



BEER BEACON

By Susan Griskonis

Beer & Politics

Intelligence on the Endangered Species List? Freedom Fighters roaming the streets? These, and other post-election possibilities weighed on my mind when I walked into Cole's on Elmwood Avenue for the holiday brew tasting on November 3rd, 2004.

Bill Metzger, committed beer enthusiast and community leader, arrived with precious, seasonal beer. We greeted the constituents to a tasting of brews that would make any liberal forget their post-election woes for a moment. A famous musician and lover of good beer once said, "You can't be a real country unless you have beer and an airline." For some this may mean the ability to drink good beer and go somewhere else for a while, you know, 'till the heat dies down. For others it may mean having a place to get a job and good beer to go home too. Mixed in spirit and affiliation, with the airport just a few miles away, we were unanimously ready for a special holiday brew tasting.

The Constituency

Evil Doer: Emerging up the stairs to the private balcony area, with an upside down American flag (U.S. Navy distress symbol) safety-pinned to his t-shirt, Evil showed no remorse for himself. He is blessed with a nose any border patrol agent would appreciate and uses it, most impressively, for identifying the state origin of the beer he receives.

Carded at the door by Freedom Fighters, and searched for signs of Communism at the stairs, this serious hophead was incredibly relaxed for being such a threat.

Vinny: Restaurant entrepreneur and much-loved godfather of good beer in the Great Lakes community, Vinny's eyes sparkled with appreciation for the Elmwood area around Cole's. Vinny is another tal-

ented nose in the group. Glowing with free friendly parking found just around the corner while examining the character of the building, he simply smiled as I asked for his take on the election results. His reply was voiced by making his way to the table, beaming like a child on Christmas morning.

Magistrate: Long time brewing geek, Magistrate arrived with an appreciation for both side's things. Though a proud hophead, he enjoys all good beer. Eyeing Evil's magical axis (as many of us were), Magistrate reserved his political feedback. We did agree, though, that swinging an evil axis around was very dangerous, and making the staff nervous, so he put it away.

Phillip: New to the crew and undecided about a beer preference, Phillip came without protest or prejudice, an empty vessel if you will, ready to learn about beer and find a place at the table. We were excited to watch his development.

Hop-Jack: Straight from backcountry hills, this hard working hop addict was unfazed by my political probing and ready to relax. Hop-Jack settled in right across from Evil, chuckled at his t-shirt, kicked his boots up and looked for a glass. Having enjoyed decades of home brewing, hours of repose and good beer, his strong peaceful awareness has been the result, some say.

The Candidates

Alpine Ale, Otter Creek, Middlebury, Vermont



"Spicy, sweet, and probably from a state with 7 or 9 electoral votes," Vinny chuckled. Evil nodded in agreement and, with a deep whiff, narrowed it down to "the north east; most likely Vermont."

"Definitely not a swing state," offered Magistrate. "Malty and rich with hops in the finish."

Not quite quenching his hop agenda, Jack Hop added, "Sugary, borders on Cloying, British in nature."

Oktoberfest Lager, Penn Brewery, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Unlike the excitement surrounding the northeast impact on the Electoral College, this Pennsylvanian brew drew little enthusi-

asm from the constituency. "Flowery nose, but the anticipated flavor disappears in the mouth, though the fizz tends to keep the subtle flavors alive for a bit," Magistrate said. Inhaling strong yeast flavors, Vinny compared it to Ringwood or a Molson Christmas beer.

"Another north east beer," Evil added, noticing Canadian character.

"Heavy on the yeast and not enough hops," Hop Jack added. But a unanimous vote was out of the question before it became one. Phillip enjoyed the malty refuge, welcoming the character much more than the *Alpine Ale*, citing less bitterness.

Double Bock Beer, Primator, Nachod, NE Bohemia



Like many third party candidates, Primator aroused our senses to the tune of 10%. Primator's bold brewing and open tank fermentation process is credited to their status as one of the few remaining Czech breweries that have not been bought by a foreign company.

"Ahh," sighed Vinny, "smells like someone opened a pack of licorice and alcohol!" Slowly coming to terms with his malty preferences, Phillip celebrated the sweet smell and heavy flavors. Hop-Jack, always a sucker for good head retention, noticed red hues and molasses, adding that he would blend this "one dimensional" sweet beer with another brew. Via intense wine and sherry tones Magistrate speculated a "Double or Triple Boch."

"I taste a diabetic coma coming on," Evil said, though he, like Hop-Jack, enjoyed the nice head retention.

30th Annual Christmas Ale, Anchor Brewing Company, San Francisco, CA

"Smells like a Christmas Shop next to a men's clothing store," Vinny's capitalist tendency summarized.

"Anchor Christmas," Evil translated, noting the heavy licorice aroma.

It was interesting to watch Phillip develop his preference. A malt man in the making, he frowned at the bitter aftertaste, looking for more *Double Bock*.

"I taste the orange and fruit, but it's complex," Hop-Jack said. Magistrate agreed, unable to put his finger on theavor.

"The hops comes out as the beer warms," Vinny noticed. Hop-Jack and

Magistrate rolled their beer in their palms, warming their pleasant discovery.

Double Bastard, Stone Brewing Company, North County San Diego, CA

In a two-party system, you got to love the name of this beer. It really hits you like most 10% beers will. Stone Brewing puts the gargoyle on the label because it guards against "modern day" evil spirits like chemical preservatives, additives and adjuncts. I wondered if President Bush had ever gotten wind of this kind of evil.

"Hmmm, what the hell is that?" Evil affectionately cooed, guessing west coast imperial melon from the nose.

With his malt preferences congealing before our very eyes, Phillip came to an important conclusion: "I really don't like hops."

Magistrate responded with two thumbs up reflecting on a far, far away time when hops made his nose flare. "It's loaded with citrus and you get more burn out of it than a double hop," Magistrate said, licking his lips. Vinny agreed there was west coast written all over it noting a similarity with *Old Guardian*, but not as strong.

As the tasting ended and we were gathered around our bountiful holiday brew harvest and respectfully exchanging our political views, I wondered: *What could we learn from good beer?*

The Anchor Brewing Company's Christmas Ale webpage announces that if "properly refrigerated, this beer remains intriguing and drinkable for years, with different nuances slowly emerging as the flavor mellows slightly." What would happen if we held the same standard to our elected officials? What if we could describe our officials as we describe our beer? One possible political translation of the above beer text follows:

Responsibly informed, this representative is, at the very least, mildly intelligent and, uncorrupted during tenure, evolving and willing to modify its course, as the union between justice and intelligence requires of those who are rooted in it.

Perhaps the new prohibitionists, explored in the last issue of Great Lakes Brewing News, should know that not only are they missing out on great beer but, sadly, the essential evolutionary lessons to be learned from them as well...ones that may actually inspire us to raise our political standards.