



## The Discovery of Chocolate: A Novel

*James Runcie*

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## The Discovery of Chocolate: A Novel James Runcie

A wonderfully inventive and entertaining journey through time and the history of chocolate!

The Discovery of Chocolate is a fabulous tale, as rich and exotic as the gorgeous creation that Diego de Godoy first discovers when he arrives in Mexico with Cortes and his conquistadors.

Diego is seeking his fortune in the New World. What he finds is love, and chocolate, and an elixir of life. Separated from his lover, he must wander the world, and the centuries, in search of the fulfilment that he first knew in Mexico.

In a series of dramatic episodes that are evocative, witty and thought-provoking, from revolutionary Paris to Freud's Vienna, Fry's Bristol and Hershey's Pittsburgh, Diego and his ever-faithful greyhound, Pedro, seek the perfection of chocolate and the meaning of life.

## The Discovery of Chocolate: A Novel Details

Date : Published June 28th 2012 by HarperCollins (first published January 23rd 2001)

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Author : James Runcie

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## From Reader Review The Discovery of Chocolate: A Novel for online ebook

### Ruth says

A compelling read. I started off really enjoying it. Then I thought it ought to be written at a slower pace rather than racing through the centuries. Then I began to think there should be less sex and more chocolate. I enjoyed the section with Freud and their philosophizing on life, death and happiness. Overall, I did enjoy the book, some parts were beautifully written and it is very quotable. "The principal advantage of chocolate is that it cannot be taken at speed. It asks you to take time, to consider, to pause." "I agree," I replied. "It is best enjoyed in silence..."

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### Katie says

This book had an interesting premise but sadly never quite delivered in the writing. A Spanish conquistador falls in love with a Mexican girl, but circumstances drive them apart. When he leaves, she gives him a drink of enchanted chocolate which extends his life and slows his aging to allow him to return to her at a time when they can be together. Consequently, he wanders through time with Pedro, his greyhound companion, in search of chocolate and love. However, far more time and attention is given to the chocolate in this book. The descriptions of chocolate making, baking, experimenting and eating are rich and sensuous and instantly made me hungry. In fact, the food writing is what makes this book interesting to read.

The remainder of the plot does not fare so well. The time travel element, surely an essential part of the plot, was made to seem almost incidental and there was no attempt to make it either logical or consistent. That the main character did not react with any surprise or disorientation to the completely unpredictable passage of time, and so it comes across as a lack of development on the part of the author rather than a deliberate device. The characters were mostly undeveloped, but this bothered me less than I expected as their appearances in the narrative were so fleeting. I did enjoy Diego's brushes with real historical figures, painfully contrived as they were, but they seemed an incidental rather than integral part of the story. Not enough was made of them, often they were unrelated to either love or chocolate, and so they did not really fit into the rest of the narrative. Ultimately, I suppose it's difficult to write an interesting account of a man who very rapidly finds his own life uninteresting and repetitive.

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### Marsha says

Mr. Runcie captures all the enchantment and excitement of discovery. In his capable hands, love, passion and the very scent of chocolate seem to peel from the page. This is a sublime book, entwining the history of the Conquistadors and a magical journey to reclaim lost love...all wound up with the magic that is chocolate. A New World delicacy found by Old World travelers, chocolate has never seemed more seductive, more delicious, more transforming than it does here in this lyrical tale of Diego de Godoy's dangerous voyage to bring back a treasure for a spoiled, aristocratic beauty and the native woman who captures his heart instead.

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## Megan says

[Ignacia's a little pissed when he finally finds her (hide spoiler)]

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## Kay says

I had such high hopes for the book but in the end you just get a very silly love story (another one) when it involves chocolate and adventure you could do so many things but no.... so sad.

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## Debra says

Although it is true that I have been considered lunatic on many occasions in the last five hundred years, it must be stated, that the very beginning of this sad and extraordinary tale, that I have been most grievously misunderstood. The elixir of life was drunk in all innocence and my dog had nothing to do with it.

---The Discovery of Chocolate by James Runcie

Such begins *The Discovery of Chocolate* by James Runcie, a historical fiction piece that also includes a bit of sci-fi time travel, true undying love, and of course, chocolate.

*The Discovery of Chocolate* is the February/March selection for Cook the Books Cook the Books.

The author weaves his inventive tale around Diego de Godoy, a young Spaniard that finds himself attached as the notary to Cortés as he begins his exploration and plunder of the New World. Diego has embarked on this journey to impress a young Spanish woman who is waiting for him to return with something new and worthy of her beauty and love, some treasure from the New World.

Of course, Diego's discovered treasure is chocolate but he also finds true love with Ignacia, a native woman. This meeting leads him on his five hundred year journey.

Runcie's premise is clever and I started out loving the book. The author began losing me a bit after the "invention of Sachertorte." Then there was the tragic and ludicrous invention of the Hershey Kiss.

Really?

And the people he encounters along the way? Besides Cortés, he meets the following (some a who's who of the chocolate industry):

Marquis de Sade

Monsieur Debaube (of Debaube and Gallais, the French Royally Appointed *Chocolatier*)

Franz Sacher, an Austrian confectioner

Sigmund Freud

Gustav Klimt

Anton Bruckner (I think. I couldn't pin point who the composer was that he and Claudia heard at the concert at St. Stephen's.)

Mr. Fry of J. S. Fry & Sons, Ltd. (a British chocolate company)

Milton S. Hershey

Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas

I was anticipating that Pablo Escobar might make an appearance at the end of the book when he finds himself in a Mexican opium operation.

I loved the first part of the book, was mildly amused during his time in France, became annoyed with the insipid conversations in Vienna (in fact, the dialogue reminded me of a boring French film), didn't really see the point of his time in England, and thought the Hershey Kiss wrap up was beyond absurd. But, then Runcie throws in Stein and Toklas and I had to wonder if he was actually writing a farce.

"A mousse is a mousse is a mousse."

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### **Cindy says**

I really loved this satisfying novel that is a bit of a fantasy/fairy tale. There were several passages that gave me pause for contemplation.

Pg. 133 is on having children.

Pg. 137 a character knows when a cake is ready to come out of the oven by it's smell. In real life I have observed my friend Ann do this when she bakes pies. She never uses a timer!

Pg. 211 ". . .this life which seems so long is, in fact, lived in an instant, and that we must one day be judged: not so much by a divine figure as by the far more frightening prospect of our own, elderly selves."

I think my book club would enjoy this one.

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### **Karen says**

I can't abide books where the dog dies!!!

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### **Amy says**

This book would have been much better off as a novella featuring the love story between Diego and Ignacia. The first quarter and the last tenth of the book were the only parts that were worth reading. The part inbetween were mind numbingly boring and nonsensical.

The main problem was this: the author wanted an immortal character and therefore introduced time travel, immortality and extremely slow aging (his pulse beats at 1/10 the speed of a normal person so he ages super slowly or something). I'm a huge science fiction fan, so I have no problem with any of these theories except that they cannot co-exist in the same story. Either he's immortal or he ages slowly. Either he lives long because of slow aging or he jumps through time of space. It can't be all of them! This is especially problematic since the time travel element was introduced early in the story, but the reason for the apparent time travel was never addressed (was it a time turner like Harry Potter? Stones like Outlander? A wardrobe like Narnia? A black hole like every sci-fi movie ever? WHAT WAS IT?!?) Then time travel is abandoned and slow aging is introduced (and that's fine too - all the vampire/werewolf/fairy stories prepare the reader for immortality)- it simply doesn't make sense to switch from one to the other and it irked me for the rest of the story.

Plus the characters were rather boring and the bedroom scenes were just icky - I felt like I needed a shower afterward. Just gross.

I feel like I'm being generous giving this book two stars. Since the story was intriguing again in the end, it partially redeemed itself enough to give two stars.

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### **Deb says**

Read for Cook the Books virtual foodie book club.

It took me a while to get into the book. I wasn't particularly fond of Diego from the start as he is young, selfish, and not that appealing. In fact, my favorite character turned out to be Pedro, his loyal greyhound. (I will never look at Hershey's kisses without thinking of Pedro). I do like time travel and I adore chocolate and learning about food history, so eventually the story kicked in more for me as Pedro finds himself living a very long life and wandering with Pedro from Mexico to Paris and then on to Vienna, England and America. While on his travels, Diego has brushes with many diverse historical figures such as Montezuma, the Marquis de Sade, Sigmund Freud, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, and Milton Hershey--which was entertaining and fun--although at times maybe a bit too much. Diego does grow some during his journey, but he never quite won me over completely. Besides Pedro, ;- ) the food descriptions were my favorite part and the book is filled with them (see my Food Inspiration notes below). Overall, although I didn't love this book, I think if you are a foodie and a chocolate fan and don't mind a lot of fantasy in your historical fiction, it is an interesting and enjoyable read that will have you reaching for the nearest chocolate bar.

You can see my review and a recipe inspired by the book here: <http://kahakaikitchen.blogspot.com/20...>

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### **Camilla says**

I would actually give this 2.5 stars. It was a little more than okay, but I can't say I'm wholly in the 'like it' camp either. I like a good story with time travel and fantastical elements, but this was not a satisfying read. It started off well, then descended into silliness as Diego encounters the Marquis de Sade, the inventor of the Sacher Torte, works for Hershey's, and comes full circle with Ignacia. It's a fanciful narrative about one man's history with chocolate wrapped around a contrived love story with some bizarre twists of fate. I didn't hate it, but I wouldn't read it again. And I would only recommend it with massive caveats.

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## **GiGi says**

The premise of this book and the synopsis of the plot was a good idea. The book itself however flew through history and in my opinion, went too fast. I wish the author was more descriptive about things other than Chocolate: what Diego was thinking, feeling, seeing, rather than just being descriptive about how many different ways he prepared chocolate.

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## **Aunty Janet says**

I found this a rich and intriguing book covering continents and centuries. Love, passion, and best of all, chocolate!

"In 1518 the 20-year-old Diego leaves Seville bound for Mexico where he joins Cortes's conquistadors and falls in love with the beautiful Ignacia. When Diego is ordered back to Spain, Ignacia gives him a parting gift: a chocolate drink, the elixir of life, and the promise that "If you are alive, then I am alive. Never cease in your search for me." But, returning to Mexico, he finds only her grave and so begins his wanderings, sometimes dictated by the forces of history, sometimes by his own whims. Through "an eternity of travel", he and Pedro reach Chiapas, the city of Ignacia's birth, where he discovers that time has slipped by a century.

Full of incident made more piquant by the introduction of significant figures along the way, Diego soon finds himself locked in the Bastille. It's 1788 and he swaps chocolate recipes with the Marquis de Sade. Then on to Vienna to create sachertorte. Fervent with questions, yet filled with despair about life's meaning, he begins his weekly visits to Freud. And all the while, his droll scrapes punctuate his slightly overdone gloom. On board ship to America, Gertrude Stein and Alice B Toklas solace him with talk of love and food. The early 1900s find him once more in Mexico, a man old in wisdom, but still virile in his ways."

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## **Sephie says**

Unexpectedly great read - Lovely undemanding, time-travelling tale of lost love, chocolate and a dog called Pedro. A really delicious read.

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## **Eileen says**

A bit silly - the plot had a lot of potential but it seemed like it was written for an audience with a very simply reading comprehension level.

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