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HELLFROST

• SUPPLEMENT •

FOOD & DRINK

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● INTRODUCTION ●

While the mightiest heroes need to consume food and drink to survive, in most campaigns it will be of importance only when it is in short supply—that is, when starvation looms in some inhospitable wilderness. For those whose campaigns focus more on life than adventuring, or for those who want a little more detail than the brief section in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide*, this free supplement takes a look at food and drink.

INGREDIENTS

The inhabitants of the northern continent enjoy a variety of foodstuffs.

Most fresh meat available during the year comes from rabbits, hares, deer, reindeer, horses, wild boars, aurochs, game birds, and other hunted creatures, though what is available depends on the local fauna and the season. Typically, animals are hunted only as fall approaches, when the prey has had time to fatten itself during the long summer months. As winter draw closer, one or two animals from the family's herd (cows, sheep, pigs, or goats) may be killed and butchered in preparation for the long winter. Even in cities, families keep a few chickens, ducks, and geese, both for their meat and their eggs.

Many varieties of freshwater and saltwater fish are eaten, while along the coast whales, seals, oysters, muscles, clams, crabs, lobsters, and the like all form part of the diet. Whale and seal blubber, packed full of calories, is also enjoyed as a snack.

Dairy produce includes butter and cheese, while eggs can be collected from domesticated fowl or taken from the nests of wild birds. A valuable source of protein, in coastal communities hunters take great risk scaling the cliffs to retrieve a handful of eggs.

Cultivated vegetables include potatoes, carrots, turnips/swedes, cabbages, sprouts (also known as fey cabbages for their size), parsnips, beetroot, onions, celery, peas, and beans of differing varieties. Seaweed is popular in coastal cuisine. Wheat and rye are grown for bread, oats for animal fodder and porridge, and barley for brewing beer and adding to stews. Culinary herbs include wild garlic, parsley, sage, thyme, and rosemary, though these are cultivated only for medicinal purposes. Common cultivated fruits include apples, pears, plums, and sloes. Various varieties of wild nuts, fruits, and berries are harvested as the season permits.

More exotic foodstuffs are available, if one has access to plentiful coins. Lemons, oranges, aubergines, asparagus, courgettes, tomatoes, cucumbers, and other such vegetables are shipped north from Al-Shirkuh, along with very expensive cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, and saffron. Fresh produce from the distant land of heat is a true luxury, and most reach the

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markets of the well-to-do in preserved form. Sugar is also imported from the southern land, though its prohibitive cost means it is a luxury even for the wealthy. Most folk use honey (also expensive) or fruit to sweeten meals.

Rys is imported from the Jade Empire at great expense. It is most often found in the diets of rich Ostmarkers, though it is slowly spreading eastward.

Bread, a staple, is flatter than modern loaves, the process using only natural yeast found in grain. Bread is often hard and coarse, requiring it to be torn or cut into small chunks dipped into liquid (such as beer, soup, or water) before being consumed.

Be a man a peasant or a king, milk is commonly consumed at breakfast. Whether it is that of a cow, sheep, or goat (or horse in eastern Veemark) depends heavily on the local herds. Beer is drunk by children and adults, serfs and lords, and in great quantities. While one might envision nations of drunkards, small beer is consumed during the day. Often served unfiltered, making it more like a thin porridge, it has a low alcohol content (around 2% ABV), meaning it can be drunk in large quantities, especially by those performing extensive manual labor. Stronger beers range from a measly (by local standards) 5% up to a more potent 9%.

Wine is common in Aspiria, the only major wine-producing region left (though Nordmark is making something of a resurgence of its wine industry thanks to ice wine). Thanks to trade, it is also not uncommon in the markets of other lands, though its cost prohibits the masses from enjoying it. Alcohol content varies from a measly 10% up to around 14%.

Mead (8% to 18%), which is fermented from honey, is the drink of the rich and powerful, and is rare except in a few realms—most consumption occurs in and around Midmark, though it is found further afield (such as Shattered Moor).

COOKING METHODS

While most plants can be eaten raw, food usually tastes much better when cooked. With regard to meat, cooking helps faster digestion (and thus release of energy), and reduces the risk of parasitic infections.

Whether in the home or out exploring, by far the most cooking method is boiling over a fire or using the hot embers to roast meals wrapped in leaves or clay. A cauldron is among the most essential culinary appliance, and no traveler worth his salt would head off into the wilderness without a small cauldron hanging from his pack.

Large animals, such as pigs and deer, if to be cooked all at once, are spit roasted. Truly large animals, such as cows, are simply too large to cook whole without an army of slaves, and are thus butchered into various joints and cuts first. Out in the wild, few adventurers have the time to spit roast large beasts, and butchery and preservation of unused flesh is recommended. Small prey, such as rabbits, are ideal for campfire spit roasting.

Frying and griddling are not unknown cooking

methods, though they are far from common. The main source of fat for frying comes from animals, rather than butter, as it keeps much longer. This is especially true in cities, where butter must be purchased. In steads and very small villages, butter is produced locally from the landowner's herd of sheep or goats. Cow milk is typically used for drinking.

PRESERVING FOOD

Surviving in Rassilon is a constant struggle. Food that isn't to be consumed relatively quickly must be preserved to prevent spoiling. Dairy products, such as cheese and butter, keep for some time, and while both products may grow mold, these are usually harmless. Few citizens would waste precious food by bothering to scrape off a layer of mold, though as with any food, there comes a stage when the mold not only looks very unappetizing, but may also cause poisoning. Cheese is often infested with cheese mites, but these too are consumed without second thought.

Root vegetables are hardy crops. Kept in cool, dark conditions, they remain edible throughout the long, harsh winters. By the arrival of spring they are usually withered, but they remain edible and nutritious.

Vegetables can also be pickled. In Rassilon, pickling involves soaking the vegetables in brine (vinegar not existing this far north), along with whatever herbs and spices are available. The resultant product is then kept in sealed jars, opened only when the vegetables have fermented to the maker's taste.

Meat, whether white, red, or fish, can be preserved by smoking, salting, pickling, or freezing. Many city dwellers eat fresh meat only rarely, and even then the choice is extremely limited (usually lamb, mutton, and fish).

Smoking requires the burning of wood. Alder, oak, and beech are preferred, but almost any hardwood can be used. The Finnar produce pine smoked reindeer, which smells much like modern kitchen pine deodorants and has a harsh, sooty taste.

Hot smoking both cooks and dries the flesh, making it the best form of long-term, smoke-fueled preservation, as well as a means of adding a little extra flavor. Temperatures within a hot smoke house must be kept between 165° and 185° F (74° to 85° C). Any lower and the food will not cook, while any higher risks shrinking the product (reducing its culinary yield) or causing it to split open. Cold smoking works at much lower temperatures (around 100° F (38° C)). While it adds much flavor, it does not actually cook the food, and thus is used only for very short term preservation. Cold smoking can also be used to help flavor cheese and vegetables.

Salting food involves covering it completely in salt. This not only draws out the moisture, but kills off many bugs. Most commonly used for pork and fish, salting is an expensive way of preserving meat unless one happens to live near a source of free salt.

Pickling uses the same process as for vegetables, and it most commonly used to preserve fish. (The author has

tried pickled herring from Norway, and it is not a food he would recommend, even if you're starving to death.)

The quickest way to preserve meat within a community is to freeze dry it. Involving little more than burying the food in snow until it freezes, it is a time-saving method. However, the food must be kept frozen (which means storing it outdoors), valuable nutrients are lost, and it must be defrosted before it can be eaten.

Fish is can be dried using the plentiful cold air and wind. The resultant product is known as stockfish. Gutted and scaled while fresh (usually the same day it is caught), the fish is hung on a triangular wooden frame for an entire month, either whole or halved. The process takes place during late spring and early fall in the Hearthlands, and in summer in the Low Winterlands. Since frost ruins the process (resulting in frozen fish), it is rarely ever used in the High Winterlands.

Adventurers' packs are typically filled with small jars of pickled vegetables, pots of animal fat, slabs of hard cheese, hot smoked meats, and stockfish, ingredients that will last for many months, if not years.

MEALS

Most citizens in Rassilon enjoy three meals a day, although quantities of food available vary immensely by community size as much as social class.

HEARTHLANDS

Breakfast is typically a thick barley or oat porridge, cooked overnight over the embers of the hearth or campfire. The rich might add honey for sweetness or salt to enhance the natural flavors. Both additives are largely unavailable to the common man, though this is where the location of one's community plays a part—salt is quite common in coastal communities, for instance. Other additions to the hearty stodge include fresh fruits in summer and early fall, preserved fruits over the winter, and maybe a few scraps of meat from the previous night. The division of meals into savory and sweet courses does not exist, and any or all of these additives may be found in the same bowl. Bread, cheese, and milk are also staples at breakfast.

The midday meal, known as lunch, is usually a simple affair. Hot meals take time to prepare and cook, and few can afford to take time from work. Citizens make do with meager strips of preserved meat, maybe some fresh fruit, more cheese, and more bread. Lunch is rarely ever a hot meal, even in winter, though a bowl of watery vegetable soup might be available. Milk and small beer are most commonly drunk, though in lands like Aspiria wine is the national drink.

The main meal of the day is the evening meal—dinner. Whereas lunch is a more personal affair, dinner is a social occasion, a time to catch up with friends and family, or to entertain guests. Dinner is a noisy affair, with a constant chatter of gossip and news among the poor, and skalds drowning out the conversations of the rich. Even in the

poorest homes, dinner can drag on for several hours, as the small talk continues into the night while the meal is digested.

Most families get by on slow cooked stew. Vegetables form the bulk of the meal, and finding more than a single chunk of meat or fish in your bowl is a fortuitous event (and often a cause of arguments). When times are good, a separate beast may be roasted as added protein. These stews are usually the "ever-lasting" variety. Around half the cauldron is eaten at any given dinner. New vegetables, meat, herbs, and water are then added to top up the pot ready for the next day.

Cheese and bread are also staples of the evening meal. Eggs may be available (either boiled or raw), as may a bowl of nuts, berries, and/or fruit. Stronger drink is served, though the very young or elderly are limited to milk or small beer.

Feasts are special dinners, laid on for certain holy days, to show one's wealth, and to entertain guests. While stew is always available, there is always extra meat served, even if the family has to slaughter a prized beast.

LOW WINTERLANDS

Life in the Low Winterlands is harder than that of the Hearthlands, yet there remains a noticeable growing season. Even using raised beds covered in a thick layer of compost, crops yields are smaller, and the produce often stunted due to early harvesting. As such, meat is a more important part of the diet, and few families do not own a small flock of sheep or goats (cows are expensive and need a lot of grazing land). Chickens are more common, as they are easy to feed and care for. Beyond that, meals are much the same as down south.

HIGH WINTERLANDS

With the ground frozen hard for almost the entire year, the High Winterlands is the land of high fat diets. While preserved meat from domesticated livestock is available from market towns in the Low Winterlands, much of the natives diet comprises birds, hares, and fish, along with root vegetables traded for skins and furs in summer. Seals and whales are hunted along the eastern coast, while the tough, resourceful natives of the Glittersands make a long trek west to hunt penguins each year.

Domesticated reindeer are rarely eaten, as they are the families' source of wealth. Polar bear liver is a great luxury, though it is consumed only in very small quantities—it is so rich in vitamin A that as little as 1 ounce (30 grams) can kill an adult human.

A few species of nuts and berries grow in the very short summer, and they are highly prized. Although perfectly edible in their own right, the Finnar view them as medicinal, for they help stave off the disease known as "old man's curse"—known in our world as scurvy. While a Finnar may call you friend is you gift him a metal weapon, he will probably let you marry his only daughter is you give him a pot of preserved fruit.