



# A Gastronomer's Guide to Talislanta

## Traveller's Edition

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# Chapter I - The Staples of Life

## Introduction

Sadly, many travelers are limited in their tastes, and are surprisingly unadventurous with foodstuffs given their dangerous pastime. As luck would have it, these poor fools are fortunate enough that a few staples of Talislantan cuisine are common almost throughout the continent. Unfortunately, they bear scrutiny for their importance, if not their tastes.

## The Staples

### Provender Plant

The humble provender, hardy and prolific in the extreme, is a taste known throughout the continent. Nearly always overlooked, the provender provides us with the grain for bread, and its grassy leaves are the fodder for much of our livestock.

Possessed of a "nutty" flavor and a texture like moist sponge, few aromas set the mouth watering like the smell of freshly baked provender bread. It is served with the majority of common meals, adding bulk and substance to any dish. Of course, it can become bland if over-baked, so many eateries add a touch of something extra so that each slice holds a few tasty morsels. Examples include spice, tiny pieces of fruit, vegetables, and even fish or meat. Cheap, filling, and often surprisingly satisfying, provender bread is the cornerstone of Talislantan civilization. Toasted, it makes a tasty snack.

### Provender Root

Sadly, where the grain makes for superb bread, the root is barely fit for animals. Although edible (and I use that term very loosely) it is potently bitter, leaving a foul, numbing after-taste that can only be removed with copious amounts of strong drink. Only the destitute lower themselves to consume it, and even they usually retch while doing so. Even livestock have the good sense not to eat it. In fact, the only beast that seems to have developed a taste for the wretched root is the Land Kra. It is typically baked in its skin, and it is incredibly cheap (its only redeeming feature).

### Provender Dumplings

Stew is obviously common around the continent, with any leftover scraps being thrown together and boiled. No Talislantan stew is complete without provender dumplings. Baking the flour in a rough ball shape with animal fat, the dumplings are crisped-off and added to the stew, soaking up some of the flavor. If any cook is really serious about his trade he will mix in some herbs or spices with the dumpling mix. Surprisingly, small dumplings are also very popular in Mandalan culture, but that will be covered in a later volume.

### Avir

Our winged friends are nothing if not commonplace, having adapted to most of Talislanta's variable climates. Of course, their meat varies, but is typically white in color, with a smooth texture. Strength of flavor varies enormously, as does the dryness of the meat, from the greasy (but succulent) flesh of the waterborne qwuk, to the dry flesh of the domestically raised, 6-legged kinchin. Indeed, it is truly astounding just how many meats taste like kinchin...

Served in an infinite variety of ways, avir is usually roasted. If any accusation can be leveled at the avir it is the accursed monotony of plucking them.

### Avir Eggs

As if their meat was not boon enough, avir eggs are a blessing to cooks everywhere. That smooth egg white and green yolk have adorned many a platter, and avir eggs have a rich taste quite unlike

anything else. Usually served poached or boiled, the humble kinchin egg is known throughout the realms, making a tasty snack when scrambled.

#### Durge

A common domestic livestock, the hulking but placid durge provide nearly 1000lbs of prime meat each. Indeed, even the liver, heart and tripe of the beast is commonly used, and its immense quantities of sweet marrow are scooped, roasted, and served in steaming slices. The meat is extremely thick, red and strong flavored, and is usually marinated before roasting to soften the flesh slightly. Dried strips of salted durge jerky form the basis of most trail rations, but even if you run out of provisions, durge are common enough in the wild, and make easy targets.

#### Erd Meat

It is actually uncommon to consume erd, for they are valued primarily for their milk producing qualities. As a result, most erd meat is from old stock, and is tough and chewy, with a weak flavor. At best, it is cheap.

#### Erd Milk

An uncommon beverage, erd milk is thick and creamy with a slightly "cheesy" aroma. Unsurprisingly its main use is the creation of erd cheese.

#### Erd Cheese

Possessed of varied flavor, erd cheese is found in a stunning number of varieties. Smoked Erd cheddar is extremely popular in Cymril, the cheese taking on a slight flavoring from the wood it is smoked with. The most popular (and expensive) smoking wood is from the spice tree, which gives the cheese a ginger tang. Texture varies greatly too, from the mild and crumbly Aarello of Aaman, to the zingy black pepper flavor of Zoldi in Zandu. Erd cheese is invariably served in slices with provender bread as a cold lunchtime menu.

#### Mudray

These murky-brown flatfish are found in nearly all the rivers, lakes, seas and oceans in and around the continent. Due to their abundance, and ability to survive in both fresh and salt waters, mudrays have become a staple of the Talislantan diet. Skinned and smoked, their soft white flesh is fresh and flavorsome, and fillets are often served with a herb and erd-cream sauce. The silverray, while smaller and almost indistinguishable in flavor, is regarded as somewhat of a delicacy simply because it looks more attractive, and is harder to come by.

#### Rock Urchin

The still live urchins are dropped into pans of boiling water, and served when their black shell starts to crack. Iron prying tools are used to pull open the steaming shell, allowing the diner to partake of the mildly flavored, succulent white flesh.

#### Grog

The alcoholic beverage of the unwashed masses, grog is the catchall (and in my opinion, well deserved) name given to the basest and cheapest alcohol of any region. Tastes range from sickening to bland, and the alcohol content varies from negligible to "one-tankard k.o.". I myself had the misfortune to try a grog in Arim that almost peeled the skin off the roof of my mouth. Chakos seemed a godsend thereafter. At best, grog is a cheap way to lose consciousness.

## Chapter II - The Seven Splendors

### Introduction

Greetings my fellow explorers of this vast expedition into the greatest of all Talislantan magicks: cuisine. Now that you are all familiar with the staples of this great continent (see [Chapter I](#)) we can proceed to explore the various national dishes of the many nations, a task which I undertook at great peril, but would repeat if demanded due to great personal courage and the selfless desire to further the knowledge of all sentients.

As the starting point of this culinary extravaganza, I have taken it upon myself to detail the most common and exotic sustenance available in this grand coalition known as the Seven Kingdoms.

Some of my vaunted colleagues may indeed be curious as to the truthful nature of this title, but each member nation's cuisine is indeed a splendor in its own unique way. Vardune, Cymril and Astar are indeed wonderful places for the discerning palate, and even Sindar turns up a few surprises, while I wonder why the natives of Durne, and especially Taz and Kasmir have any desire to live as their "cuisine" (and I use such a term with great reservation) leaves much to be desired.

### On the Dainty Dishes of Astar

One might wonder that the whisp-like and flighty Muses eat at all, but I have found their dishes to be surprisingly tasteful. If only they realized that two mouthfuls of food, however succulent, do not a meal make.

Dishes are served on thin, light, and beautifully carved plates, and are often garnished with a few attractive flowers, traditionally to be worn by the eater in their hair after consuming the meal, as a small sign of gratitude to the host. Unfortunately unaware of this fact, I ate several of these flowers, only to be chased away by a temperamental Muse, and suffer from stomach cramps for several hours afterwards.

It should be noted that Muses eat very little meat, and only white meats tend to agree with their delicate stomachs at all. In addition, they are not overly fond of cooking their dishes (except for the aforementioned occasional white meat), and as such their dishes are generally cold fruit salads. Various fruits are delicately sliced, often into fanciful shapes, and served in colorful and beautiful arrangements. These are often sprinkled with a touch of powdered candy (an extremely popular import from Dracarta), and nibbled upon with glee. In fact, the Muses have taken to candy with gusto, and many while away the hours of the day, nibbling contentedly on a candy stick. I fear it may become an addiction for this light-headed race, and it further disgusts me that no matter how much candy they consume, they never seem to gain any weight! Utterly and completely unfair.

The one (and only) meat they eat with any regularity is the humming bird, and several varieties of this colorful species are found throughout Astar. Even bearing this factor in mind, they never eat more than one bird at any meal, and never eat more than one a fortnight. The Muse method for catching these lightning quick flyers is simple and ingenious, out of all character for these simple-minded folk.

They spin extremely fine nets, and place these over the flowers that such birds commonly visit. The bird then flies around, tries to take a sip of nectar, and becomes hopelessly entangled. These birds are then cooked, wrapped in the leaves of herbs, by placing them under heated rocks. The bird is then served with its beautiful plumage as decoration. I found the humming bird to be a delicate morsel,

but after my second, my Muse hosts began to regard me with disgust and I was forced to ignore my still substantial hunger.

As one would expect, the beverages of Astar are as lightweight as their dishes, and only two are to be found. Their primary beverage is both simple and plentiful, consisting of the sweet fresh waters of their local lake Zephyr. The water is cool, refreshing, and amazingly free of detritus and parasites, but its merits end there for it possesses no alcoholic qualities and is therefore only suitable for the occasional drink if nothing more relaxing is available. Fortunately for my sanity during my stay in Astar there is a more appealing alternative: the fermented nectar of the polyp plant. Nectar is a sweet, light, sugary and delicious beverage, with an orange coloration and delicate aroma strongly reminiscent of flowers. Drunk from small thimble-sized goblets, it is regarded by the Muses as something to savor, and I would have to agree. However, they did take exception when I "savored" most of their small nectar-skin and fell into a warm and giddy stupor during which I am informed that I giggled incessantly. An appalling thought.

### **The Enchanted Experience that is Cymril**

Although I have traveled far and wide across this continent, it is with great pride that I note that few places are as sacred to the gastronaut as our home nation of Cymril! As sophisticated and intelligent cosmopolitans, we eschew much of the laborious farming that features in other areas, and import many of our foodstuffs from further afield. Of course, that does not mean we relegate ourselves to eating the same dishes as our dear neighbors if said dishes are boring. We Cymrilians use the ingredients to create magnificent morsels such as the other uneducated buffoons could not conceive of. In fact, it has become something of a fashion among my fellow countrymen to eat out, and trying foreign dishes is currently in vogue, albeit with a sorcerous twist.

We do however, have one notable local product that bears mention here: that very nectar of the Magister, aquavit. A truly wondrous drink, aquavit is light, bubbly, refreshing, and slightly sweet, with a vaguely phosphorescent green coloration that brings a warm glow to the heart. Distilled from the fruit of the vida tree, many of the orchards that travelers notice while approaching our great capital are dedicated to producing the fruit. Indeed, such is our great love of this fine drink that it is even used in many of our sauces, and the fruit itself (a large, lime-green sphere) is often served in slices as an appetizer.

We have applied our love of magic to every facet of our lives, and cuisine is no exception.

A recent hit among the youngsters of our populace is the alchemical Wizard-Fizz ("Wiz-Fizz"), a sweet tasting powder that fizzes, crackles and pops in a most pleasant way when placed on the tongue. Numerous street vendors now deal in this marvel, selling small bags for only a few coppers each.

Magic is also a prime ingredient in making meal times something more than the mere consumption of food. When eating out last night my roasted qwuk was enchanted to perform a little dance for me before I ate it, with the vegetables performing as backing dancers. My red hairy blum fruit sorbet floated over the tabletop without a glass, and my aquavit spurted like a fountain into my mouth on command.

Unsophisticated savages visiting Cymril are often scared by these antics, but I can safely assert that problems are extremely rare. In all my vast research I have heard of only one or two accounts where the meals attacked their eaters.

## The Deep Dishes of Durne

While I am especially fond of our child-like comrades, it pains me to speak of what passes for food among their people. I freely admit that their mushrooms are found in a number of varieties, and they have several fish to supplement their diet. Ultimately a mushroom, lichen and fish platter wearies the soul, and yet the poor deluded children seem to find this acceptable as a "bountiful" gift from Terra! Poor dear souls. My fellow colleagues, take pity on these, our misguided friends, and introduce them to more interesting foods whenever you can. The Magister knows, they are surely not worldly or mature enough to look after themselves.

The Gnomekin eat their food raw (as Terra intended), but exported fungi are usually lightly fried and seasoned with herbs, or used as ingredients in other dishes, and exported dried omo fish is only used in the most basic of meals.

As the staples of the Gnomekin diet, their many varieties of fungi deserve the greatest mention. Most common of all is the whitecap mushroom, distinguished by its large size, and bell-shaped cap. Farmed extensively by these industrious children it is sadly quite bland, and used by those of more discerning taste (such as ourselves) to bulk out less filling meals. In fact, such vast quantities are produced that whitecap is the major Durne export, and it is found in all the neighboring kingdoms.

Less common, but of greater quality are the rare purple puffballs (faintly phosphorescent, small, round purple mushrooms, that grow in clusters) with their faintly sweet flavor and moussy texture. Purple puffballs are a delicacy among the Gnomekin and maintain their phosphorescence even after cooking.

Two other common Durne fungi are the browncap and crimson inkwell. The browncap has a light, sharp flavor, and is recognizable for its small nut-brown cap, and thin, six inch long white stem. The crimson inkwell on the other hand is short, squat and thick, resembling a small red pot, and having a chewy texture with a strong and distinct flavor. Supplementing their diet of fungi are tubers harvested from below the ground, mol (a subterranean shallow-water kelp), omo fish (raised in pens in the shallows), rock urchin, and the occasional carnivorous render.

Mol is harvested in shallow pens at the edge of the great lake, and is deathly white, with long thin tendrils. It is cut and dried, and has a taste like strong spinach. It also forms an abundant export good, but in less quantities than the ever-present whitecap.

The ugly omo fish is the only animal that the softhearted Gnomekin farm, and they have created several fish farms at the lakes edges to raise these fish. Of course, such pens are often subject to attack by predators, so the fish-farmers rely extensively on skilled Gnomekin protectors to defend the livelihood of the nation. The fish itself is small (merely six inches in length) and white, with a disproportionately large head, no eyes, and numerous feelers surrounding the mouth. Few animals this side of an urthrax are so repugnant to behold. However, when you can bring yourself to eat one you'll find the flesh quite delicious. If only the Gnomekin would learn not to eat it raw, marinated in mushroom ale, or dried.

Steamed rock urchin is a welcome treat, with its tender flesh, and savory aroma. The occasional render is a delicacy among the Gnomekin but obtaining it is a risky and often lethal proposition. This large, vicious lungfish is quite capable of attacking foes in the water and on land, and is armed with vicious dagger-like teeth, and protected by hard metallic scales. It is considered something of a test of bravery for the best hunters and warriors to track them down and dispatch them. In addition this

brings monetary rewards because the metallic scales are favored by Gnomekin artificers in the crafting of armor. The render is often the focal point of a celebratory banquet, and has a strong, meaty flavor for a fish. I still assert that it would taste better cooked though.

While the Gnomekin drink a substantial quantity of water (how primitive) they do produce one alcoholic beverage of note. Mushroom ale is a thick pungent beverage with a pale murky brown coloration, thin "head", and unsurprisingly mushroom-like flavor. The poor misled Gnomekin regard it as flavorsome, but I found it utterly repulsive. If you like the idea of alcoholic, smelly, murky, mushroom soup I am sure that you will like it. If on the other hand the thought makes your stomach churn, the drink itself will make you decidedly ill. My advice? Carry a bucket, or maintain your dignity by avoiding the drink altogether. Fortunately, their young are possessed of superior tastes, and are especially fond of root syrup, thin, sweet syrup that can be drunk or used as an ingredient in the cooking of desserts. In fact, root syrup has acquired growing acceptance as an export good, and is gaining in popularity among youngsters throughout the Seven Kingdoms.

### **The Miserly Menu of the Kasmir**

Kasmir. Kasmir... Kasmiran "cuisine" has one (and only one) great feature worthy of mention; it is disgustingly cheap. The basic principle behind all Kasmiran cuisine is "waste-not, want-not", and believe this humble scribe when I tell you they waste nothing. Kasmiran food is, in general, as bitter and sour as the people themselves (my apologies to Adn Qbun, my financier and sponsor, who is of course an exceptionally generous and charismatic member of his race).

Prime cuts of meat are regarded as something of a luxury good among these misers, who consider offal to be the best bargain for their diet. Eyeballs are especially highly regarded as a symbol of watchfulness, and for their high water content. I myself found it quite disconcerting to see half a dozen eyeballs glaring up at me from the plate, and must confess that my Kasmiran "hosts" showed exceptional glee when I informed them I was no longer feeling hungry. In keeping with their absolute hatred of waste, they make a point of devouring nearly every possible part of a carcass, and think nothing of eating the tough, tasteless flesh of an aged aht-ra when it finally expires.

Loathe to spend money purchasing "expensive" imported foodstuffs, the Kasmir pay a few desperate farmers to operate on their land producing crops of bitter desert greens. These bitter-tasting plants have thick leaves that must be boiled extensively before becoming edible, and are served in slices, with the boiled water served in a mug after being allowed to cool. I found this to my dismay after trying to wash away the bitter taste of the greens, only to find that the water was equally bitter. To make matters worse, they pickle what they do not immediately eat, and pickled bitter greens are sour enough to make a Yassan's face screw up into a wrinkled ball. Far from alleviating my revulsion, the lump of hard, rancidly pungent cheese they offered me - called kasmara - merely served to make me feel entirely wretched.

To bulk out their offal and bitter greens, the Kasmir use flatbread, coarse black bread and sourdough. Flatbread is unleavened (yeast is obviously a costly "luxury"), and sourdough uses the cost-effective "soured" (gone-off) milk instead of precious water. Flatbread is abysmally bland, while sourdough has all the flavor and appeal of slightly rancid milk. Needless to say the Kasmir were extremely "disappointed" that my appetite had been shattered completely. However, my dogged determination paid off when at last they came to presenting the "dessert". Presented with much show and expectation of gratitude was a small (stingy) dish of dates and nuts, "painstakingly" picked from the nearby desert sands. My hunger rekindled, I consumed the dates and nuts with aplomb, only to find myself with a voracious appetite and gazing at an empty dish. I wish I could say that this had



extinguished my hunger, but I have yet to meet a sentient who believes that two nuts and two dates makes for a fulfilling meal.

But the Kasmir do possess one comestible of true worth: mochan. Brewed from ground, dark brown mocha beans, mochan is served hot and sweet, and, despite being non-alcoholic, has remarkable qualities. Attempting to drown my hunger with mochan, I gazed up after my second cup into the scowling faces of my hosts. Tossing a pentacle onto the tabletop, their disposition improved greatly, and I was able to indulge myself in cupfuls of this fine liquid. After two days of hyperactivity and edginess I was still unable to sleep. With the great wisdom of hindsight I strongly recommend moderation when drinking this addictive and invigorating beverage. In fact, it was only after leaving my Kasmiran "hosts" that I was informed it is somewhat common practice for the Kasmir to ply some of their employees with the drink in order to garner more working hours and increased productivity.

### **The Savories of Sindar**

Our cerebral contemporaries the Sindarans face numerous hardships which force them to import a full two thirds of their foodstuffs. Firstly, the land they inhabit is rocky and barren, and secondly there is little space to grow crops on the mesa-tops. However, being a folk of most singular intellect, they have devised ways to overcome these problems to a degree.

With their great alchemical prowess (second only to the grand magicks that make Cymril the premier nation) they have created artificial "soils" in which vegetables and fruit can grow, and alchemical fertilizers to promote growth in the absence of suitable weather and conditions. This has led to a surprising diversity in what little food they do produce, and several varieties of Vardune produce are commonly grown. In addition, they have set up several small whitecap farms in the tunnels that riddle the mesa, and these have proved quite successful.

The Sindarans lead vegetarian diets, although they supplement this with powdered crystal and minerals; necessary elements for their alien biologies, which are typically imported from Durne. Needless to say, I had no intention of consuming powdered rock.

Unfortunately water is a rare commodity and is rationed tightly when drawn from the wells deep within each settlement. Given its rarity, the Sindarans have formulated numerous alchemical cleansing agents, both for personal use, and to dispose of waste. But then again, who cares for water when you can drink skoryx?

Skoryx is a delectable beverage distilled from the rainbow lotus, and should be conserved for truly deserving and intelligent people (such as myself). Who but a sophisticated mind could truly appreciate the constantly shifting flavor and its many subtle nuances? Clear, iridescent and constantly changing from tangy to sweet, and spicy to sour, I can truthfully state that skoryx is the most interesting and unique tipple on the continent. I can also account for its potency after being left by chance to "inspect" a small barrel. I was found several hours later, swinging merrily from a crane and chanting lewd limericks the like of which I cannot write in this tome.

### **The Taste of Taz**

Utterly sick of the strong vegetarian bias of Astar and Sindar I had set out for Taz in eager anticipation of a meat feast. Thralls, being a race engineered for warfare, eat a diet consisting almost entirely of meat.

To gain the best nutritional value, these colorful clones often eat their meat raw, and after eagerly expecting a roast I was presented with a quivering hunk of bloody flesh. Turning a peculiar shade of yellow I spent the next ten minutes leaning over a small bush examining the half-digested remains of my trail rations.

Not in the least perturbed, my Thrall hosts gorged themselves messily on the recently slain erd, while I stole away with a chunk and roasted it myself.

Several beasts are commonly slain for food by the highly proficient Thrall hunters; these include erd, as well as numerous varieties of swamp-dwelling rodent and serpis. The blood of a fresh kill is often drunk, and the bones are cracked open in order to devour the nutritious marrow.

Having absolutely no interest or desire to farm or raise food, or to prepare and cook food, the Thralls will typically eat nearly anything without complaint, including the most foul-tasting and wretched of foods. It seems that Thralls are somewhat lacking in the senses of taste, so only the strongest of flavors have any appreciable sensations for them. This is one reason why the magma like fire-ale is considered palatable by these monotonous clones.

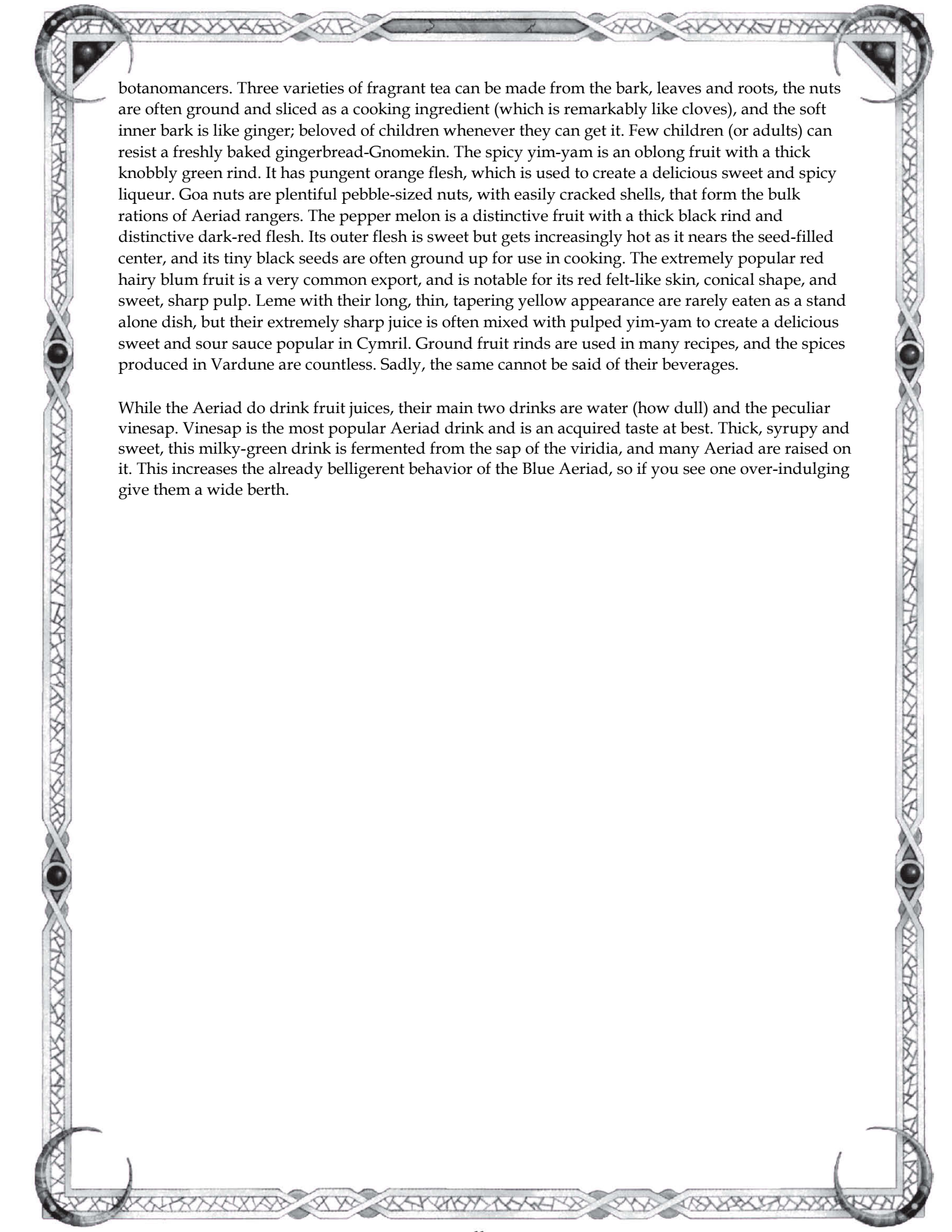
Thrall requisitioners typically gather anything remotely edible and dry it, creating less perishable rations, which are sadly devoid of all but the most meager taste, and are considered unpalatable by all but the most unintelligent of creatures (Thralls included). Thralls do not seem to care, having little regard for food beyond its use as sustenance.

Decidedly miserable after several dried strips of durge, and my small roasted hunk of erd, I decided to drown my sorrow with the Thralls as they sat at the campfire. Gratefully taking an iron mug I thoughtlessly guzzled, only to howl as my mouth was singed and magma surged down my throat. I awoke several hours later, sprawled on my back with several concerned looking Thralls peering down at me. Tazian fire-ale (for such was the nature of the magma) is brilliant crimson in color and ignited prior to drinking. It inflicts a powerful burning sensation when drunk and is one of the most potent alcoholic beverages in Talislanta. Unless you have the iron constitution, toughness, and dulled tastebuds of a Thrall you drink it at your own peril.

### **The Varied Vittles of Vardune**

Vardune is a culinary jewel if your tastes veer towards the vegetarian. The extremely proficient Aeriad botanomancers and horticulturists have been able to create numerous unique strains of plant, all carefully tailored to interact with, rather than alter, the local environment. All shapes, colors, sizes and flavors of fruit, nut and vegetable can be found here, and several enterprising botanomancers even create custom fruit to order in any size, shape or flavor the customer desires. Such "one-off" creations are made without the ability to propagate however. The Aeriad have even imparted certain special qualities to some of their produce, an example of which is the red hairy blum fruit with its reduced rate of spoilage. Every plant from every corner of Talislanta can be found somewhere in Vardune, and if it is edible they eat it. Primarily vegetarian, the Aeriad eat most of their produce raw, their only meat is the occasional boiled giant waterbug which is served as a delicacy and centerpiece at feasts. Bright red when boiled, they have pulpy steaming innards, and delicious white flesh. Quite why these avians do not eat them more frequently is beyond me.

The viridia tuber from their most sacred (and useful) tree is perhaps their largest export, being ground into flour for baking. It can even be baked whole making a passable (although bland) accompaniment to a meal. Spice trees are also highly regarded, and a matter of great pride to the



botanomancers. Three varieties of fragrant tea can be made from the bark, leaves and roots, the nuts are often ground and sliced as a cooking ingredient (which is remarkably like cloves), and the soft inner bark is like ginger; beloved of children whenever they can get it. Few children (or adults) can resist a freshly baked gingerbread-Gnomekin. The spicy yim-yam is an oblong fruit with a thick knobby green rind. It has pungent orange flesh, which is used to create a delicious sweet and spicy liqueur. Goa nuts are plentiful pebble-sized nuts, with easily cracked shells, that form the bulk rations of Aeriad rangers. The pepper melon is a distinctive fruit with a thick black rind and distinctive dark-red flesh. Its outer flesh is sweet but gets increasingly hot as it nears the seed-filled center, and its tiny black seeds are often ground up for use in cooking. The extremely popular red hairy blum fruit is a very common export, and is notable for its red felt-like skin, conical shape, and sweet, sharp pulp. Leme with their long, thin, tapering yellow appearance are rarely eaten as a stand alone dish, but their extremely sharp juice is often mixed with pulped yim-yam to create a delicious sweet and sour sauce popular in Cymril. Ground fruit rinds are used in many recipes, and the spices produced in Vardune are countless. Sadly, the same cannot be said of their beverages.

While the Aeriad do drink fruit juices, their main two drinks are water (how dull) and the peculiar vinesap. Vinesap is the most popular Aeriad drink and is an acquired taste at best. Thick, syrupy and sweet, this milky-green drink is fermented from the sap of the viridia, and many Aeriad are raised on it. This increases the already belligerent behavior of the Blue Aeriad, so if you see one over-indulging give them a wide berth.

## Chapter III - Western Wonders

### Introduction

Salutations my fellow gourmets and aficionados of the comestible experience. I must apologize for the delay in the publication of this, the third chapter, but a brief respite was necessary after my travails in Taz. I had severe indigestion for a period of several days.

Stomach settled and revitalized after some much-needed recuperation, I began the first leg of my further travels, acquiring passage by barge from Vardune to Shattra. Presented here for your delectation are my findings. While a few of you may be disappointed at the reduced length of this manuscript, I can only apologize and assure you there is good reason. Only by keeping moving can I maintain distance between myself and the Witch-Hunters of Aaman.

### Author's Note

Before commencing with this discourse, I find it necessary to write a diatribe about that nation of proselytizers, Aaman. As I am now considered a heretic, I have little fear of alienating them further, as the Witch-Hunters are already on my trail.

Avoid that nation of narrow-minded, ignorant and self-flagellating buffoons. Both they and their cuisine are empty, colorless, unfulfilling and bland, as is the deity they worship.

### Of Acrid Arim

Disembarking from the viridia barge onto the docks of the Creator-forsaken and wretched pit known as Shattra, I was immediately struck by the filth and acrid stench of the trade town. I also noted with alarm that the people there watched me with a mixture of suspicion and jealousy, ensuring I remained vigilant, lest I should inadvertently attract someone's ire and the attention of the Revenants. I made with all haste for the nearest inn.

The inn was raucous with the sounds of a violent brawl, caused by Arimites who had drunk far too much chakos. Bizarrely, no one paid them any heed, as if drinking was an excuse for poor behavior. Such a primitive people. I neatly avoided the leering, foul-mouthed miners, and ordered a mug of chakos, shouting to be heard over the din. The inn became utterly silent, as they all turned to gawk at me in surprise and amusement, before returning to their sullen drinking, and violent brawling.

Served in a grimy, black-iron mug, the liquid inside fizzed slightly and had a sharp aroma that curled the nose. Taking a substantial swallow, so as to avoid any interpretation that the national drink of Arim was beneath me, I forced a broad, toothy smile as my stomach and tastebuds rebelled. I maintained that same fixed grin for several minutes, and the Arimites must have assumed I was a harmless simpleton, for they relaxed visibly.

Chakos is murky purple-blue, as bitter as freshly squeezed leme, and as metallic as a rusty nail. As I overbalanced slightly on my stool, I also realized it was extremely potent.

The bloated barkeep raised one quizzical eyebrow when I asked for a menu, and offered me the "chef's special". How could I possibly refuse? I certainly wish I had. A grubby iron plate was placed in front of me bearing a few half-baked provender roots, barely cooked roast avir, runny cheese, a thin gruel, and a few chunks of oil-dripping greasy meat. I have rarely felt so wretched, and my face began to ache painfully after grinning forcibly for the entire foul meal.

The meat was thoroughly repulsive, having been deep-fried in dripping, making it heavy and unpleasant. The fat coated my tongue and the roof of my mouth, making me nauseous. Chakos seemed entirely more preferable as a gastronomic experience.

Due to scarce natural resources, and a sullen, moody culture, the Arimites have little inclination to experiment with cookery, usually either over or under-cooking their food to a horrendous degree. Avir, a handful of durge, and the occasional tundra beast from the hills (which after the Arimite cooking process tastes like a greasy chunk of lard, just like any meat they cook) are fairly common. Provender is present in Arim, as it is nearly everywhere, although the local pollution means it is sparse and stunted. Mashing or roasting are their most common cooking methods, and occasionally they blend the resulting mush into a sickly, bittersweet stew, possibly adding a few chunks of fatty meat or dripping. How utterly vulgar.

I do warn against trying any local grog, as by all accounts it is infinitely viler than Chakos (see [Chapter I - The Staples of Life](#)).

If you wish to cultivate the sour and ugly mien of the Arimite people, I recommend eating their food as a step in the right direction. Having secured my reputation in Shattrra as a mindless simpleton (but, a "live" simpleton, I might add), I departed Shattrra for Aamahd, with the firm belief that things couldn't get any worse.

### **On Abstinent Aaman**

Upon arriving in Aamahd via a tributary of the Axis River from Shattrra, it has to be noted that my initial impressions were far from favorable, as I was made to feel distinctly unwelcome in this most dour of nations. Sadly, the situation was set to deteriorate.

Making enquiries as to a suitable eating establishment, I was tersely directed under escort to a small hostel "suitable for unclean and unenlightened infidels". The building itself, squat, square, white-washed and unadorned was obviously in poor repair, but I am open-minded enough to avoid the assumption that this must reflect on the food. I must make a mental note to pay closer attention to appearances in future. Not all are inaccurate.

Draughty and poorly lit, the hostelry was an exercise in bleak minimalism. I sat at a crude and roughly hewn wooden table, receiving several splinters from the chair in my haste. There I was served with great reluctance by a bald old morde of an Aamanian.

The platter offered, I am sad to say, was typical Aamanian fare, but this is of course the focus of my expedition. Mashed and blanched provender is served at every meal as the bulk of their food, and accompanied by bland, extra thin wafers of unleavened bread. Thin, measly slices of boiled erd or durge meat, with a small wedge of dull and tasteless white Aarello cheese, round out the meal. I believe vellum and parchment hold more tantalizing flavor.

Paying the exorbitant cost for this enthusiasm-sapping "meal", I hinted to the proprietor that alcohol might help me forgive his lack of culinary expertise. Recoiling in horror, he almost screamed at me. How was I to know that alcohol and all other intoxicants are expressly forbidden? I was later to learn that the Aamanians must be ever alert for signs from Aa, and therefore such distractions as taste, color, and mild inebriation cannot be tolerated. Being told in no uncertain terms that Aa-given water would be my only tippie, I began to sulk in unseemly fashion. It was then that I was approached by a friendly Zandir merchant, name of Zabarillo.

While the proprietor was otherwise busy, Zabarillo began to cheer my spirits, hinting comically that the Hierophant was a quaga-licking sycophant. Laughing, I heartily agreed, adding several colorful and scandalous insults of my own on the nature of Aa, Aaman, the Aamanian people, and their possible relationships with the excrement-eating urthrax. Excusing himself for the night, Zabarillo bid me farewell and left. I retired then, to a cold and uncomfortable bed.

During a midnight excursion to the toilet facilities, there was a tremendous ruckus, and I peered out of the commode to witness several armed Warrior-Priests, commanded by Zabarillo, break into my room. I fled, and escaped from Aaman, minus many of my belongings. Luckily, I met up with a Sarista gypsy caravan, who were gracious enough to take me under their wing.

I was later to learn that "Zabarillo" was actually an undercover Orthodoxist, trained to "encourage" visitors to speak their minds and therefore damn themselves to the Halls of Penance for treason and heresy.

### **The Succulence of Silvanus**

Having no currency and possessions to speak of after my narrow escape in Aaman, I was fortunate indeed to happen across a Sarista caravan. They helped rescue me, and took me to Silvanus to partake of their hospitality.

I was made to feel welcome during the week I spent dwelling amid their colorful tents, although I did have to aid the children in various mundane chores, such as collecting firewood and gruffan dung. The little hellions were constantly jumping about, climbing all over me, and badgering me for stories. My only reprieve from the tireless brats was the single evening I spent in Werewood with a white Dhuna coven, when I was invited to attend a feast by a Dhuna called Dharus who was visiting the Sarista camp.

Come evening, large bonfires had been erected, and the day's hunt and forage prepared. Sarista food, while far from extravagant, is wholesome, tasty and honest (the latter attribute of which is seldom associated with these folk). Roasted meats such as durge and avir are particularly common, and served with herbal salads and mushrooms. Flavorful Erd cheddar cheese, curdled from the milk of their clan's few domesticated erd, is well received, and roasted provender is as sickeningly common here as anywhere else in Talislanta. A few spices from the uncommon spice tree are generally reserved to flavor old meat, or to produce the rare treat for the clan's children. A Sarista child gnawing on the ginger-like bark of a spice tree is a happy child indeed.

However, one victual does bear mention. It was at the Sarista bonfire that I first tried feather dractyl, and found, perhaps unsurprisingly, that it tastes like kinchin.

Despairing of my lack of alcohol, I was startled and relieved to be offered some hearty alquine ale (tapped from the Alquine Tree), that I found to be stout, be mild in flavor. In addition, I was offered some fine blue pomegranate wine from Zandu, and, oh rapture, a tippie of aquavit. Apparently the Sarista do appreciate the finer things in life, and alcohol is something they often trade for, or otherwise "acquire".

About a week after my evening with the Dhuna, I accompanied the caravan to Zandu, where they were to set up camp in Zanth's Sarista ghetto.

### **The Delectables of the Dhuna**

I consider myself blessed indeed to have made the friendship of Dharus, a Dhuna White Witch whom I met while staying in the Sarista camp. Aware of my culinary quest, he invited me to accompany him to Werewood, and partake of what he called "the humble Dhuna fare". Although reluctant to leave my Sarista saviors, I accepted his generous offer. It was to prove an excellent decision.

Every evening, the members of each specific coven hold a small banquet to celebrate life. Each day, the Dhuna spend several hours gathering what food they can in preparation for the night's feast. All of the coven's member's fruits are then gathered, and a feast created.

Sat at a long, low slab of polished stone, I watched as the banquet was offered up in thanks to nature, before being laid upon the table-slab. Rightful gratitude having been expressed for nature's bounty, the feast began.

As much a social gathering as anything else, the Dhuna were friendly and generous. Dishes of roasted wild mushrooms, seasoned with forest herbs; slices of roasted provender stuffed with the savory buds of the fernwood. Following these savories were platters of succulent wild berries, but most exceptional were the Dhuna plates themselves; or rather, their lack of same, as the Dhuna eat their food straight off the slab. No knives and forks are to be found, so you are expected to use your fingers and tuck in. Surprisingly, the Dhuna had provided just enough food to leave everyone content, without producing so much that any food is wasted.

Smiling somewhat mischievously, an attractive female witch offered to show me what she termed "their sweetest dish"... I awoke somewhat sore and disheveled, and reluctantly left, vowing to return sometime, hopefully with some fine bottles of aquavit. Their food is certainly delectable, but they really should drink something beyond water.

### **The Zest of Zandu**

Bidding my Sarista friends a heartfelt farewell when they left me at Zanth, I was pleasantly surprised to find a plump purse of coinage had been hidden in the cloak they had given me. Anyone who speaks poorly of the Sarista within earshot of me will receive a sound ear bending, or my name isn't Ebullo the Extravagant of Cymril.

Proceeding with all the speed and urgency of a Kasmiran who has spied an untended coin, I made my way through colorful and chaotic streets. As a people very much dedicated to enjoying themselves, it should come as no surprise that the food of Zandu is tasty, exotic, and varied. Market stalls sell freshly roasted and spiced erd, durge, avir, mudray, rainbow kra and angorn. Local fruits, such as the sweet blue pomegranate abound, and are often distilled into fruit wines and cordials. All of the staples are present of course, though most are given lavish garnishes of spices, herbs, fungi and alcoholic sauces. The most popular cheese is zoldi, an erd cheese made with pulped black peppers which is added to the milk before the cheese is curdled, and gives it a black coloration and zingy bite.

The Zandir are especially fond of something they have dubbed "fast-food", referring to dishes that are tasty, yet quick to prepare and eat, such as spiced provender fries. An extremely popular dish is "zash"; sold throughout all Zanth's eating establishments, and many food stalls. It consists of lightly spiced provender fries, accompanied by a spicy sauce filled with chopped mushrooms, diced meat,

or both. In fact, nearly every establishment and family has a traditional recipe for the sauce, the secrets of which are known by no one else.

One fairly well known practice among the hot-blooded Zandir is the use of aphrodisiac elixir, blended into food or drink to "spice up" an evening, a prime example of which is chima, a tasty erd cheese "flavored" with powdered tantalus root. I discovered this fact while visiting a hospitable establishment known as "The Caged Skank", wherein I managed to interview a Jaka manhunter bitch as regards the food of her people. Following my dialogue with the Jaka, I was invited to dine with a delightful Zandir couple, both of whom seemed fascinated by my "exotic" Cymrilian looks. With much laughter, and no little innuendo, I related my travails in Aamahd, and ate and drank the offered dishes quite eagerly. Beyond that my memory is a haze, for I awoke the next morning to find myself disheveled and in a state of undress, in a bedroom unknown to me, the Zandir couple on either side. Needless to say, I quietly donned my scattered apparel, and quickly left, at once annoyed and relieved that I could not remember the previous night's escapades.

Nearly every dish available, and a few that are not, can be found in Zandu, and new, often strange, recipes are created daily. More than anything else, the Zandir like to experiment, very occasionally to the detriment of their customer's digestive system. It was with mixed feelings that I left Zanth, taking berth on a ship called the Fountain of Dust, bound for a voyage across the Sea of Sorrow to the isle of Castabulan.

#### **Jaka Victuals**

*Author's Note:* The following information was gleaned from an interview with a Jaka Manhunter bitch (female), known as Kana that I met while spending an evening in The Caged Skank in Zanth. I have attempted to relate what she told me in her own words (sans her growling dialect), for I did not try their comestibles myself, much to my delight.

"You Archaens do not know how to eat well. You burn your meat until it loses all the flavor of life, and add spices and sauces that overpower the flavor of the food itself, as well as assaulting our delicate sense of smell. You tell me, why buy expensive meats, only to disguise their flavor? You use silly little tools to cut and hold your food, and you think it makes you civilized, even though we Jaka laugh at it, for we are honest enough to eat our food with our hands. You eat food that you have not killed yourself, that you have not earned with your own skill, that you have not witnessed die. You do not associate the animals with what you eat, and that means you do not truly appreciate what you eat. That is sad, for we Jaka eat the meat we have hunted with reverence, for the animal has died so that we may live. It makes the meal important, and the meat sweeter. It also means we do not waste like you Archaens, for that would be selfish and disrespectful. We hunt the muskront, with its tough red flesh, and the tundra beast with its hot metallic blood. The avir we fell with arrows, pluck (keeping the feathers for arrow flights), and devour. To eat the heart while it is still warm is a sign of respect for the animal's sacrifice, and we drain their blood into a flask, drinking it like you would savor the finest wines. Fermented grapes! Bah! Where is the life in that? We eat well, for the livers, heart, flesh, tongue, even the eyes and brains are all edible, and our rasping tongues allow us to scrape the flesh off the bones, and hook the sweet marrow from within them. We eat the freshest berries, fruits, and buds, picked straight off the trees and bushes where they were living only moments before. They are fresh, full of life, unlike the fruits you pickle and preserve. We gather grasses that act as purgatives, and keep ourselves healthy, and we are not so foolish as to avoid tasty grubs or insects, many of which taste like kinchin. You Archaens are so foolish, but we Jaka know that the way you eat is not a sign of intelligence, but of affectation and ignorance".



## The Comestibles of Castabulan

Entirely too eager to set foot on solid ground following the short voyage from Zanth (during which I spent most of my time scurrying to the ship's railings in order to divest the contents of my queasy stomach). Upon arrival, I staggered almost delirious onto the beach of the tiny isle, cackling with joy, before throwing myself onto the golden sands with abject relief. Gazing up from my prone position, I saw that I had prostrated myself unceremoniously at the feet of a staggering tall and thin fellow with amber hair and a bemused expression. Gathering the fragments of my dignity, I stood up shakily, and informed him why I had arrived, while a comrade of his escorted the jocular Captain Zirago Vey to the interior of their complex.

Salaestram, for such was the individual's name, helped me inside, and promised that he would happily introduce me to the humble faire that is Castabulanese cuisine, just as soon as the community settled down for dinner in a few short hours, providing that I was willing to discuss my travels to date. Protesting that surely such a discourse would surely prove monotonous, Salaestram reassured me that any information about the outside world was welcome, such was the tedium of existence on the small isle.

Somewhat settled and cleaned up, I was seated a few hours later at the community's evening banquet, where I was to preside as guest of honor. Roasted provender with erd's cheddar was served with hard-baked provender bread as a side dish, while oysters were served as an appetizer, along with raw eels pickled in vinegar, a dish I found quite revolting. Steamed mudray and fish platters were laid out, arranged around a nar-eel centerpiece, the majority of which I found acceptable, if uninspiring. Spiced grain bakes were served as dessert with whipped erd's cream, and stood as the only truly enjoyable part of the menu. Blue pomegranate wine accompanied the otherwise dull meal, and I discovered that it was customary for visiting sea captains to bring a few bottles as gifts to the Castabulanese. While relating my tale, Zirago constantly commented that my quest was a "cushy number", and spat vehemently (right into the oyster dish, though considering the phlegm-like taste and consistency of oysters, I'm sure no one noticed) at my mention of the Aamanians. My overly attentive Castabulanese hosts quizzed my incessantly for more details, until, too tired to continue, I was shown to a hammock, steeling myself for my depart for the Southern Rim on the morrow.