

Your first thought was to decline. You already knew the shot would corrode your throat, and you knew you'd make a face of disgust as soon as you managed to down the whole thing. But the mere suggestion of a shot of Jäger hit a hidden crazy button inside your brain. A chance to find out exactly what was beyond your wildest imagination.

As the bartender poured the liqueur, it seemed heavy enough to plop into the shot glass—*glub glub glub*—and concentrated enough to make permanent stains on an asphalt highway. When your shot arrived, you hesitated imperceptibly, jaw clenched.

What was going on in that moment? You were playing a mind game with yourself. Psyching yourself up and bracing yourself at the same time, like an extreme skier dropping down the face of a double-black-diamond run. The shot was cold, but not cold enough to kill the pain.

Afterward, you looked to your friends and smiled with a mixture of victory and relief. Your empty shot glass became a medal of valor.

So what just happened?

You didn't do the Jäger shot *despite* the unpleasant taste. You did that shot *because* of it.

A History of Liquid Fascination

The year was 1878. Wintertime stag hunting was a popular pastime in Germany. Hunting parties braved the cold, and a shot of liqueur helped take the edge off the chill. A hunter named Curt Mast developed a drink for his stag-hunting excursions. What were his ingredients? Only a handful of people knew. It was a secret mixture of fifty-six herbs, spices, and blooms.

Mast named his drink Jägermeister, which translates to "Master Hunter." The greatest hunter of them all.

Because Mast didn't want a bottle to shatter while hunting, he tested various designs while on his horse, dropping different

bottles while galloping at full speed, until he discovered the specific squared shape that was the least likely to shatter. This led to the iconic squared dark-green bottle with imagery of Mast adorned his shatterproof green bottle with imagery of mystical hunting legends. For instance, a Christian cross glowed eerily between the curved antlers of a stag. This cross was in homage to Saint Hubertus, the patron saint of hunting. Legend has it that Hubertus converted to Christianity when he saw a vision of a stag with a glowing crucifix between its antlers. Images of the saint, born in 656, still hang in churches around the world.

In 1935, Jäger was commercially released in Germany, marketed as an after-dinner digestif. While it had originally helped hunters brave the chill, now it helped the digestive system brave the bratwurst.

The green bottle later served in the fields of World War II as an anesthetic for wounded soldiers. In the 1980s, however, it made the leap from painkiller to hangover creator.

In 1985, an American marketer and entrepreneur, Sidney Frank, bought the rights to import the drink into the United States from Germany. This wasn't an obvious move at the time. The drink was only a very modest seller, barely worth the license. Up to that point, the digestif was a nostalgic drink for traditional blue-collar German immigrants who remembered it from the homeland.

But then everything changed. Frank came across a short article in the *Baton Rouge Advocate*. It described his digestif as a cult drink, hopped up with opium, Quaaludes, and aphrodisiacs.

A conventional marketer would have suppressed the article, worrying about reputation damage. Frank did quite the opposite. He made hundreds of copies of the newspaper article, and plastered them in college bars all around the country. So it began.

College students visiting New Orleans swarmed to the bars, clutching bottles of the mysterious brown elixir, bringing them back to campus and secretively sharing them with friends. Hurry