



BEER BEACON

Soul Food

By Sue Griskison

"I distrust the perpetually busy; always have. The frenetic ones, spinning in tight little circles like poisoned rates. The slower ones, grinding away their fourscore and ten righteousness and pain. They are the soul-eaters."
- Mark Skouka

We asked the regular Beer Beacon tasters to take a moment, reflect on their tastes, and bring a bottle to share for this issue's tasting. Some call this a "beer-luck" but I conclude that beer-lucks occur pretty much anytime two or more folks bring quality beer to a place outside of their homes to share with others. This occasion was different. Our tasters passed their selected brews to the crew at the Pizza Plant upon entry; to be hidden and poured, identities only revealed whence naturally paced reflections and discussions were had. 4 out of 5 of the evenings' tasters were long-time home brewers and beer worshippers. This, I believe, reasoned why I watched more than one truly enjoy the moments their offering was carried away, anticipating their next appearance in 8 shining glasses.

The Tasters

Magistrate - When Magistrate, the strong, silent regular, handed me a cooler of home brews...I was not surprised. I anticipated that a home-made would most likely be his choice. How else could one adequately represent the still depth churned by years of long-time home brewing?

Hop Jack - Confidently arriving with offerings in tow, Hop Jack ordered a British beer at the bar and casually discussed the tax evasive reasons British Brewers use inverted sugars, demonstrating, yet again, why he holds beer geek awards from the world over. It's a knowing smile he'll give with his schooling humor for anything less than a head-full of beer knowledge. Hard fieldwork shaped this country boys' beer buds a long time ago into one word: Hops.

Vinny - Vinny's magic is sensed by all those fortunate enough to taste the abundance of great beer at his bar or order from his incredible menu of pizzas. I mean, the best beer and pizza on this side of the Great Lakes, and if you haven't had them both...you're missing out. Vinny and Hop Jack casually leaned back across from each other, geek equals, some would say, sharing a love for good beer and thorough feedback.

Beer Fox - The last writer for the *Beer Beacon* - Janet Hinkel, did a fantastic job naming this regular, which just about summarized her presence that evening. She was eager for some good brews and was quite certainly a fox. Her taste was born and bread on Labatt's X Stock but she sticks to Bass and Ying Ling, and if nothing else, a Molson Canadian Standard.

Evil - Late, and a-wake just shy of 14 hours, Evil handed the bartender something hoppy, threw his cigarettes on the table and

went to the bathroom, signifying natural form that evening.

The Brews

Flying Bison Bird of Prey IPA 6.5%

"Whatta we got here? Smells like Warrior with a citrus bomb," Vinny chimed.

Beer Fox and Vinny agreed on the earthy skunk taste, while Hop Jack narrowed the scope to a single hop varietal beer, most likely the work of the Brit's.

"The alcohol sneaks up on ya," Evil noted, while Magistrate enjoyed a hoppy flavor over citrus tones.

Magistrate's Home Brew, Oatmeal Stout 5.5%

"I usually don't like darks but this is good," Beer Fox announced. Vinny and Hop Jack picked up a British taste, inverted sugars, and determined it a dark Holy Grail with food coloring.

"It's gone and I still can't tell you what it is," Magistrate said, looking puzzled at his empty glass.

"Alk-ce-hol," pronounced Evil, noting roasty dryness as the beer warmed.

Saint Peter's Brewery Co., Cream Stout 6.5%

"Smooth and creamy, but I liked the last beer better," Beer Fox hiccupped.

"Definitely not a hop head," Hop Jack said laughing, pointing at Beer Fox.

"A Double Bock in the nose, black licorice after taste, something medicinal in between... I'm feeling Brother James," Evil gently summarized.

Vinny sifted through some possible origins, leaning towards British or Czech, noting a lot of licorice. "Sweet cologne and stale funk in the nose," Hop Jack added.

La Binchoise' Spéciale Noël 9%

"Smells like apricots and pears," Evil offered.

"You should let it go stale and use it in your hair," Beer Fox agreed.

Vinny laughed and wondered if Chanel was getting into IPA's. "Maybe a Wisconsin brewery" he guessed.

"Fruity, probably a Ringwood...classic chic beer," Hop Jack slipped in.

We unanimously agreed that this beer would go well with any breakfast or brunch buffet if, as Evil's put it, one were awake for breakfast or brunch.

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"It's too damn sweet," Hop Jack said as he slid his glass to the center of the table.

"Smells like pop," chimed Beer Fox.

"Smells like ginger," added Vinny.

"Smells like Maryanne," Evil coolly replied, affectionately referring to an old favorite TV show.

(I was too busy laughing my ass off at this point to continue taking notes but basically it was sweet with peppery coriander as noted by Magistrate.)

Stone Brewing Company, Old Guardian Winter 2005 Limited 11.26%

"Ow," chirped Beer Fox, "my finger dissolved in it."

"It made me go blind...I liked it," Evil cooed.

Hop Jack agreed, calling it a "well-balanced paint thinner."

"This definitely gets you where you want to go," Magistrate said, to the tune of 11.26%.

Vinny called the day after reporting hearing loss.

Victory Brewing Co., Golden Monkey 9.5%

"This would be great through a coffee filter or as a shot...peach snaps comes to mind," chimed Beer Fox.

"Huge taste, a lot of spice...very good," Magistrate said, finishing his glass.

"You can taste Vitamin B and a touch of sour...European whole flowers," Hop Jack added, agreeing with Vinny on the good balance of alcohol and sweetness.

"If you hold it up to the light you can see plankton in it," noticed Evil, as we all held our glasses high, into the light above us, admiring our golden pleasures, and pondered the specks before our eyes...

Beer may fill us with precious yeast and mulches, but these moments are what render beer "soul food." The experiences we have are as vital as the type of beer we drink. A good beer can transform an atmosphere, brighten

the dull, and rearrange an opinion. It has the power to make us stop and look again... many a happy marriage are had between two who saw each others choice of beer and then laid eyes on each other. During the blizzard of '85, Buffalo Mayor Jimmy Griffin wisely guided us to "go down to (our) local convenience store, pick up a six pack and just wait it out."

So take time to delight in these moments: the snow in March, the blue dawns and gray dusks. There is a

bounty of time and space and beer before you on this and every day. Slow down, smile, call a few beer-loving friends over tonight and see what's in your glasses.

