

# Chasing the Dragon

Hoppy brews take you to a new high

DON TSE

**C**hasing the dragon is a phrase used to describe drug users' constant need to increase their doses to achieve a high as their bodies develop a tolerance to the poison. It

is a phrase that could also be used to describe hopheads — beer lovers who seek ever more hoppy beers (though hops are not nearly as lethal as recreational drugs). Hops are the ingredient that provide almost all of the bitterness in beer and that provide various aromas and flavours like fruits, grass, flowers or spices.

Perhaps this is what Alley Kat Brewing Company of Edmonton had in mind when they named their Dragon series of Double India Pale Ales. While the IPAs are not truly double that of a regular IPA, there is no doubt that these beers have been dialed-up and aimed directly at those looking to increase their hop dosage.

What makes the series of beers interesting is that each of the Dragons features a single hop variety, allowing the drinker to learn the different characteristics. All of the Dragons are 7.5 per cent and copper in colour. The flavour is full and balanced to the bitter side, though there is also significant malt flavour. A new Dragon will be released approximately every two months, but older versions can still be found. Look for them at your local liquor store.

• **Red Dragon** — The first of the series featured Simcoe hops, which has one of the most distinctive aromas and flavours of any hop variety. Some people describe the sharp aroma as "cat pee," which isn't appealing, but the flavour of the hops is. To me, the distinguishing characteristic of Simcoe hops is pineapple.

## BOOZE

• **Blue Dragon** — The second Dragon replaced the Simcoe hops with Columbus hops, which features pine and lightly citric flavours and aromas. The bitterness is less sharp, but a little harsher.

• **Green Dragon** — Zythos hops were featured in the third Dragon, which is a bit of a cheat, since it is a trademarked blend of multiple hop varieties. Tropical fruits feature in this beer, including tangerines and lychee.

• **Black Dragon** — The current Dragon features Warrior hops. Warrior is very high in alpha acids, thus creating an aggressive bitterness. And yet there is an earthy quality to the hop flavour with a hint of grapefruit pulp.

• **Yellow Dragon** — The next Dragon will feature a new hop with the decidedly experimental name HBC 342. The hop was developed by the same company that created the Simcoe hop, but this one promises to be more subtle with mild notes of citrus and watermelon.

### Calgary International Beer Fest

The eighth annual Calgary International Beer Festival takes place this Friday and Saturday at the BMO Centre. Tickets are \$19 from the festival website ([calgarybeerfest.com](http://calgarybeerfest.com)) or \$25 at the door. Sample hundreds of beers under one roof by buying tasting tickets for \$1 each (samples are typically two or three tasting tickets apiece).