

Henge Sweets

By Allen Varney

Introductions can be awkward. When henge meets human, or two henge meet each other, it helps to break the ice. For many henge, one sure way to win a new friend is to offer candy—Japanese candy!

Any random Asian grocery sells hundreds of candies. Buy ten random bags—or boxes, canisters, blocks, trays, wheels, Chinese take-out food containers, shapes of all kinds, more package shapes than a toy store. Open any one of them, try one bite, and there it is, on the tongue, immediate: the Asian weird. Maybe it's delicious sticky-chewy rice gelatin, with an odd filmy transparent wrapper that melts in the mouth. Maybe it's sweet-salty red bean paste, or sesame chocolate, or lip-puckering salty-sour lemon. Maybe it's seaweed. It's probably seaweed. It's definitely strange and wonderful—magical—just like a henge.

Many henge steal food sometimes (and the mouse henge rather more often). Candy, though, is different. For a henge with a sweet tooth—the Japanese term is *amatou*—candy isn't food but pure pleasure. In the presence of their favored candy, these “sweeties” get weak in the knees. They react with wild interest, the way fox henge react to fried tofu, or raccoon dogs with the Glutton weakness react to, well, everything.

When the player group wants to introduce a new player, the characters can play a scene where one of these “henge sweets” attracts the henge newcomer. Or if they've already met, but haven't yet developed a Connection, an offer of the correct sweet gives an easy reason to like the bearer.





Henge and Their Sweets

Each type of henge—not every single one of that type, but most of them—tends to love candies with one specific kind of flavor. Your own henge character doesn't have to like that kind, but you automatically know which kind attracts your own type. Witches and older fox henge know the preferred flavors of all types of henge. So do some old people in town—and Elder Turtle, of course. (Yet who knows Elder Turtle's favorite? Hmmm...)

Older henge usually like home-made sweets; younger ones may prefer packaged commercial brands. Mononoke henge and humans might like any or all sweets, or none; there's no way to tell.

Henge	Preferred Flavor
Bird	Spiced Plum
Cat	Squid, Scallop
Dog	Caramel
Fish	Sweet Rice
Fox	Taro Root
Horse	Cabbage
Mouse	Chocolate
Rabbit	Red Bean Paste
Raccoon Dog	Pretty Much Everything!
Wolf	Chicken Essence

Sweet Stories

If you like, you could build a story around sweets. Maybe some candy mysteriously disappears from a house in town, and the characters track down the thief.

But in a little story, the candy can do its job in one short scene. A character's favorite sweet winds up attracting a new

visitor; a henge cooks a batch of candy just to win new friends; or the established characters simply meet the new arrival, and someone happens to be carrying the right candy in her pocket.

Here's how it works: imagine someone with candy—the “bearer”—meets a henge for the first time, and there's no prior Connection between them. If the bearer offers the sweet, and it's the kind the henge likes, the bearer's Impression check succeeds automatically—please don't bother choosing an attribute—and creates a Like connection between them of strength 1. (If these two are the only players in the story, the Like strength is 2.)

Sweets at the Gaming Table

East and West share *amatou*, though, as in many other ways, their differences are surprising. For players unfamiliar with Asian culture, the fabulous range of candies at small Asian groceries provides a gentle introduction, and a nice conversation piece during the game.

Possibly the best-known Japanese candy in North America and Europe is Pocky. The chocolate-coated biscuit sticks have been around for nearly 50 years. In Japan there are dozens of Pocky flavors, like banana, grape, tangerine, green tea, coconut-ginger, Kobe wine, cream cheese, Brazilian pudding, Men's (dark chocolate), and black sesame.

But the real action in strange commercial candy flavors is in Kit Kat bars. These are the same Nestle chocolate wafer biscuits sold worldwide, but in Japan, Kit Kats are actually something of a good luck charm for Japanese students, because the name sounds like *kitto katsu* (“you shall surely win”). So Kit Kats are packaged with books or CD singles, and dozens of different Kit Kat bars are flavored with everything from custard pudding, grilled corn, Earl Grey tea, and sweet potato to Camembert cheese, lemon vinegar, and citrus with hot pepper. And the bestselling Kit Kat flavor? Soy sauce.

These are the odd foothills of a strange mountain of red bean paste, spiced plum, taro root, lamb-flavored caramels, and New Golden Chicken Essence Candy (ingredients: sugar, corn starch, chicken essence, salt, monosodium glutamate). Westerners find some of these sweets delicious, like Botan rice candy (in the edible wrapper) and the popular Kasugai gummies. Others taste okay but are sold under names that give pause, like Meiji Gummy Collagen. Many require advanced study and a careful approach, such as Pickle EX Lemon Milk bourbon stick chocolate, Okonomiyaki Drops (in cabbage and radish flavors), and caffeinated Black Black Super Menthol gum, Oolong or Ginseng flavor, sold in single packs or by the tub.

The mountain extends down to the sea, too, with delicacies like chocolate-covered dried squid, scallop candy in sweet sauce, Kanten Konbu seaweed, and *echizen kurage*, made from the flesh, if that's the word, of a six-foot-long, 440-pound jellyfish. It's flavored with caramel.

Then there are the cakes, cookies, and ice cream. According to the web site Weird Asia News, these are all real flavors of real desserts sold in real stores:

- corn, potato, wasabi, taro, tomato, fried eggplant
- octopus, shrimp, whale, oyster, abalone, crab, eel, tuna
- ox tongue, horse, pit viper, chicken wing
- miso, cypress, noodle, soy sauce, lettuce-and-potato, wasabi

Sampling some of these sweets requires a true spirit of adventure, but many of them can please even the stodgiest palate. Ahead of the next roleplaying session, please consider a foray to the nearest Asian grocery. It might turn out that not only henge are fond of Japanese candy.

SOURCES:

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Editing by Basil Lisk

Art by Honoel A. Ibardolaza

