

Color me “Moo”

Yesterday I read that we have a Mad Cow. I called my best friend, Fred, who now works for the Department of Homeland Security, and suggested some beer and pool at the Castle, our favorite Manhattan Beach hangout in Los Angeles.

“Fred,” I asked over a couple of Carta Blancas between our version of Eightball where you have to call your next shot, “Are you guys into this cow business?”

Fred looked at me as if I might have been an accomplice of Lee Harvey Oswald. “How did you know that,” he asked me, slackjawed, looking furtively around the bar?

“Well you all seem to be everywhere, so I just assumed that you might have your hand in this. But I can’t figure out why?”

Fred knows that my lips are sealed and would never divulge anything that might jeopardize his job, so he gestured to the back of the bar and we sat down with another beer.

“Remember the alert codes I told you about,” he said? “They never were released to the public for a very good reason. Joe Average would never be able to figure out what to do and frankly even if we knew what to tell them we couldn’t because it would be a breach in security. But Ashcroft was in love with the idea, pretty much because he was the inventor. Of course we had to review a major revision in alert strategy. To make a long story short, after a high level briefing with the Boss, we shit canned it. The president couldn’t understand any of it. He said, ‘What is this Puce crap?’ When we told him, he laughed his ass off. ‘Laura tells me that its Condi’s skivvies color, and she doesn’t even know it I’ll bet,’ he chuckled.

“Well she damn well did know it and she is the one that got the whole thing killed. She took him through the whole litany, alert code by alert code and while she was explaining it...you know how on TV he hunches his shoulders, his brow gets all wrinkly and his eyes get really small and he looks like he needs to go potty when stuff makes him think.... it was obvious he didn’t have a clue. When she was explaining the Puce Alert to him, he started to laugh and spilled the beans. I heard that Condi was apoplectic when she heard that everyone knew what color her knickers were. She apparently told the Boss that this

color strategy was a whole load of crap and he would be the laughing stock of the world intelligence people. That was when the president's eyebrows unwrinkled and he started shouting at Ashcroft. Good-bye new alert colors!!!

“So we stuck with the ‘green, yellow, orange, red’ codes we originally went with. We still don’t know what to do with them either, but SAC has been using them since WW II, so they must be ok and the CIA loves it because it makes their jobs so easy.”

“Why Ashcroft,” I asked? “I thought Tom Ridge was in charge of that stuff.”

“Ridge couldn’t find his ass with both hands,” Fred explained amiably. Everyone knows that. He’s the pretty boy that we show to the press, but the real bad boy is Ashcroft. He runs the show and up to this fiasco the President loved him.”

“I’m not surprised, to tell you the truth, Fred,” I said. “I sort of assumed that the ‘Average Joe’ wouldn’t understand the difference between a ‘Mauve Alert’ and a ‘Sepia Alert’ anyway. But what does that have to do with mad cows?”

“Ah-hah,” he almost shouted and then lowered his voice as everyone in the Castle turned towards our table. “John was so in love with his colors that he figured a way he could get it in the back door, so to speak. So he set up this wheezy old cow with asthma or arthritis someplace in Washington State. Then he started a rumor that it was a mad cow. When everyone in the world went ape shit over that, he created a series of Cow Alerts.”

“Cow alerts,” I asked incredulously?

“Yeah. He knew better than to mess with Condi Rice any more, so he went to the enemy, the accursed Democrats. The obvious person to adopt Cow Alerts would be Senator Akaka from Hawaii. Akaka....I love saying his name....bought it hook, line and sinker. For the last ten years or so he had been the most vocal advocate for destroying every sick cow in the land no matter what the cause.”

“For God’s sake, bought what,” I asked?

“Like I said.... colored Cow Alerts. You know, if you find one cow it would be a simple alert, if you found a whole herd, it would be the equivalent of a Red Alert, just like his security alert stuff.”

“You have got to be kidding me,” I said.

“Not at all,” Fred answered. “Akaka is going to announce a Cow Alert tomorrow. It will be called an ‘Annoyed Cow Alert’.” It will be accompanied with a beige color, just like the first alert in his old warning system. He just won’t advertise the color, just the fact that they have found a cow that is mildly irritated. This won’t stampede the beef business, but will get everyone’s attention.

“Wait a minute,” I interrupted. “You mean that a Democrat of Akaka’s stature is going to make a fool of himself just because Ashcroft had a few beers with him?”

“Well, Akaka is going to blame the Republicans for not letting the public know that there might be discontented cows in America. This can be a terrific election year issue if he plays his cards right and he knows it. He won’t mention Ashcroft at all. In fact I happen to know that there are some sick cows in Indiana and Senator Bayh is going to announce a Livid Cow Alert next Thursday. The announcement will be shown in bold chartreuse, John’s favorite color. That was the deal he made with Akaka for giving him this neat idea.”

I expressed a high degree of skepticism, but Fred went on.

“Then around the middle of next year before the election campaigning gets really hot, Wesley Clark will announce a ‘Berserk Cow Alert’ in puce. This will really piss off Condi Rice and will warn the public that this whole cow business has been completely mishandled by the administration. Not only that, but it will tip the Democratic nomination decidedly in Clark’s favor. I can’t avoid calling it ‘cow tipping’. Can you imagine the consternation of the voting public when they think that cows are roaming the land loaded with Freudian impulses, impure thoughts or seeking revenge on humans who have mistreated and eaten them for millennia? What if a herd of 100,000 cows, blind with rage and foaming at the mouth come charging into New York around November?”

I asked Fred, “How can Ashcroft do this? If anyone is a mad cow, it’s him. I always thought he was a Republican first and Bush administration Bill of Rights repealer a distant second.”

“Oh, my,” Fred looked at me pityingly. “You are so naïve. Ashcroft has one love and one love only. John Ashcroft. And he hates Condoleeza, so when the cows come charging into New York City with 100,000 puce bras on their livid horns or puce knickers...well, she is going to shit a brick.”

“Won’t people get hurt,” I asked Fred? “Surely you can’t let this happen no matter the consequences. I can’t imagine people on Wall Street being skewered by some enraged bull with puce panties without immense repercussions.”

“Nah,” Fred said with a smile. “There won’t be any bulls. Cows are dumb as stumps. Who ever saw a mad cow, for God’s sake? They will clog up Fifth Avenue for awhile, but they are harmless. They will moo a lot for awhile, beef herders will round them up, we’ll slaughter them because of public outrage against the cow incompetence of the administration and send the surplus beef to hungry countries in Africa and Asia and Democrats will take all the credit. It will be a landslide victory. Viva President Clark. I love Ashcroft now. He’s a lot smarter than he looks.

“Of course he’d have to be,” Fred sighed.

We went back to playing call-the-next-shot Eightball.