



Melts In Your Mind, Not On Your Hands

*"I want the world
I want the whole world
I want to lock it all up in my pocket
It's my bar of chocolate
Give it to me now."*

-- Veruca Salt (Julie Dawn Cole), *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*

We still don't know why we want it -- pharmaceutical chemistry makes a few good guesses, but can't reliably explain anything. We aren't sure where we got it -- archaeologists push its origins further back every year. We don't know who makes it -- half the American market is controlled by the most paranoid and secretive establishment outside the CIA. But every American soldier carries it with them; it's distributed to children on the night when the dead walk the earth, and without it, love (we have somehow come to understand) is meaningless. It's chocolate, and there has to be something more there, behind that silver foil wrapper.

Americans eat eleven pounds of it a year -- more, in a good year. Globally, cocoa production is around 2.9 million tons; the American chocolate retail market alone is worth \$14 billion a year. Facts are available, if you look for them -- but meaning, well, that has to be left to the imagination; which is to say, gaming. I've based much of what follows, then, on the reliably sound facts in Sophie and Michael Coe's *The True History of Chocolate*. But this column is something far sweeter -- the Secret History of Chocolate. How many licks does it take to get to the center of the Conspiracy? The world may never know.

"This saying was said of cacao . . . nowhere did it appear in times past. The common folk, the needy did not drink it. Hence it was said, 'The heart, the blood, are to be feared.' And also it was said of it that it was like Datura; it was considered to be like the mushroom, for it . . . intoxicated one . . . it was not drunk unthinkingly."

-- Fr. Bernardino de Sahagún, *General History of the Things of New Spain*

Chocolate comes (after any number of different processes not restricted to roasting, fanning, dutching, alkalizing, pressing, and conching) from the cacao bean. The word "cocoa" comes from an English misspelling of the Spanish version, *cacao*, of the Mayan *kakaw*, which itself seems to derive from the Olmec *kakawa*. (The word "chocolate" either comes from Aztec *xocolatl*, "bitter water," or a Spanish mixture of the Maya *chocol*, "hot," with the Aztec *atl*, "water," in all cases referring to the original cacao-and-peppers beverage of the natives.) Carolus Linnaeus, apparently irked at the confusion, gave the original name second place when he named the cacao tree *Theobroma cacao*. Theobroma; "food of the gods." (Let us remember, however, what H.G. Wells decided was the Food of the Gods, and in our speculations wonder precisely how They will use human fat to make up for the projected global chocolate shortage in 2020.) The Aztecs, Mayas, and other Mesoamerican nations had a peculiar relationship with cacao -- to them, also, it was the "food of the gods," given to them by our old ancient astronaut buddy Quetzalcoatl. As Father Sahagún reports, they used it (under the peculiar kenning "the heart, the blood") in hallucinogenic

beverages, and sacred communion with astral entities. The Aztecs seem to have transformed it from a sacred beverage to a luxury; Montezuma reportedly wept when a sorcerer warned him the Aztecs were doomed for debasing cacao.

Chemically, modern pharmacists can't explain it. Cacao does contain caffeine, the mild dopamine-trigger phenylethylamine (which is apparently molecularly very similar to Ecstasy), and the alkaloid theobromine. (Theobromine is also found in yerba buena and [kola nuts](#), both also used in shamanic trance practices.) Most commercial chocolate has far less theobromine than the pure stuff that apparently kept Balboa's men wired for three straight days of crossing Panama, but even at its top levels chemistry can't find any reason for cacao to trigger hallucinations. Of course, there are well over 300 trace chemicals in cacao, and at least five major varieties of the plant -- perhaps the heirs of the Mayan priesthood still know the recipe for True Chocolate, and they're waiting for the end of the world in 2012 to share it.

"Ellegua likes the following foods: chicken (if you're vegetarian, get a box of frozen chicken nuggets and defrost one whenever you need an offering), rum (small nip bottles are great for this) and CHOCOLATE. Three M&M's are great. Find a small offering dish to give him things in -- we have a little black cup."

-- Raven Kaldera, "Orisha Altar-Building"

Or maybe they're protecting us from it. Cacao, although credited to Quetzalcoatl, seems to have been a major offering to the far less pleasant god Huitzilopochtli. Now we start thinking about that icky Aztec poetic metaphor "the heart, the blood," and the whole Food of the Gods thing and wondering exactly what we've gotten our sticky fingers into. (And just what secret Huitzilopochtli worshipper first started packing Valentine's chocolates into a heart-shaped box, anyway?) Chocolate is also a favored offering to voodoo loa such as Legba (the master of the crossroads and [the mirror](#); the Key and the Gate), Oya (a Santería orisha associated with wind and spirits), and Le Baron Cemetaire -- the graveyard loa of the dead. And we're back on Halloween, tossing Hershey bars to ghosts. Is there some deeper reason that a richly chocolate cake is called Devil's Food?

"[T]he murder of the Pope has been proven by the clearest evidence. A slow poison was given him by his own innocent [confectioner] in a dish of chocolate last Holy Thursday at the Vatican, where he assisted at the ceremonies of the day. It is surprising that he who from the beginning of his pontificate had taken every precaution to avoid what he always feared, should persist in drinking the chocolate . . ."

-- Sir Horace Mann, letter to Horace Walpole, Oct. 8, 1774

And just why did the Jesuits (in popular legend at least) adopt it as their favored method of murdering people? Pope Clement XIV, who suppressed the Jesuits in 1773, died of a remarkably unpleasant wasting disease in September of 1774. Frederick the Great was saved from poisoned chocolate by the fortunate accident of a spider falling into the cup; when he called for a refill, the chocolatier, fearing that he had been found out, shot himself. (That, they say, is why there's a spider painted on the ceiling of Frederick's anteroom in his palace at Sans Souci. There may be [another reason](#).) The Jesuits did, in fact, control virtually all the trade in South American chocolate, and their international network of houses and missions may have been responsible for spreading cacao, and chocolate-drinking, worldwide. (The Jesuits, not to change the subject or anything, have also long been particularly intent on meditations to visualize the Sacred Heart; no connection with "the heart, the blood," and hallucinogenic theobroma, I'm sure.)

Chocolate-drinking was, in fact, also connected with conspiracy by the royal houses of France and England, where it was monopolized or banned outright. Cardinal Alphonse de Richelieu introduced it to his more famous brother, who passed it on to Mazarin, who obtained the royal monopoly on chocolate for his creature Sieur David Chaliou. (The later Medici were also big chocolate fans, as was the Marquis de Sade.) Charles II attempted to close "any Public . . . House" selling "Coffee, Chocolate, Sherbet, or Tea" in 1675 as dens of license and political subversion. Interestingly enough, after the Stuarts were dethroned, such establishments as the Cocoa-Tree in St. James'

Street or White's Chocolate House became dens of Jacobitism and Freemasonry. White's, intriguingly, had a back room called "Hell." Just thought you should know.

"What made Forrest [Mars]'s blood rush was the thrill of mastering new opportunities and taming uncharted worlds. Like Milton Hershey, he was driven by his visions; but where Milton Hershey saw utopia, Forrest Mars saw conquest."

-- Joël Glenn Brenner, *The Emperors of Chocolate*

As the industrial era came of age, methods of processing, refining, and smoothing the bitter taste of natural cacao turned chocolate from a political stimulant into a global confection -- suitable for global conspiracies. (The Secret Chocolate Wars no doubt parallel the wars of wines in Tim Powers' *Earthquake Weather*.) James Baker and John Hannon began the first chocolate-mill in America in 1765; "Hannon's Chocolate" became "Baker's Chocolate" in 1799 after Hannon was mysteriously lost at sea in the (voodoo loa-controlled) Caribbean. The Gnomes of Zurich began their involvement in the global chocolate conspiracy in 1819, when Francois-Louis Cailler opened his factory on Lake Geneva; Philippe Suchard began the Suchard-Toblerone empire in 1826; Henri Nestlé birthed the largest food company in the world in 1879 after inventing milk chocolate. In 1854, John Cadbury received a Royal Warrant as chocolatier to Queen Victoria, and the Round Table Group entered the scene. (Why, precisely, did Italian chocolatier Domingo Ghirardelli travel to San Francisco via theobromine-rich Peru -- was it to get an Imperial Warrant from the [Emperor Norton](#)?) Milton Hershey tried to build a Utopian chocolate-town in Pennsylvania (just as Henry Cadbury did in Bournville); his bitter rival Forrest Mars (inventor of M&Ms, born in future [UFO nexus](#) Tacoma, Washington) became a billionaire recluse, living over a massive chocolate factory in Las Vegas. (Masking himself from Huitzilopochtli's vision? Or prolonging his unlife by inhaling the sacred fumes?) The Mars Company, however, remained headquartered in McLean, Virginia, and worked closely with their neighbors, the CIA. The true story of the Chocoluminati may never be told -- except in your game. But keep one thing in mind -- revenge is sweet.

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