

# The Answer to Disasters of All Kinds? Beer

Apparently the Apocalypse has started and the horsemen are named Sandy, Athena, Brutus and ... I don't know, Cindy?

Despite the catastrophic weather hitting both coasts in an unprecedented series of weather events, people are trying to put their lives back together. That's the name of the game, of course. For some of us, that means picking up the debris and rebuilding. For others, that means putting together something to help those in need.

Many a time, charity events coincide with good beer. This is a largely unspoken-of trend in the craft beer world. Many events are done to raise money for historical locations, like the Newport Storm Summer Luau that benefits Fort Adams. Others are less obvious, but support a broad range of causes from homeless shelters to cancer research. Craft beer people are generous people.

If you're a beer bar owner, or somehow in the craft beer world, this storm is a good opportunity for you to do some good. Putting together a charity beer event might take some time and effort, but the rewards are beyond anything tangible. With the rise of all these super storms, we're going to need all the help we can get to keep rebuilding. The Red Cross asks for monetary donations, and what better way to do that than to raise money with craft beer?

Think about it. All you're asking people to do is drink good beer and be social. And it helps people rebuild their lives. There's no downside!

For some out there, this is preaching to the choir. For others, this might spark an idea that genuinely helps people. I'd be remiss in my responsibility as a beer pundit to let an opportunity to spread good will pass by.

Now that the elephant in the room is placated, let's talk about the next upcoming disaster. You see, right about now, people are starting to go insane en masse. It's as if they are affected by some sort of plague. On a certain day, at a certain time, they will rise in the dead of night, venture forth, and sow chaos and destruction upon the world as they rampage violently through the streets and shopping malls. Ladies and gentlemen, the Christmas shopping season is upon us.

I find it amusingly ironic that we choose to worship the Prince of Peace by trampling Walmart employees to buy electronic devices for other people. We obsess over getting the best deals for the hottest items and run up our personal debts in a mad race to outdo each other's generosity or to save a few bucks while we fulfill someone's wish for the latest model of the Wii.

I don't know about you, but it sure as hell makes me want a beer.

So here are my top picks for beer gifts for your friends and family. Also, please don't wait until the last minute on this stuff. Relax and take your time; liquor stores don't have Black Friday specials, and if they do, they're probably overcharging you to begin with.

The Newport Storm Annual '12 - Every year our coastal extremists down in Newport put out a special anniversary brew. It's become sort of a collector's item in itself. This corked, cobalt-blue bottle contains something usually experimental, interesting, and most often delicious. This year's batch is a strange blend of malty chocolate notes and spicy chipotle and habanero. Maybe that's your thing, maybe it's not, but you gotta admit, you want to see the look on the face of the first person to drink it.

The Bad Elf Series by Ridgeway Brewing - This line of brews warms my heart even as it chills my soul. I believe it's still banned in Connecticut because they believe the elf character is an attempt to market to children, but one look at this little toy-builder would make any sane child hide under the covers and wet himself. See for yourself. Find the bottle and take a look. Not exactly a Keebler, is he? The series begins with Bad Elf, is followed by Very Bad, Seriously Bad, Criminally Bad, and Insanely Bad. The worse the elf gets, the higher the alcohol content gets, which may indicate a causal relationship. Each brew is a different style as well, creating a delightful variety to choose from. This, of course, doesn't include the other brews in the line, Lump of Coal Stout (my favorite,) Santa's Butt, Reindeer Droppings, and more.

Delirium Tremens - I recommend this beer to anyone who's a fan of Belgian ales, but most fans of Belgian ales I know are fans because of this beer. It really is the perfect example of the style, while still being light, drinkable, and full of flavor. I think I'm dipping into commercial lingo again.

This puppy is potent, but don't worry, the pink elephant you are seeing is just the picture on the label. If you've got a friend who loves good beer, get him a bottle of this for his holiday of choice.

Imperial Stout Trooper by New England Brewing Co. - Oh, George Lucas, how do you break our hearts? Let me count the ways. No, there is no time.

This brew is a perfect homage to *Star Wars* in so many ways, and a perfect gift to *Star Wars* fans as well as beer enthusiasts. Its history says it all. Originally the design on the label was extremely close to the look of the Stormtroopers in the *Star Wars* original trilogy, hence the name. New England Brewing did fairly well with their little brew. Then, came the dark times ... the Empire. George Lucas fired a legal warning shot. Apparently he didn't take being honored very well since it didn't involve cash. So the label had to be changed. I won't spoil it for you if you don't know already, but Imperial Stout Trooper made a *slight* alteration to their label in a very "*This is for Jar Jar!*" kind of way. Since then, the original label has become a collector's item, and the beer itself has enjoyed tremendous popularity. It also happens to be a dark, roasty, tasty little stout well worth the hype on its own. May the Force be with you.

Samuel Adams Utopias - If you're really looking to impress someone, this is still the Holy Grail of the craft beer world. While it varies from year to year, the Utopias is typically a very malty, almost bourbon-like brew that's only technically a beer based on its ingredients. It might be a bit too hefty for some, but if you've got a true beer snob on your list, and a lot of loose cash (if you find it for \$130 or less, it's a steal) it'll make someone's Christmas very very merry. Or blurry.

Finally, as always, I encourage everyone to give the gift of homebrewing. The typical saying is "Give a man some homebrew, and he'll drink it for a day. Teach a man to homebrew, and he'll discover a new religion." It's amazing how often a brief dabble into homebrewing frequently results in a lifelong obsession. A typical homebrew kit with all the trimmings and a couple of ingredient kits will run you anywhere from \$100 to \$150. I promise you, though, that kit goes a long way. From there, all you need is a stove, some time, and soon the beer shall flow.

It's a fun hobby that lets the brewer be creative, do something with his hands, and enjoy a good brew.

Homebrewing isn't difficult, unless you have my luck, and once you have the ingredients you can put together a 5- to 6-gallon batch for about \$40. The yield is typically somewhere between 2 and 2 ½ cases, meaning that for the price of two typical cases of cheap domestic swill, you can invest a little time and make something delicious. And you can show it off to your friends, impress strangers, or whip up a bunch of Christmas gifts for some craft beer lovers.

If you're a real enthusiast, or you think your friend might need some help, throw in "The Complete Joy of Homebrewing," by Charlie Papazian. It's considered to be the bible for homebrewing. If your local homebrew shop doesn't have it, your local bookstore will.

What if your friend is more into wine? Worry not. Most places that sell homebrewing supplies also sell winemaking supplies. You can also make mead, hard cider, any many other fermented fluids in your home this way. Yes, it's legal. The law says you're allowed up to 100 gallons per adult, per household, per year. That's 20 brews with 5-gallon batches per adult in the house every year. It's like Christmas every couple of weeks!

So when you're out there fighting traffic and radioactive cannibal zombie mutants, maybe my suggestions will help you save a little time and frustration. Or, maybe I just wrote out your Christmas list for you, and you're shoving this article in someone's face saying, "Buy me that! Buy me that!" Either

way, try not to let the holiday panic get to you. Relax, have a homebrew, and wait for all this to blow over.

Happy Channukah, Merry Christmas, Happy Kwanzaa, Merry Yule, whatever your end-of-the-year celebration with religious significance, enjoy it. It only comes once a year.

Let's all be grateful for that.