

Geeks turn talents toward brewing

Tool Shed hopes to renovate the Calgary beer scene ▶ DON TSE

TWO SELF-PROCLAIMED GEEKS who became instant friends when they met in Afghanistan while working for a military technology company have founded Calgary's newest brewing company, Tool Shed (toolshedbrewing.com).

Jeff Orr's Twitter profile (@jefforr) refers to Jeff as a "Professional Nerd." Graham Sherman's profile (@ShermanDelux) refers to Graham as a "things-too-far-taker." Since returning to Calgary, the pair have nerded up coffee — each has their own commercial coffee roaster and added their own custom computerization to it — and nerded up competitive barbecue — Sherman's iPhone-controllable barbecue even has its own Twitter handle (@BBQ_Island). But their latest hobby, home brewing, is not only being taken too far, it's being taken to a whole new level: commercial brewing.

As you read this article, six-pack cans of Tool Shed beers are hitting the shelves at fine liquor stores, including Co-Op Wines & Spirits, Zyn, Willow Park Wine & Spirits, Vine Arts and Cork, and Tool Shed beer is available on draft at both locations of National, with other beer bars soon to follow.

"At this point, it's pensive excitement," says Orr. "It finally feels real, but it's also very stressful. Do we have enough beer? Do we have too much?"

Coming to terms with the unpredictability of the brewing business is half the battle, and Sherman appears to be prepared for anything. "When Jeff and I were in Afghanistan, we'd hear rockets all night and we'd try to figure out if they were coming or going. Then we realized that it didn't matter. There's a strange peace in accepting that you're screwed either way."

Tool Shed is initially offering three very different beers, and they don't expect people to like them all. "We've got a deliberately broad offering and we didn't want to brew ordinary beer, so people shouldn't like all of our beers," explains Sherman. "But every beer drinker should like one, love one and hate one of our beers."

Here are the choices, and how they rate on my scale:
■ **STAR CHEEK** — Good IPAs have lots of hops. Great IPAs have lots of hops, but maintain a balanced flavour. This copper-coloured beer features lots of citrus hoppiness, but also a firm maltiness with even a touch of caramel. Overall, the bitterness that lingers long in the finish will remind you that IPAs like Star Cheek are judged by their hops. Like.

■ **RED RAGE** — Deep red to almost brown, as soon as you see this beer, you know to expect something rich. Caramel and toast feature in the aroma while the flavour has even richer notes of molasses and coffee. The balance of Red Rage favours the sweet side, but a touch of smoky bitterness helps even things out in the finish. You'll be raging for another when the glass is empty. Love.

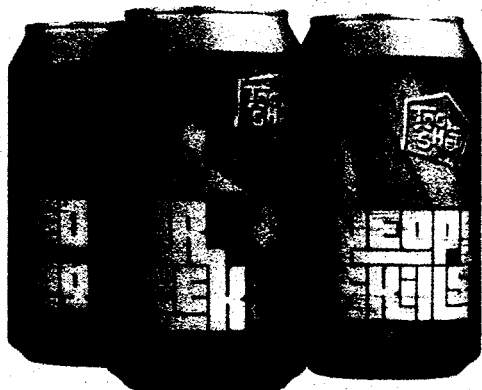
■ **PEOPLE SKILLS** — With a highly quaffable maltiness, including a touch of biscuit flavour, this beer is easily approachable. Crystal clear, gold to copper colour and capped with a nice, white head, it's got that double threat of good looks and great

personality. That's the point of People Skills — it's a crowd pleaser. For those who must categorize everything, People Skills is a cream ale, but it's better just to focus on the flavours. Hate (but not really).

Tool Shed's official launch party is being held at National on 17th (550 17 Ave. S.W.) on Wednesday, August 21.

WE'VE GOT A DELIBERATELY BROAD OFFERING AND WE DIDN'T WANT TO BREW ORDINARY BEER, SO PEOPLE SHOULDN'T LIKE ALL OF OUR BEERS... BUT EVERY BEER DRINKER SHOULD LIKE ONE, LOVE ONE AND HATE ONE OF OUR BEERS

— Graham Sherman, Tool Shed Brewing



BOOZE