



In the Devil's Garden: A Sinful History of Forbidden Food

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Deliciously organized by the Seven Deadly Sins, here is a scintillating history of forbidden foods through the ages—and how these mouth-watering taboos have defined cultures around the world.

From the lusciously tempting fruit in the Garden of Eden to the divine *foie gras*, Stewart Lee Allen engagingly illustrates that when a pleasure as primal as eating is criminalized, there is often an astonishing tale to tell. Among the foods thought to encourage Lust, the love apple (now known as the tomato) was thought to possess demonic spirits until the nineteenth century. The Gluttony “course” invites the reader to an ancient Roman dinner party where nearly every dish served—from poppy-crusted rodents to “Trojan Pork”—was considered a crime against the state. While the vice known as Sloth introduces the sad story of “The Lazy Root” (the potato), whose popularity in Ireland led British moralists to claim that the Great Famine was God’s way of punishing the Irish for eating a food that bred degeneracy and idleness.

Filled with incredible food history and the author’s travels to many of these exotic locales, *In the Devil’s Garden* also features recipes like the matzo-ball stews outlawed by the Spanish Inquisition and the forbidden “chocolate champagnes” of the Aztecs. This is truly a delectable book that will be consumed by food lovers, culinary historians, amateur anthropologists, and armchair travelers alike. *Bon appétit!*

In the Devil's Garden: A Sinful History of Forbidden Food Details

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Margitte says

This is a totally over-the-board, tedious, killer review. My sincere apologies for that. But maybe ... maybe ... MAYBE ... someone might walk beside me through this tale. But generous yours truly will forgive you if you skip it in its entirety. You need perseverance and lots of courage for this one. And since its not a fight or flight situation, you don't need to read it.

I was wondering with whom I can share SOME OF the information in this book. I imagined the following remarks:

Neighbor: "Have you noticed the kind of books she is reading? Oh dear, the poor soul. Don't eat at her place, you know she loves to test recipes and according THIS book, there are plenty to explore!";

Old School friend: "Are you okay, girl?" (thinking: "how sad for her, after all these years. She was always so happy and bright. Sigh.")

Bon vivant, connoisseur friends: "You don't want to invite her to dinner right now. She's just read this book that might ruin our appetites ... Friendships might be tested, you know."

Daughter: "Mommmmmmm! Why don't you try chick-lit instead. Still love you! But I need to know what's for dinner, right now!!!"

So there you have it. Forewarned and foretold!!

Fasten the seat belts. Keep bicarbonate of soda handy for possible indigestion! Half a teaspoon in half a cup of water. Stir very well, and swallow quickly.;-)

REVIEW

I know one thing for sure. Adam and Eve did not have the munchies for apples, unless The Garden of Eden was in the Ukraine (allegedly the original home of apples growing in the woods). The two sinners also had to be born after apples were hybridized, and that's only a few hundred years ago. The original apple was totally inedible, according to some sources. But then again, you can regard the Adam & Eve legend as a metaphor and not fact. In this book, however, it is postulated that the original apple might have been a tomato. Who knows, right? There were no witnesses. So who wrote that story, and when, I wonder?

If you deconstruct most religious ceremonies, you wind up with a man dressed suspiciously like a chef serving some kind of snack."

Food as sins. *In the Devil's Garden: A Sinful History of Forbidden Food*, states the obvious. This book is about world religions and the holy scriptures of each religion and how food fitted into the equations. Add a light, satirical, often crude mouth to tell the tale, and this book is happening. Tongue-in-cheek, challenging, outrageous, serious, too good to be true. Fact is there's facts in between. The facts are dished out in their multiples: dumbfounding, funny, astonishing, surprising, revolting, amazing.

The author says in the

Introduction: - ON SIN, SEX, AND FOR BIDDEN FOOD

What struck me while writing this book was the surprising extent to which people have judged, fought, and slaughtered others because of what they had for dinner. These laws about forbidden food give more than a unique perspective on history. They tell us quite a lot about the nature of pleasure and can turn the daily meal into a meditation on humanity's relationship to the delicious and the revolting, the sacred and the profane."

For this book you need ... a strong curiosity ... and ... a strong stomach ... just to read it!

Longggg spoiler. Indulge if you like :-)(view spoiler)

The book is organized into sections corresponding with the famous Seven Deadly Sins: lust, gluttony, pride, sloth, greed, blasphemy, and anger. Within each section are the stories of delicacies.

Each section begins with a satirical menu. For instance:

GREED MENU

APÉRITIF

Leche de Mamasita

Vodka, cream, and green ink

FIRST COURSE

Crostini de Jesus

Crisp baked wafer spread with a messianic pâté.

Sprinkling of Rindfleisch.

SECOND HELPINGS

Smoked Green Makaku

Herb-flecked loin of baboon, slow smoked over endangered tropical hardwoods.

MAIN COURSE

Fried Capitalist Pig

Deep-fried Haitian pork rind served in a bitter sauce. Garnished with eye-of-the-needle pickles.

DESSERT

Rock Candy Mountain

Served in a pool of whiskey sauce.

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The book continues sin by sin to cover everything from how the first recorded image of God relates to certain taboos in Asia and the West, to how modern corporations manipulate our subliminal hunting/violent urges to make junk food more appealing. Since whom we invite for dinner can be as important as what we serve, there are stories on how these rules have played a part in events like the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Disputes between “chefs,” like the one that split Europe in half, make an appearance. There are also recipes. A plate of Joël Robuchon’s famously sensual mashed potatoes should give the flavor of the sloth-like ecstasy that led the English to try to ban the root in the 1800s. ...

...These food taboos were so important to our ancestors that they often starved to death rather than violate them, and at least half of the world’s current population—from cow-crazy Hindus to kosher Jews to young Western vegetarians—still live with severe dietary restrictions on a daily basis.

Anorexia is not a modern trend either ... Fascinating detail about the ancient 'practice' of this form of voluntary starvation. There was even a Holy Anorexia to consider...starvation fasts.

Interesting, recipes are provided. Two examples:
(view spoiler)

Manna. Angel Food Cake, or not? The explanation is simply fascinating.
(view spoiler)

The normally abstemious Greeks have the last word. Literally, because the longest single word in their language was a dish recorded by Aristophanes in his work *Ecclesiazusae*.

*Now must the spindleshanks, lanky and lean,
trip to the banquet, for soon will, I wean,
high on the table be smoking a dish,
Brimming with game and with fowl and with fish.
(called) Plattero-fillete-muleto-turboto-cranio-morselo-pickleo-acido-silphio- honeyo-
poureontehtopo-ouzelto-thrusheo-cushatao-culvero-cutleto- roastingo-marrows-dipper-
leveret-syrupo-gibletto-wings
So now ye have heard these tidings true, get hold of a plate and an omelet too!*

This book made many of its readers squirmish, queasy, annoyed, thrilled, mesmerized. Compared to modern culinary delights, it is not so unworldly, unthinkable or unbelievable at all.

For a current tour through our cosmopolitan cuisines, the reader might indulge in the Food channel series *"Bizarre Foods of America"*, hosted by Andrew Zimmern. For the past decade he traveled 162 countries (and counting) and made numerous stops all over America, to tell the modern tale of culinary delicatessens.

In case you do not venture off on his exploits, here are some menu highlights:

A piece of fermented walrus anus;(Source: **USAtoday.com**

cuttlefish cooked in its own ink (Venus);

snail soup, whole baby pig head, rabbit paella and beef fat "bon bon" (Madrid)

Watch some of his adventures on **Youtube**

Stewart Lee Allen did pretty much the same for centuries gone by, by foraging through many countries, museums, ancient literature and folk tales, to compile this synopsis of our ancient kitchen adventures. Like his other book, which I LOVED, *The Devil's Cup: A history of the World According to Coffee*, he often wrote a travelogue while providing information on amazing culinary traditions of our ancestors.

The book is just an unbelievable experience. Stacked, packed, filled to overflowing with amazing historical facts, written in a casual, playful, chatty tone, leaving the reader often humored and smiling. But it also exposes a history of violence and barbarism.

We only have to look at our modern society, through the experiences of Andrew Zimmern, to confirm the validity of the information in this book. Stewart Lee Allen's extensive research makes up for the few factual mishaps.

(view spoiler)

On a more serious note cannibalism and anti-Jewish history, which began many centuries ago, were discussed in revolting detail. While reading it I wished I did not. Some things really need not to be known. Well, that's how I felt about it. It was just too shocking. The origin of vegetarianism - the tidbit about Hitler as a vegetarian--it all appears in the book as teasers to further studies elsewhere.

Big world. Different cultures. Many beliefs. All devoted to feeding the soul, body and mind.
Some call it moral rot, but, of course, one man's rot is another man's wine Sela.

For anyone interested in food, this is an entertaining, informative, fun and often hilarious read. But there are also serious moments of deep thought. I had a super time! I also learnt a few things I wish I had not.

Worth it? YES!!!

Tracey says

I added this book to my Library To Read list based on an NPR piece from January 2004.

Allen uses the seven deadly sins as the structure for a discussion on foods both irresistible and forbidden, beginning with a fanciful menu for each section. Not surprisingly, the Lust chapter discusses aphrodisiacs, but it also includes a compelling case for why the apple was the Forbidden Fruit of the Bible - it boils down to Roman vs Celtic Christianity. The tomato's carnal history vs that of its humble, bland sibling the potato is also presented.

Gluttony is a natural topic when talking about food; although some of the more outré meals made me a bit queasy. Pride includes a section on corn & how it was treated as a second-class foodstuff for centuries; even my grandmother refused to eat corn on the cob, since "that's what they feed pigs". Once it was off the cob, she had no problem with it. :shrug:. Sloth includes a section on the potato; its easy cultivation in the soil of Ireland helped contribute to the stereotype of lazy Irishmen.

The section on Greed discusses cannibalism and formula vs breastmilk; while Blasphemy covers the dietary restrictions of Jews, Hindus and Muslims - and how misinterpretations of those restrictions led to hate & prejudice in medieval Europe. Capsaicin and members of the allum family are discussed in Anger; and Allen wraps up with what he calls the Eighth Sin - when everything is allowed and nothing has flavor.

An entertaining look at the history of many different foodstuffs, with just enough detail to make you feel as if you were learning something new. Allen worked hard at covering non-European cultures, including information from Central/South America, the Middle East and India; more sources and stories from the Far East might have been useful as well.

He has an extensive bibliography and notes section; but an index would be helpful. For example, I know chocolate was discussed at least once, but can't remember if it was in Lust, Pride or Gluttony. The chapter titles, while whimsical, weren't of much help.

Recommended to food lovers with an interest in odd corners of history.

Brooke says

This book combines three of my favorite reading topics: history, theology, and food. Totally impressed with Allen's anthropological approach and keen eye to historical detail regarding the dialogue between people and their relationship with food over the ages. Highlights for me include: 1 - Garden of Eden, was it an apple or a tomato? 2 - Pythagoras, the world's first intellectual vegetarian! 3 - How the link between aggression and eating in our brains leads potato chip manufacturers to making extra crispy, crunchy chips/crisps.

Sarah says

3.5 stars. Interesting concept, and the writing style fit nicely with the subject matter. The prose is sensual, almost lurid at times. The red of a sinful tomato is described as "slut-red;" no one ever just "cuts" with a knife, when they can thrust it into something. I kind of felt like I needed a cigarette after reading a couple of these sections. I'm not sure I loved this way this is arranged according to the seven deadly sins--clever idea, but a little haphazard.

Mackenzie Cole says

An intensely frustrating book because it is full of interesting tidbits of information but the author apparently believes the best way to tell a story is to distill it to the most over-simplified and sensationalized version possible, with little regard for nuance or accuracy.

(I had to reread the sentence where he claims that people in China eat Tibetan Lamas four times before I fully processed it. Either this is a badly worded political comment or the author has confused Lamas - Tibetan Buddhist priests - with llamas - South American camelids - because I am quite sure that such cannibalism would be international news if it were actually occurring. Also worthy of note is the regurgitation (pun fully intended) of the obnoxious myth of the ancient Roman vomitorium, which in reality had nothing to do with vomit at all and historians have known this for years.)

Laura says

Had a few interesting stories, but on the whole seemed poorly researched and fact-checked. The author takes a "who knows" attitude to a lot of well-known facts and makes insultingly sweeping generalizations, assumptions, and ethnocentric statements. Also, the editor should be horsewhipped for letting so many misused words slip through.

Lisanne says

There are not many ways you can make me very angry to the point where I start screaming at my book, but man, this one found some of those ways. I'm not even going to finish this. If you want to write about sex, please do but don't make it into a 'I've done a lot of research on food and this is all very true'-book. Just write

about Spartan juice in a completely honest way, okay? If you want to write about your travels to exotic places, write a travel book. Do not combine said topics and pretend it's just about food.

Another thing: research? I can see there's a pretty extensive bibliography here, but where are the footnotes? Where are the references? A lot of these stories are just too weird or good to be true - and actually, it turns out THEY ARE LITERALLY TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE because they're more legend than fact yet the writes does not acknowledge this. A VOMITORIUM IS NOT A PLACE TO THROW UP IT'S AN EXIT OF AN AMPHITHEATRE YOU NITWIT. Give this man access to Google or you know, a Roman culture for Dummies book. Nope nope nope.

Also, I would prefer it if women are not referred to as 'sluts' and 'whores' and homosexuality is not frowned upon by the author or used to shock or as comic relief. Really, this is not necessary. This is just unacceptable.

I hope the author chokes on a slutty tomato before he attempts to write another book like this.

Jenny says

Once I got past the subtitle for this book, which isn't entirely accurate, I really enjoyed it. It bothered me at first that Allen didn't really write about forbidden foods altogether. He also wrote about food that caused trouble and food that carried significant meaning for various cultural and religious groups. But then, I realized that as much as a title matters, I was already reading the book anyway, and it didn't really matter that the book strayed from it's titular guidelines.

The structure of the book, organized by the seven deadly sins, was interesting. It led Allen to discuss food such as garlic, tomatoes, bushmeat, and communion wafers in fascinating and unexpected ways. The book is very informative, offering historical, economic, cultural, and religious backgrounds for why we eat and don't eat what we eat and don't eat. There were many facts that I never heard of before and aspects of food and of eating that I never considered. I really enjoyed the final chapter, a summation of the information offered, in which Allen reflects on why food taboos have mostly faded and what this means for our lives and our manners and values.

Allen's tone is fun and easy to follow. Sometimes, he's irreverent, but this is a secular book, and he treats all religions in the same way, sort of poking fun at their taboos and customs, sort of trying to understand them. He discusses Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam in the same way, although he discusses Christianity and Judaism the most, probably because those are the biggest religious influences on the West. Although he does discuss Eastern cultures, his focus is on European and American food interests. If I had one beef with Allen's tone it's that it does verge on disrespectful at times.

Overall, this is an enlightening, funny, and entertaining book. I would definitely recommend it to readers interested in learning more about food, culture, and how the two are inseparable from each other and from our psyches.

Laurie says

Author Allen sets out to give the history of foods as they pertain to the seven deadly sins- lust, gluttony, pride, sloth, greed, blasphemy and anger. It's an entertaining social history of human eating habits and taboos, but that's where I'd leave it- entertainment.

With it's long bibliography, one would think that the book was well researched. But I had the feeling that some things were more myth than fact; when he got to a bit about absinthe, I knew he was flying blind. (He said that absinthe is clear and turns green when you pour it over sugar. He even said that he found a bottle of this clear absinthe at a friend's house and tried to make it turn green. It didn't, of course. In reality, it starts green and turns milky when poured over the sugar and mixed with water.) This one obvious error made me doubt a lot more of the 'facts' in the book. Combine that with an attitude that all cultures other than his own are pretty weird about food, and it's a rather annoying book.

Kate says

I had high hopes for this book, and it didn't really meet many of them. It's more a collection of vignettes and anecdotes, loosely organized according to the Seven Deadly Sins, than an examination of foods that correspond to those sins. There are a few interesting segments, and a couple of recipes I plan to try out, but many of the connections are extremely tenuous, and seem to be simply an excuse for the author to relate some of the exotic journeys he's gone on through the years. It feels very self-indulgent, and as though he was basically looking for a framework into which to put his adventures and travels other than a mere memoir. The memoir would've probably been more interesting and cohesive, to be honest.

That said, the "menus" at the beginning of each chapter were really fun, and as I said - some of the recipes will be getting tried out. I just would've liked to see a lot more about food, rather than travelogue commentary, and more historical information.

For a work about devilish foods or forbidden foods, I'd recommend "The Devil's Picnic" over this book - that one admits that it's a gimmick book crossed with a travelogue, and so it works a lot better in context and hangs together better.

Viktoria says

While at times sacrificing compete and full accuracy for a more engaging narrative, this is an interesting book. The author chose to make it an easy read, rather than an academic tome. It has cuisine and culture from six continents, rather than just a eurocentric approach. I cannot speak to the recipes, as I did not try any, but they looked tasty. For once, I recommend reading the endnotes, as they are as witty as the rest of the book.

Abhishek Ganguly says

When San Jose Mercury News reviewed this one as "Clever ... In the Devil's Garden will amaze your dinner guests", they were clearly judging the book by its cover. If I shared any of the so called 'witty' anecdotes from this book with my dinner guests, I would be assured that they would never return to my table (with a very strong possibility that I would not be invited to theirs either, anytime soon).

There is nothing delightful to mention in 'In The Devil's Garden'. For an ardent fan of Microhistories and Food Writing, most of the narrative in this one seems unbelievable, incredulous and very largely revolting. Most of the food taboos seem more like folklore going extinct than actual facts. Stewart Lee Allen's

'research' (yes, quotes intended) on Indian cuisine and history makes it seem so medieval, uncultured and largely exaggerated that I am inclined to think that his description of the cuisine and food habits of cultures across the globe are just as exaggerated and fictional (and not even a good one).

Clearly, this book is written with the sole agenda of entertainment.

Having said all that, not everything is wrong with this book. The break up of the text into chapters related to the 7 Deadly Sins, the content of each chapter being more or less relevant to the corresponding sins, the menus preceeding each chapter (some descriptions are vomit inducing) add to the charm of the book. The book cover design is quite intelligent (exceedingly good for a paperback).

To say that 'In The Devil's Garden' falls short of expectations will be an understatement.

Lydia says

This is an interesting read about different forbidden foods throughout history, which bases its structure on the seven deadly sins. It's entertaining and sensuously written.

There are a number of factual inaccuracies however, despite what looks like a fairly extensive bibliography (a "vomitorium" is not a room where Romans went to throw-up their food at the end of a meal so that they could eat more... a basic google search tells you that this is a common misconception. I mean... how did this get past the editing process?!?). After noticing a few blatant falsities being paraded as truth, I decided that I couldn't actually trust anything that this book told me. Which is a bit of a shame considering it's meant to be non-fiction.

It is an entertaining read though. Well-written and it had some pretty unusual and fun recipes dotted throughout.

Sesana says

Disappointing. Some of the tidbits are interesting, but the author has a tendency to forget his premise. This isn't a history of forbidden foods in any sense, partly because there's nothing like a coherent history and partly because a huge number of the foods presented haven't ever been forbidden. You can tell he's stretching when he includes several pages about crunchy snacks in the chapter on rage, because crunching supposedly makes people aggressive? Worse, he got enough blatantly wrong that I can't trust anything he wrote that I didn't already know from other sources. No, Allen, historians do not debate whether or not Marie Antoinette said, "Let them eat cake," because they all know damn good and well that she didn't. There are far, far better food histories out there.

Tittirossa says

Brillante e superanedottico. Pure troppo.

Alla fine ti vien voglia di leggere Camporesi e Montanari per qualche "storia di cibo" quadrata e storiograficamente ineccepibile. Non che Allen non sembri ricco di sapere e conoscenza, ma questo sfoggio

di brillantezza alla fin fine risulta indigesto, si pilucca, si spizzica, un assazzino qui uno là, un po' di finger food e poi ci si rende conto che l'apericena sembra sempre così promettente, e ricca e "mammamia c'è anche la mortadella vegana e gli spiedini di scorpioni" poi torni a casa e a mezzanotte svuoti il frigorifero strafogandoti di ciccioli e maionese.
