beer expert. You could grow a beard, sport chunky knitwear, take up the bodhrán, or even steal a British Guild of Beer Writers' tie bearing its proud quill and tankard livery (you wouldn't want to double up the tie with the knitwear, obviously). Alternatively, you could breeze through this book.

It sets out to conduct you through the main danger zones encountered in beer discussions, and to equip you with a vocabulary and an evasive technique that will minimise the risk of being rumbled as a bluffer. It will give you a few easy-to-learn hints and methods designed to allow you to be accepted as a beer connoisseur of rare ability and experience. But it will do more. It will give you the tools to impress legions of marvelling listeners with your knowledge and insight – without anyone discovering that, before reading it, you didn't know your butt from your firkin (108 gallons versus 9 gallons, since you ask). Even as we speak, a thriving craft brewing scene is eroding the edifice of mass-produced, perma-chilled blandness as slowly but surely as meltwater trickling through a glacier. A brave new world of beer is stretching out before us – a veritable bluffer's paradise.