

FEAST DAYS OF TLÖN

a culinary RPG by Sam Kabo Ashwell

Players: 2 - 6

PREP

One player is the Host. The game doesn't have to take place at the Host's home, but they are the one responsible for coordinating the event and making sure that everyone is taken care of.

1. The Host invites you to a meal. They should give general parameters - 'this is just snacks', 'this is going to be a sit-down evening dinner' - and logistical information - 'you can use my kitchen to prep if you want, just as long as you don't show up more than an hour before the game', 'this is a picnic, so it's best if you make something that's easy to carry around in containers.'

2. If there are some things you're not OK with eating, let the group know in advance. Everybody should be happy to have at least a taste of every dish. The Host is responsible for making sure everybody's clear about this. Don't make a dish that someone can't have. If you're not sure, ask.

3. Each player makes and brings a dish. It can be as simple or as complicated as you want, an old favourite or a weird invention, but you do have to *make* it. Putting spray cheese on a toaster pastry or an ice cube into whiskey counts as 'making'. Opening a bag of chips doesn't.

Don't tell people what you're bringing. (If you're the Host holding a main meal, it's a good idea to make a substantial dish against the possibility that everyone else brings cocktails.)

4. Everybody brings their dish to the meal.

5. The Host, or anyone, can provide other food and drink at their discretion, but this is not part of the story, and none of the rules apply to it. One Dish per player; other food doesn't count as a Dish.

Real cultures matter more than fictional ones

Food means things in the real world; that's why this game is possible, and we can't entirely leave that behind. Part of the Host's job should be to check in with players about how they want to handle real-world cultures.

Emphasize that you're going to be completely transforming the cultural meanings of dishes, and that no one player will have control over that. You might not feel comfortable bringing foods that are very meaningful to you; or you might want to agree not to cook dishes from historically-exploited cultures not your own.

No foods are truly culture-neutral. If you can't figure out something that will make all the players comfortable, that's OK. Play something else together. That's part of the Host's job.

SETUP ON THE NIGHT

- 1.** Sit around a table, or on the floor, or somewhere where everybody can reach things.
- 2.** Every dish gets a character sheet. Place it somewhere near the food. Expect it to get stained.

Each contributor fills in up to 5 **ingredients** beside their own dish.

* They have to be actual ingredients you used.

* Don't be too specific. Rather than 'Himalayan pink salt', write 'salt.' Rather than 'wild Alaskan sockeye', go with 'salmon' or 'fish'. We'll add more details later.

* You don't have to list every ingredient. Go with ingredients you think might be interesting.

- 3.** Wait until everybody's settled, has a drink, and is done chatting about whatever else is going on with them. Snack on non-Dish things if you want but don't break into the actual Dishes. Then begin.

PLAY

1. Start with the player to the right of the Host. Play proceeds to the left, so the Host goes second.

2. The first player *invents and names the culture* that the entire meal comes from, and briefly states the meal's usual context. Examples:

** This is a very conservative version of a traditional funeral breakfast of the Sa Zae.*

** This is a lowbrow avant-garde creation at a hipster pub on the main concourse of Metterskil Hub spaceport.*

** This is a pretty typical family meal you'd see among diasporic Weris.*

** This is the seventeenth course of the Twenty Days Brunch, the most notoriously extravagant banquet of Jigo IV of the Rukh.*

You don't have to explain everything you refer to; if it's not defined, it's an invitation for someone else to define it.

3. The host welcomes everyone and declares the meal begun. If appropriate, pause briefly while everyone fills their plate. Everyone can now eat Dishes (if you want to wait, that's up to you).

4. Regular play continues to the left. On a turn, take one of the following Actions.

Whenever you take an Action on a dish, add a note to its character sheet.

ACTIONS ON DISHES

Flavour Notes. Taste a dish. Make a big deal out of it. Close your eyes in rapture, assume the critical affect of a veteran food critic, clap and holler, do *something*. Write down a word or a short phrase that the food evokes. You can go flowery ('a hint of sunshine on a childhood morning') or very simple ('fresh').

Ingredient. Choose a listed ingredient. Describe or expand upon its role in the world. Possibilities include:

- Give it a *more specific name*.
- *Where does it come from?* Is it local or exotic? Long-familiar or an exciting new thing?
- Is it *common or rare*? Expensive? High or low status?
 - If it's exotic, rare or new, are there *tall tales* about its discovery or production?
 - If it's commonplace, are there *old stories* that show its place in the world?
- *Symbolism*. In this context, does it have a symbolic meaning? Is it a
- *Virtue*. Food is imbued with values. Is the ingredient seen as wicked, wholesome, virtuous, authentic, unhealthy, indulgent or extravagant?

Creation. How old is this dish? Does it have a single, named inventor, or is it traditional? Is it based on earlier dishes? Are there stories about its origin?

Evolution. Play after Creation is established. How has the dish changed since its creation? Have ingredients been added or lost? Has its social role shifted?

Naming. After at least two people have taken an action on it, give the dish a formal name.

GENERAL ACTIONS

Etiquette. Declare a convention of polite table behaviour. Explain its implications - 'metal cutlery profanes the sacraments of Orta', 'only barbarians talk with their mouths full.'

Everyone has to start following this rule.

Be reasonable: if a rule turns out to be awkward, impossible or unpleasant to follow, agree to fix or withdraw it. Or you can:

Excuse. Etiquette is flexible. Come up with a reason why sometimes politeness isn't observed, or a circumstance that excuses you. This is a free action and can be taken by anyone after a player completes their turn. Players can choose to opt out of the rule (possibly by following some conditions).

ENDING THE GAME

The game ends when you feel the meal is done, or when someone has to leave. Thank your Host.

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