

SOCIAL CUSTOMS

BACKGROUND NOTES

Much has been said about the races and cultures of Rassilon. The material produced, however, has been an overview, looking at the larger picture and most important aspects. This free document zooms in on some of the nuances and unusual customs of the various people.

ARMS & SPELL ETIQUETTE

In some fantasy games, the laws of the land rarely interfere in the lives of aspiring heroes. They stroll around towns like they're on the battlefield and cast magic willy-nilly. *Hellfrost* is not one of those games. Mighty heroes they may be, but the player characters are expected to obey both the laws of the land and acceptable social behavior. They don't have to like it.

WEAPON ETIQUETTE: HOMES

It is a universal custom that guests do not wear armor or carry weapons in their host's house. Doing so implies you do not trust your host to keep you safe or that you suspect he may break hospitality and try to cause you harm. Daggers are an exception to the rule, as they are used when eating.

Obviously there are exceptions to this rule. A person who has recently arrived is given time to say his greetings before being expected to strip off his armor. A nobleman beholden to a superior is likely to be allowed to retain a sword in his master's hall as a sign of trust and fealty, as are his bodyguards. Clerics of Tiw feasting in their temple are rarely unarmed and do not look down on guests who retain their weapons. Weapons and armor may be permitted if the household is under threat of attack, but this requires the permission of the host.

Conversely, weapons should never be too far away. As a guest, one is expected to defend both one's host and his home should the need arrive. Typically, weapons are left by the door, either in the care of a servant or, in the homes of commoners, leaned up against a wall for easy access.

WEAPON ETIQUETTE: SETTLEMENTS

When travelling between settlements, being heavily armed and having your weapons ready to draw at a

moment's notice is prudent. The settlements themselves, however, are safe zones and etiquette exists concerning armor and weapons.

Armor is designed for one purpose—to protect the wearer from harm in battle. Regardless of the encumbrance rules, metal armor is not designed to be worn all day, nor is it a fashion statement. Leather armor isn't as comfortable as regular clothing, but few people will raise an eyebrow at someone wearing it. Go shopping in chain or plate, though, and people start to get worried. Does this armored customer know something the shopkeeper doesn't about an imminent attack? Is he going to cause trouble? As a general rule, wearing metal armor for prolonged periods in any settlement not under threat of attack attracts attention and raises suspicions.

Weapons are a different matter. Daggers are universal tools and are often used when eating. Maces, axes, and swords are instruments of battle designed to maim and kill. In a settlement, they should be sheathed, encased in a leather covering (such as with axes and spears), or otherwise set to prevent them being used in a hurry (such as through a "peace knot"). Drawing such a weapon requires a full round and even Quick Draw requires an action.

Walking around with a drawn or unguarded weapon is a surefire way of attracting the city watch. Questions will be asked and time will be wasted. Sassing the watch or threatening them is going to lead to arrests, time in jail, and possibly more serious charges.

Even if the watch don't respond, walking around with a drawn weapon (except a dagger) earns a -2 Charisma penalty—ordinary people get very nervous around things designed to kill them.

SPELL ETIQUETTE

Whether noble who retains a song mage in his retinue or peasant who has only heard of wizards in travellers' tales, everyone knows that magic exists. More importantly, they know what it is capable of. Except in the Magocracy, where a mage-noble may do pretty much whatever he wants in his own lands, neither fact gives a mage *carte blanche* to walk around with active Maintained spells.

In the eyes of the people and the authorities, sorcerers Maintaining spells, especially defensive ones such as

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armor and *deflection*, are trouble. Either they don't trust the authorities to protect them (potentially making them vigilantes), or they're expecting trouble. Maintained offensive spells, such as *smite* or *sphere of might*, are likely to result in a hue and cry. Being *invisible* can mean only that you're a thief at best or an assassin at worst.

Thanks to trappings, it is actually quite difficult to hide most spells. Obviously no one is going to miss a flaming weapon imbued with *smite*, but even "invisible" spells, such as *deflection* with a wind trapping, come with drawbacks. Snow is kicked up, loose debris is knocked aside, and people who brush pass the sorcerer are buffeted by the protective wind. More than one mage has been chased away by angry shopkeepers after walking into a shop and sending the goods scattering in all directions.

ENGROS & SHOES

Invite an engro into your house and the first thing he is likely to do is take off his shoes or boots. Similarly, if he invites you into his abode he will immediately gesture to the pile of shoes and boots inside the door.

Among a race renowned for its hospitality, keeping your footwear on implies that you don't intend to stay for long. That in turn implies, in their eyes at least, that the hospitality is (or is likely to be) poor. Asking an engro to keep his boots on is deeply insulting, being a direct statement that you won't be expecting him to stay long or be offering him any form of hospitality.

Other races and cultures don't tend to have piles of boots lying around or remove their footwear just because they are indoors. Those accustomed to dealing with engro welcome their short guests with a courteous "Take your boots off," which means the guest is welcome and will receive hospitality.

This custom has given rise to several common phrases among engros. Saying "I won't take my boots off" as soon as you enter one's house is the equivalent of "I can't stay long." It immediately tells your host that his hospitality is in no way being besmirched, though it won't stop him offering you a drink or light meal. "My shoes are calling" is the engro way of saying "I'm leaving now." It can also be used to signify the start of any journey.

Having spent many decades as nomads, a lifestyle some families still maintain to this day, engro often refer to one's shoes instead of the wearer. Asking "How are your shoes?" is an off-hand way of asking "What have you been up to recently?" Saying "Your boots look good" actually means "You look well."

GREETINGS & FAREWELLS

Whether insular frost dwarves or extrovert engros, polite people greet each other, if only as a token gesture. Likewise, there are stock phrases used in place of the more modern "hello" and "goodbye."

These notes apply in settlements and among friends. Out in the wilds, it is always wise to be wary of strangers and gather as much information as possible. Thus, the

typical gesture is to be prepared for battle without coming across as aggressive (such as drawing your weapon in advance of greetings) and then ask the stranger to identify himself. Assuming he does so, the polite thing is to then introduce yourself.

ANARI

While the Anari know all the terms for the various times of day (such as dawn, morning, noon, etc.), greetings refer to just two—day and night. When the sun is up, they greet each other by asking "How goes the day?" When it is down, this is replaced with "How goes the night?" If the other person does not wish to engage in length conversation he may merely nod in reply or say "Well." Adding "And you?" is a request for further dialogue, although it may warrant only a "Well" in return.

Whereas Saxa typically raise their right arm to signal a greeting, Anari sweep their arm low and to the side as a greeting. This is often accompanied with a low bow if the other person is of higher social rank.

Farewells also refer to day and night. A simple "Good day" or "good night" suffices. This is not a statement of fact or a question, but simply wishing the other person good fortune and safe travels.

ELVES

Despite their long lives, neither race of elves is one to waste words unnecessarily. Much can be achieved with a simple gesture. A nod suffices as a hello in most instances, though one would bow to a noble. Placing one's right hand over one's heart means "Peace upon you."

This isn't to say elves ignore verbal communication completely. They may wish each other a good morning or enquire as to a friend's health in quiet lengthy ways. "The forest calls" is a common way of excusing oneself from another's company.

ENGROS

Despite many engros being settled, their time as wanderers is firmly ingrained in the entire race's psyche. "Good journey?", always phrased as a question, means both "hello" and "how are you?" at the same time. As noted above, asking about a person's shoes is another way of asking how he is and what he has been doing.

When greeting strangers, "Whose are you?" means "Where are you from?" More literally, it means "To what settlement/tribe do you belong?" Since engros sport their colored tribal headscarves with pride, it is rarely used when meeting others of the same race.

Whether an engro is nomadic or settled, the standard phrase when saying goodbye is "Safe travels." In areas where they have settled, this may be replaced with "Short journey" (hoping the other person gets home without any difficulties), "Full belly and pipe" (stay safe), or "A pipe awaits" (a short form of "A pipe awaits next time we meet," or see you soon).

FROST DWARVES

Dwarven society can be quite regimented and every dwarf knows his place in the community. When greeting a fellow dwarf he knows, the common phrase is “How goes the...” with a suffix appropriate to the other person’s profession. Thus, a guard may be asked “How goes the watch?” and a smith “How goes the forge?” When speaking to a noble, it is traditional to ask “How goes the hall?” If a dwarf is unsure as to a fellow’s profession, he will usually ask “How goes the hearth?” However it is phrased, the question doesn’t actually limit the reply to the dwarf’s work—it is simply their way of asking how the person is in general.

Dwarves signal they have no hostile intent by crossing their arms over their chest.

Farewells equally refer to work. “Strong...” followed by an item relating to the dwarf’s work means “Good luck and go safely.” Thus, the smith would receive “Strong hammer,” the warrior “Strong axe,” and the nobleman “Strong hall” (since he has to govern the entire community). Most dwarf labor involves hard work, and “Strong arms” suffices as a generic farewell.

SAXA

Among Saxa, the universal greeting is to raise one’s right hand, thus showing it isn’t concealing a weapon. Actual friends are typically greeted by clasping your hand on their right forearm, and vice versa, or with a brief hug. Again, these actions show trust.

The Norns rarely give people an easy ride through life, and Saxa can be very pessimistic by the standards of other races (though they call it pragmatism). This has led to the standard greeting of “Se upp?” The literal translates of this is “Look out,” though when phrased as a question it is more commonly expressed as “What is wrong?” “Hei,” meaning “You there” (or more formally, “I acknowledge your presence”), is another way of saying hello to someone.

It is an oddity among Saxa that good friends might forgo the usual greetings and instead mildly insult one another. For instance, Thorbjorn may call out, “Ulfric, you mangy dog! Still using your axe to slay rabbits?” Naturally, this is done with a broad grin just to emphasize no actual insult is meant—the Saxa can be a very touchy lot.

Farewell is most often expressed as “Lykke til.” This means “good fate,” an indication that the speaker hopes the Norns don’t have anything nasty in store.

HOSPITALITY

Hospitality is a privilege, not a right. It can be given, but it cannot be requested. At best, a visitor may request shelter. This might earn him a bed for the night, likely in an outbuilding, but it in no way confers the protection (or bond) of hospitality.

Not all hospitality is equal, nor may a guest request a specific level of hospitality or complain at what is offered.

ENGROSI METAPHORS & PROVERBS

Engrosi is actually a remarkably colorful language, full of metaphors and proverbs that are used in daily speech. A small few are listed below.

* *Acid corrodes its own container*: Be nice or you’ll become bitter and twisted.

* *Before this fire burns out*: I’ll do the task soon; can also mean that time is running out.

* *Children aren’t born with teeth*: No one is born with bad habits or an evil nature.

* *Don’t scratch where it doesn’t itch*: It isn’t your business; don’t cause trouble (equivalent to “let sleeping dogs lie”).

* *Everybody sees only his own wagon*: You don’t see the whole picture; you’re opinionated.

* *Gone to the village*: Committing thievery.

* *It is easier to milk a cow that stands still*: A difficult task.

* *Like stealing apples from a bucket*: Very easy.

* *Like trying to jump over your own shadow*: An impossible task; can also imply stupidity, as in “He’s the sort who’d try to jump over his own shadow.”

* *May your names be forgotten*: A curse.

* *Money in hand, bride in wagon*: I’ll play my part if you play yours; you keep up your end of the bargain and I’ll keep mine.

* *The rabbit which has only one hole soon is caught*: This idea is stupid.

* *The shadow moves as the sun commands*: Things happen because they are meant to; don’t try to change what can’t be changed.

* *Select your daughter-in-law/wife with the ears and not with the eyes*: Pay more attention to someone’s reputation than their appearance.

* *Stolen wood burns better for being stolen*: The end justifies the means.

* *Where the wagon goes a trial is left*: i) I’ll see you soon; ii) a veiled threat, implying you know where to find an enemy; iii) a logical deduction.

* *You can’t sit on two horses*: Don’t be greedy; also be careful what you wish for.

* *You cannot walk straight when the road is bent*: You can’t fix something that is broken; some problems cannot be resolved.

He must either accept what is given or leave. If host and guest are well acquainted, then the host announces that he knows his guest and offers the appropriate level of hospitality, as described below. Otherwise, there is a universal ritual that must be followed.

In many settlements, there will be an inn, ale-house, mead-hall, or equivalent. That is, a business dedicated to providing for the needs of travellers. The rules of hospitality do not apply in such establishments, nor is the ritual ever performed.

The ritual is best reserved for when the party seek hospitality with a nobleman or at a remote stead. When it comes to seeking hospitality with nobility, the GM should ask two questions. First, is there a noble in the party, and second, is there an inn or equivalent nearby?

If there is an inn and no one in the party is a noble, then they will be turned away at the local noble's door—hospitality is not the same as open charity. Even if there is noble in the party, other nobles are under no obligation to extend offers of hospitality. Don't let the guidelines become a crutch.

THE RITUAL OF KJALARR

The ritual is not just an exchange of words—it is a sacred ritual to Kjalarr, goddess of the home, and by extension one to both Eira and Kenaz, with fixed questions and offers. In all cases, “host” can refer to either the host in person or his appointed spokesman. Any lie automatically invalidates the sanctity of hospitality and leaves the guest open to repercussions.



Host: The host begins the ritual by giving his name and any social rank, and then asks “*Who are you who calls at this hall?*”

Guest: The guest should reply with only his full name, not including any ancestors beyond his father.

The host ponders for a moment, giving him time to see if he or any of his councilors recalls the name. If the guest has negative Glory or a Bad Reputation he may be told, “*Kjalarr's house is closed to you.*” The audience is over and no hospitality is offered or implied. Otherwise, the ritual continues.

Host: “*Kjalarr welcomes you in peace. Is there peace in your heart?*”

If the reply is affirmative, the host replies, “*You may drink water from Kjalarr's bowl.*” This is the lowest level of hospitality. The guest literally receives only that which is offered, being forced to eat his own food, supply his own blankets, and sleep in a drafty part of the house (if lucky) or an outbuilding.

Such hospitality, while it meets the minimum required by Kjalarr, is a grave insult, for it implies the guest is nothing more than a worthless beggar.

The host may, at his discretion, proceed further.

Host: “*Kjalarr is the daughter of Eira, who heals the gods. Who are your people?*”

The guest is respected to recite his family line (see **Ancestry** in *Hellfrost Expansion 2*). If satisfied, his host replies, “*You may sleep by Kjalarr's hearth.*” The guest is given blankets or furs, depending on the time of year, and a warm place to sleep. A simple meal, typically bread, soup, and cheese, is provided.

This is the most common form of hospitality. Unless the heroes have Glory in excess of 100 or are known allies, the ritual typically ends at this point.

A generous host may push further, however.

Host: *Kjalarr is friend to all. Are you my friend?*

The host is not referring to personal friendship, but friendship towards his people in general. A guest who answers yes must then demonstrate a valid reason for his friendship. Assuming he can (and simply stating, “I have never warred or spoken against you or your people” may suffice if the hero is well known through his reputation), the host says, “*You may eat of Kjalarr's roast.*”

This equates the guest to the host's kin and retinue, for he is permitted to eat meat. It also includes beer, mead, or wine, as appropriate to the culture and region.

This level of hospitality is a rare honor. Among his future deeds, the guest may now add “Kinsman by honor to...” One or two points of Glory may be awarded if the host is a powerful noble (count or above, or a noted individual, such as Baroness Olivia of Aslov) and the hero of lower rank or reputation.

On very rare occasion, the host will ask one more question. This should be reserved for heroes with 200+ Glory or who are the host's feudal superior.

Host: *Kjalarr has offered your ancestors hospitality in the halls of the gods. Have you honored their name?*

The guest is now expected to provide a concise list of his feats. If they meet with the host's approval then

he replies, “*Kjalarr offers you friendship.*” The guest is offered a seat at his host’s table or its equivalent, an honor normally bestowed only on his closest friends, the highest nobility, and the mightiest heroes. If the host has no table, the guest is seated as close to him as possible.

Among his future deeds, the guest may now add “Friend to...” Up to five points of Glory may be awarded if the host is a powerful noble or notable person (as above) and the character is of lower rank.

Caveat: Society in *Hellfrost* is not one of equals. There are leaders and there are followers, and that is the will of the gods. For the most part, small parties are treated as a single individual in terms of hospitality and Glory rewards. However, if one of the party is a noble and introduces himself as such, then hosts will automatically assume the other party members are his followers. Unless the noble states otherwise, his “minions” will not receive any Glory rewards, nor can they receive better hospitality than meat.

VARIATIONS

Every race alters rituals to suit its needs, and the ritual of hospitality is no exception. The differences are fairly minor, though.

Engro exchange the offer of the hearth to “*You may sleep in Kjalarr’s wagon.*” If the family is actually nomadic, then the guest is found room on the floor of a wagon. Otherwise, he gets to sleep in the house as normal. Similarly, friendship is changed to “*You may smoke of Kjalarr’s pipe,*” which in engro eyes is the same thing.

Frost dwarves offer Kjalarr’s flagon instead of her bowl. The guest receives small beer in place of water.

Hearth elves eat meat, but only sparingly. They offer “*Kjalarr’s bounty*” in place of roasted meat in the ritual, regardless of what food is actually on offer.

Human cultural variations also exist. Aspirians offer “*Kjalarr’s cup,*” which gets the guest watered down wine, while Midmarkers and Royalmarkers offer her flagon and gift watered down mead instead of water. In Hrosmark, the offer of friendship is changed to, “*You may ride Kjalarr’s horse,*” though it has the same result.

GMs intending to use the ritual should pay attention to the local imports and exports. In Pig Fort, the offer of “roast” may be specifically stated as “pork,” while in Dalsetter water should be replaced with cider.

OBLIGATIONS

Regardless of the races involved and the degree of succor offered, hospitality is governed by strict rules. Once given, it cannot be revoked. Similarly, it applies to all members of a party, regardless of race or station, or to none at all. There is a loophole, invented following the rise of the frostborn (though it can apply in any situation), that gives a host the opportunity to break this rule. He may tell the leader of the party seeking hospitality that there is an undesirable person in their number. The onus for excluding the party member now falls to the guests.

Guests are equally bound by rules. They may not

attack their host (which includes any member of his household) through action or word. They are required to defend their host’s home if it is attacked.

SMOKING ETIQUETTE

The smoking of pipeleaf has grown dramatically in popularity in recent decades. This is due in part its increased cultivation in Ostmark and the sight of engro nomads puffing away on their long-stemmed pipes. Each race has adopted its own customs with regard smoking.

COGLELUND

Wealth is everything in Coglelund. More important to owning money is the overt display of wealth. With the border with Vestmark closed (thus forcing merchants from the Vale to take a length detour), and Ostmark being half a continent away, pipeleaf prices have risen in recent years. This has not stopped the nobility from smoking, nor has it diminished the size of their pipes.

The truly extravagant nobles use pipes with bowls big enough to accommodate an entire pouch of pipeleaf. This doesn’t mean they intend to smoke it all in one sitting—those keenest to show their wealth will smoke only a little and then throw the rest away.

While rich Cogleunders are uncharitable by nature, this does not apply to those they wish to impress. Visit a wealthy man’s house, pull out your pipe, and you just might be rewarded with an entire pouch of valuable pipeleaf for your troubles. Of course, your host won’t be happy if you leave without finishing it all—he isn’t a charity case.

ELVES

Few elves smoke, and it is not a habit they encourage in others, even guests. The stems from their love of nature. To cultivate plants or harvest wild plants for food is part of the natural cycle of life. Picking a plant, drying its leaves, setting fire to it, and then inhaling the smoke is simply beyond elven comprehension. After all, humans don’t smoke dried animal flesh.

If a guest simply must smoke, he expected to step outside an elf’s house—the smell of burning pipeleaf is as offensive to their senses as the smell of burning flesh is to other races. It is considered polite not even to mention the act of smoking. Simply stating, “I am going outside for a few minutes” is enough.

This is not to say that all elves detest smoking—racial and cultural biases do not include every member. Elves that smoke often consider it their dirty secret, refraining from doing so in sight of others.

ENGROS

The greatest smokers, in terms of quantity consumed and customs associated with it, are the engros. A good host, even if he doesn’t smoke, will always offer a guest

pipeleaf after a meal. A guest who takes only a small pinch, enough for one or two puffs, is indirectly informing his host that his hospitality has already been more than gracious. Stuffing your pipe bowl full, or worse, using an over large pipe, implies the hospitality has been sorely lacking to this point. Offering a guest a loan of a pipe means you consider him as a friend.

Among other races, engro have learned that not being offered pipeleaf is rarely an insult—smoking simply isn't as important to them. However, an engro host who refuses to open his pouch is as good as saying, "I don't like you and you should leave my house now."

It is considered especially rude to talk to a smoker when he has his pipe in his mouth or if he has yet to exhale. As a result, after dinner conversation tends to be very stilted until the smoking is over.

Family members rarely use their own pipes when gathered together. Instead, they share a single pipe. As simple an act as this is, it strengthens the familial bonds. Again, there is etiquette involved. One is expected to draw once, exhale, and then pass the pipe to one's right. The act of passing this pipe in this direction implies trust—the host will take it with his left hand (typically the off-hand), leaving his weapon hand free. In turn he then moves the pipe to his right hand before inhaling, a sign that he trusts his companion. Outsiders told to put their pipes away and share with their host and his family are receiving a great honor—it essentially means the outsider is one of the family.

FROST DWARVES

Whether it is because smoking reminds dwarves of their forges or whether it is for some other reason, frost dwarves have adopted smoking.

Unlike the engro, smoking isn't instinctively a communal activity or one to be shared with friends. It is a time for quiet reflection, to ponder life's problems and find solutions. To offer a dwarf a pipe out of hand is the same as asking him to share his woes, something they find extremely rude except among close kith and kin. Offering him pipeleaf has a similar effect, for it implies the dwarf has issues he needs to think about. This works the other way round, of course—dwarves are unlikely to offer pipeleaf out of simple politeness or as part of hospitality.

There are situations where dwarves *do* share pipes and pipeleaf. Adventuring bands tend to form close bonds, and family members often share the same troubles. Sharing a pipe among such groups essentially means "This our problem," while offering pipeleaf translates as "We have a problem." The act of sharing is intended to put everyone in the same frame of mind, thus improving the odds of finding a solution. Typically, the head of the family, or the dwarf in an adventuring party, will instigate communal smoking—he may not believe there is a problem, and thus including him becomes an insult.

If in doubt, either never make the offer or pull out a pipe or pipeleaf pouch, give the dwarf a quizzical look, and let him decide what move to make.

SOCIAL PENALTIES

Hellfrost is not just a game about slaying monsters. The heroes belong to cultures and races, and they have social rules, just like those in our world. Whether the GM awards penalties for breeches of social rules is, ultimately, his choice. For those who do, some basic guidelines are presented below.

As a rule, social blunders committed against one's host incur Glory modifiers—hospitality is extremely sacred in Rassilon and whereas heroes in settlements are largely faceless, dealings with a host are personal. Penalties apply for each and every breach. Persistent offenders may receive the Bad Reputation Hindrance.

ARMOR (HOME)

Glory penalty equal to twice the highest Armor rating.

ARMOR (SETTLEMENT)

Temporary Charisma penalty equal to the highest protection rating.

WEAPONS (HOME)

Carrying a weapon (other than a dagger) inflicts a Glory penalty equal to half the weapon's damage die type. Drawing the weapon incurs a second penalty, this time equal to the weapon's damage die type. Actually using the weapon aggressively incurs a third penalty of a flat 20 points and may lead to claims for wergild. The latter two penalties do not apply if the guest is forced to draw a weapon to defend himself.

WEAPONS (SETTLEMENT)

Temporary -2 Charisma penalty if wearing metal armor.

GENERAL RUDENESS

Heroes aren't expected to be pure of word or deed, but they are expected to be polite if they want to win public acclaim. General rudeness should warrant no more than a 1 point loss of Glory, though.

HOSPITALITY

Breeches of hospitality are far more severe. A minor breach may warrant a 5 point penalty and a severe one a 10 point penalty. Betraying your host is an affront to the gods and a serious stain on one's honor. It warrants a 20 point penalty as well as the Bad Reputation (Major) Hindrance.