

BEER BUZZ:

THE END OF HISTORY?

by Joey Williams



(Disclaimer: Brewdog's "The End of History", "Sink the Bismark!" and "Tactical Nuclear Penguin" are not available in Texas).



One of the biggest stories in craft beer this week has been the release of Brewdog's "The End of History". Weighing in at a lofty 55% ABV, with only 11 bottles released to the public at a price in excess of \$700 with each bottle custom packaged in a taxidermied squirrel, there is a lot to talk about. (If you've not heard about "The End of History", which was on many mainstream and even local media outlets, then you can visit the brewery's blog on their website for more info and pictures of the squirrel wrapped bottles.) One of the biggest discussions in the beer community is the process by which Brewdog obtains such extreme alcohol content in their beers and if, after such processes, the liquid in question can even be considered beer.

Freeze concentrating is a primitive form of distillation where the alcohol in question is frozen, instead of being boiled like regular modern distillation. Alcohol freezes at a much lower temperature than water, so the water in the liquid partially separates and freezes into ice. The ice is then removed and what is left behind is a concentrated version of the previous liquid, in both alcohol and flavor. Repeat this process enough times at increasingly lower temperatures and you can reach alcohol levels rivaling those of modern distilled spirits. Freeze concentration was most likely happening for hundreds of years by accident before people got savvy and decided to harness the powers of winter to produce strong drinks. During colonial times, apple cider was freeze concentrated, then referred to as "jacking", and became a very primitive version of apple brandy that was known as "Applejack". The modern Applejack released by the Laird family is distilled in a pot still, much the same way whisky and other liquors are, because of economics and quality of product.

The beer world hasn't just recently begun utilizing freeze concentrating. Eisbock is a style that originated in Germany, possibly from the Kulmbacher Brewery. The story goes that after a night of partying, the people responsible for bringing the barrels of bock beer inside the brewery forgot and left them out in the cold German winter. The next morning the barrels were discovered and the water had separated from the rest of the liquid. What was left behind was a beer much higher in alcohol and more intense in flavor, reminiscent of a beer liqueur. Even modern brewers have discovered the enriching powers of the winter's cold. In the 1990s, Deschutes Brewing in Bend, Oregon suffered a break-in where the thief tried to steal a keg of their winter seasonal, Jubel Ale. For anyone that hasn't tried to move or lift a full-size keg, they weigh somewhere in the ballpark of 180-200lbs. If you don't have a plan to get the keg out of the brewery and home, then you're not going very far.

The morning after the break-in, brewery workers arrived to discover a keg abandoned in the snow. Bringing the orphaned beer back home, they tapped it to see what was left and what became of the liquid inside. As one could expect by now, the water had separated and frozen, leaving behind a rich and intense beer that inspired the brewers to create Jubel, a strong beer modeled after the forgotten keg. We were lucky enough to receive some Jubel 2010 (only the second bottling ever) in Houston and there might even be some out there somewhere, though it sold quickly everywhere it made an appearance.

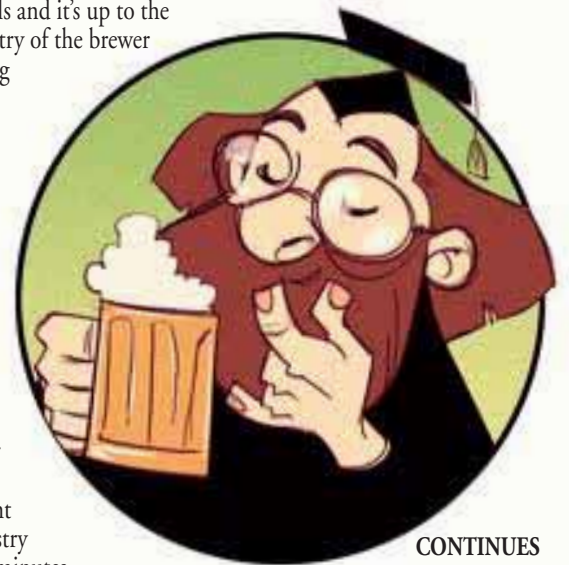


Now, there is a difference between these "eis-" beers and the "ice" beers produced by the large brewers. "Ice" beer is a term used to describe a beer that has been filtered, either by freezing or by running it through ice crystals, to remove yeast and other naturally occurring components that the brewer has deemed unwanted in the final beer. Because of the fraction of freeze concentration taking place, the alcohol of "ice" beer is marginally higher than that of the breweries standard offerings. Labatt of Canada originated the "ice" beer filtering process, but most large breweries offer some form of the beer. The process of freeze concentrating here is a secondary benefit, where the original goal is to filter out undesired flavor compounds and to create a beer that is lighter in flavor and intensity than even some mass market beers.

The release of Brewdog's "The End of History" has generated a massive debate in the beer community as to what beer really is. Obviously Scotch is not beer, though it is distilled from an alcohol that is loosely beer based. How, then, can a beer like The End of History, or any of the brewery's high octane brews, be considered a beer and hold a record for strongest beer? How can a drink like Samuel Adams Utopia, at 25%+ ABV, be considered beer when the brewing process is so unlike a regular beer and the aging and blending process resembles liquor more than beer? Or, how can a beverage like Dogfish Head 120 Minute IPA be considered a beer at a reported 18% ABV and large amounts of non-grain sugars being used in the brewing process? In all honesty, I'm not sure. I'm not sure any of these fit the traditional definition of beer as we've come to know it. What I can be sure of is that these beers have all done wonders for the perception of what beer is and what it can be, along with getting non-beer media to pay attention to the industry, even if just for a passing moment.

These beers spark debate and lively conversation, as do any of the bourbon barrel-aged, wild yeast infused, exotic ingredient added beers that we see on an almost daily basis from breweries all over the world. The greatest thing about beer is that there isn't a strict adherence to tradition that keeps people from experimenting. Beer is a canvas where all artists, macro or micro, are given the same basic tools and it's up to the creativity and artistry of the brewer

to create something desirable and delicious. It is a level playing field and I'm excited to see two guys from Scotland having fun and schooling the rest of the world on how to get attention and spark debate with beer. Love them or hate them, they turned the spotlight on the entire industry for a few valuable minutes.



CONTINUES
ON PAGE 2

Boundary-pushing Beers to Try:**Brewdog Tokio –**

The most extreme beer that we get from Brewdog in Texas, Tokio is an 18% ABV Imperial Stout brewed with Cranberries and Jasmine and aged on toasted French oak. What sounds like a catastrophic train wreck of flavors ends up being a well integrated group of flavors dominated by roasted grain and dark fruits, accented by vanilla and oak.

**Kulmbacher Eisbock –**

The only beer, and possibly beverage, on our shelves that showcases the freeze concentrating method, Kulmbacher Eisbock is no longer left out in the snow haphazardly over night, but is instead purposefully frozen and separated from the ice to create a liquid with surprising depth and complexity that straddles the line between beer and liqueur, or something else.

**Allagash Interlude –**

A personal favorite, Interlude is a Belgian inspired ale utilizing Allagash's house strain of Belgian yeast and a strain of wild yeast, Brettanomyces, which was discovered around the brewery. The two yeasts create a depth of flavors that are enhanced by aging the beer in French Merlot and French Syrah wine barrels before blending and bottling. The flavors that develop in the barrels and the bottle are otherworldly and really bring into question what beer can be.

**Deus –**

Developed in Belgium by the Bosteels Brewery, makers of Kwak and Tripel Karmeleit, Deus is a Biere de Champagne. Brewed like many traditional Belgian strong golden beers, Deus undergoes the same treatment of cave aging in France and sediment removal that would be expected of fine champagne. The end result is a liquid that could trick most amateur wine connoisseurs and please all drinkers of fine liquids.

**Dogfish Head Fort –**

The World's Strongest Fruit Beer. At 18% ABV, utilizing one ton, or more, of raspberry puree in each batch, DFH Fort is a beer of incredible strength with an accompanying depth and complexity. Not overwhelmingly fruity or sweet, Fort blurs the lines of beer, liqueur and rose sparkling wine. I brought a few bottles to a New Year's gathering and received nearly unanimous praise, and some pretty entertaining memories. ☺



E-mail it to me at: jwilliams@specsonline.com

NEW ON SHELVES AT SPEC'S DOWNTOWN:

**Stone 14th Anniversary
Imperial IPA 22oz**

**Sierra Nevada 30th Anniversary
Imperial Helles Bock 750ml**

**Lagunitas Lil Sumpin' Sumpin'
Ale 6pk**

Lagunitas Maximus IPA 6pk

