

Really, Really Bad Idea #6: FOOD TASTER

CHARACTERS: (2)

EMPEROR / EMPRESS, either sex, any age, haughty,
self-important

TASTER, either sex, any age, lowly

EMP (entering) I decree that we will stop here for
the night!

TASTER As you wish, Mighty Emperor / Empress!

EMP Spread out our bed over there. (Points
offstage.)

TASTER It will be done, O Emperor / Empress.
(Claps hands at offstage retinue.)

EMP And we think a little snack before we retire.

TASTER Are you sure about that?

EMP (snappishly) What do you mean? We're
always sure! Get us some friggin' food!

TASTER I believe we ran out this morning.

- EMP What do you mean – ran out? We’re the
goddamned Emperor / Empress! You don’t
just run out on us!
- TASTER I am sorry. We will all have to go to bed
hungry tonight.
- EMP Oh, we will, will we? We don’t think so.
What’s that over there? (Points.)
- TASTER (checking) It looks like a weed, O Royal
One.
- EMP Do you recognize it?
- TASTER Not really. It could be sorrel.
- EMP What’s sorrel? Can we eat it?
- TASTER I think cattle eat it. Not people.
- EMP Have you ever tried it?
- TASTER Not really.
- EMP Why not? It might be good. We need some
friggin’ bulk in our diet.

TASTER I'm pretty sure it's not edible, Royal One.

EMP (irritably) How the crap would you know? You just said you haven't tried it.

TASTER Pardon, My Emperor / Empress, I am generalizing from my past tastings. That particular weed does not look promising. (Gets the weed.) Now that I look at it more closely, I don't believe it's sorrel after all. I have no idea what it is.

EMP Aren't you the one who discovered lettuce?

TASTER I am, Mighty One.

EMP And the tomato? Wasn't that you?

TASTER I hate to brag, but indeed it was.

EMP Nobody used to eat lettuce and tomatoes, right, because they thought they were poisonous? Have we got that right?

TASTER In the old days that was very true.

EMP And then you ate some lettuce and a couple of tomatoes, and that changed everybody's thinking. Correct?

- TASTER You flatter me too much, Mighty One.
- EMP Who's flattering? It's your friggin' job, isn't it?
- TASTER I am blessed to be your official taster, yes.
- EMP Naturally you are. Only you're not as good as the last one.
- TASTER I am most distressed to hear that, My Emperor/Empress.
- EMP You're too conservative.
- TASTER I apologize, Majesty.
- EMP That last taster would try anything once. But you – oh, no! Go to bed hungry! Don't try this! Don't try that! God, we wish we had our old taster back.
- TASTER Perhaps you might see about reinstating him, Majesty.
- EMP We can't do that! He's dead! That purple thing he tried over in Kazakhstan didn't agree with him.

TASTER I'm sorry to hear about his misfortune, O Royal One.

EMP Saved our butt, though! We were just about to have some of that purple stuff when he fell right over and puked his guts out. God, we didn't know someone could puke that much!

TASTER Must have been very stressful for you.

EMP And then he twitched for about eleven hours and kept calling out, "Kill me! Please, won't somebody kill me!"

TASTER And did anyone finally grant his wish?

EMP Don't really know. We had to leave. Had a big meeting in Outer Mongolia.

TASTER I take it your taster didn't recover.

EMP Well, *we* never saw him again! But he might have. I'll tell you one thing. I haven't touched that purple crap even once.
(Laughs)

TASTER Very wise, O Mighty One.

- EMP You've never seen us puking our guts out, have you?
- TASTER I can't say that I have, Majesty.
- EMP Although there was that tummy ache after that catered orgy in Tunis. Somebody wasn't doing their friggin' job apparently. Who could *that* have been?
- TASTER Of course it could have been because of the volume consumed, not the actual foodstuffs themselves that were the culprit.
- EMP (after a beat) You criticizing us?
- TASTER Never, O Royal One!
- EMP Let's hope not.
- TASTER It is my duty – and pleasure – to serve as your barrier to the unknown harms that can trouble my Emperor's / Empress's intestines.
- EMP We'll drink to that! Better yet, *you* drink to that!
- TASTER Most amusing, I'm sure, Highness.

- EMP You think you're hiding your snotty attitude. But we can feel it!
- TASTER I am mortified if I have given offence, My Imperial, Majestic Royalness.
- EMP You're laying it on pretty thick. Don't think we don't notice. . . . Friggin' asshole!
- TASTER It grieves me more than I can say to think for even one moment that I am not pleasing my Emperor / Empress. Perhaps I may beg to leave your employ?
- EMP Leave? With the benefits you've got? Full-time work! Health care! Funeral expenses paid if needed! You don't know just how good you've got it!
- TASTER I am not worthy of such largesse, so I should most probably leave. (Starts to leave.)
- EMP And leave us to taste our own food?!
- TASTER I could leave a list of things to look out for: certain colors, certain smells, certain –

EMP We don't want a frigging list! We want you to run everything over your tongue! That's what you get paid for, and don't you forget it for a minute!

TASTER But if I no long satisfy my Emperor/
Empress, it is no doubt best that I –

EMP Listen here. You get to eat everything I do! How many lowlifes can say that? You eat like an Emperor / Empress! And you get everything while it's fresh – while we have to wait around and take sloppy seconds!

TASTER Yes, it must be quite a hardship to have to wait.

EMP You bet your ass it is! And you're so slow besides! When we want to eat, we want to eat! Why can't you seem to get that through your thick skull?! We have a blood sugar problem, and we get cranky!

TASTER You?

EMP Yeah, me. Us.

TASTER I am heartily sorry to have failed you in my task, Majesty.

EMP Oh, stop being so obsequious! Sorry about this. Sorry about that. Stop being so goddamned sorry all the time! And do something!

TASTER It's my understanding that I am to be exceedingly –

EMP Oh, for the gods' sake, how bad can tasting weeds be? Huh? Give us that friggin' weed! (Grabs at it)

TASTER O Royalness, you really ought not to –

EMP Ought not to what? Taste a weed? (Sniffs it) Smells all right to us. (Examines it.) Nice color.

TASTER But the color can sometimes be –

EMP There you go again. Way too cautious. How do you think civilization advances, huh? By being scared to try a new weed? (mockingly) 'Oh, should I try that one? Oh, no, it might not agree with me!' What a sissy! Let us show you how an Emperor / Empress chows down! You see this weed?

TASTER Yes, Majesty.

EMP You see this mouth? (The Taster bows.)
Now watch and learn. (Takes a bite of
the weed, chews.)

TASTER And?

EMP It tastes like chicken.

TASTER Really?

EMP (about to take another bite) Oh, the gods
help me! (Grabs stomach.)

TASTER Something wrong?

EMP Oh! My! God! Taster, we think we got a
bad one. (Falls down, contorts, writhes in
agony.)

(After a long bit, the Emperor / Empress dies.)

TASTER (coming over to the body, looks down at it)
Would you like, O Royal One, a friggin'
after-dinner mint with that?

BLACKOUT