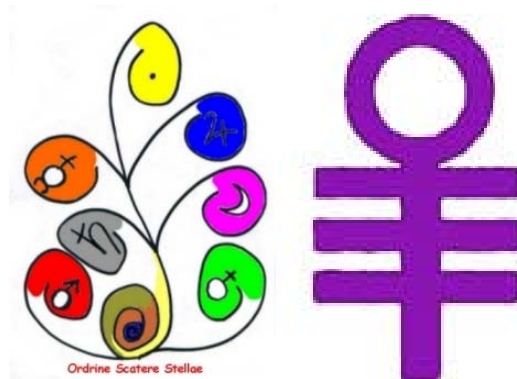




Jean de Cabalis

For Members of the Following Orders



The Power of Spice

Essaier LXXXIV

The Power of Spice

By John Elder

The following is a short story which presents some useful herb and spice magical lore within a fictional matrix. It is set sometime towards the middle of the next century. The "Convocation of Heads of Holy Orders" was real though, and what happened at the Convocation did actually happen [See Essaier LXXXIII]. It took place in 1972 in Auckland. The real breads are also real. I accompanied John Elder (a witch - Ed) to the meeting. He and I watched it all from the sidelines. John Elder is now blind, and living in Sydney where he makes a living as a professional storyteller. I have his permission to upload this story which appeared first in Magic Pentacle in 1991, and which holds the copyright - **Michael Freedman**

The Power of Spice: The apprentice looked up from the stone which she was laboriously turning to grind wheat into flour. She muttered under her breath, "Why can't I go down to the store and buy a packet of flour if he wants to make biscuits - better still, buy a packet of biscuits." "I heard that," said the old man, who was sitting in an easy chair, his feet up

and reading a tattered copy of Penthouse magazine. "Anyone can make ordinary biscuits," the old man said ostentatiously stroking his beard and toying with the Pentacle hanging round his neck. "We're going to make real biscuits." "What do you mean 'real biscuits'? How can biscuits be real or unreal? I bet any biscuits you'd make would be unreal. I came here to learn magic and, so far, all I've done is sweep floors and cook meals. When do we summon a demon to do the chores."

"I think I might have done just that when I was stupid enough to take you on. There's no quality in the occult these days, just out-of-work no-goods looking for a free meal and a bed. You've all been reading old copies of 2000 AD and Sandman, and think it is all grand battles against demons; and healing the country from the latest glowing plague. I'll tell you what it is, it's grinding flour to make your own biscuits. Let's have a look."

The old man rubbed a little of the flour between his fingers. "Put it through again while you do twenty-eight repetitions of the Arabic alphabet and one chant of the Song of the 18 Runes. That should get it fine enough. Now, let me get back to this very interesting 20th century manual on sex magic."

The apprentice began to chant the letters as she started the stone turning once again: "Alif - Ba. Ta - Tha. Jim - Cha ... "

Round and round the stone went, once for each letter, 28 letters, 28 times. At the end of each round, the apprentice shouted out "One time. Two times. Three times." and so on, until she shouted "Twenty-eight times" and launched herself in a very rapid, very loud chanting of the Rune-song. The wheel spun round and round.

The old man dropped his magazine and put his hands over his ears. "Remind me to tell you about the value of silence as a magical technique," he shouted over the lusty roaring of the apprentice.

Later that evening, after supper of "real" biscuits and real ale, the old man stretched out his legs in front of the meagrely glowing radiator. "Looks like the power station is running on half-fuel again."

"What's real about real biscuits?" the apprentice demanded. She knew that, after supper was as good as any time to wring information out of the old man, who clearly was determined to make her work as long as he could for every morsel of magical knowledge he grudgingly handed out.

"I could call this story The Power of Spice," the old man said.

"Is it a true story?"

"It is indeed, and don't you dare question the veracity of any Mage of Hermes. My story begins about 25 years before they nuked the oil fields in 1998 and everything went down the drain ... or up in smoke, I suppose it was.

"I was in New Zealand during those days; which was about as far as you could get from the northern hemisphere and still keep warm. I was new in the city and had met only one other magician. Everyone was full of ideas of co-operation in those days, before the world broke up into little communities each fighting to survive in a grey, dark and very cold world. We still know how to do things, but we cannot afford to do them ..."

"Get on with the story," the apprentice said. "I know all about how things are today."

The old man held out his thin, bony long-fingered hands to the radiator; the young woman pulled her sheepskin around her shoulders and hunched forward. "My magical friend invited me to go with him to a 'Convocation of Heads of Holy Orders' which he had been invited to discuss mutual co-operation among magical orders in Auckland. Everyone was full of ideas of co-operation in those days ... "

"You already said that. Get on with the story."

"I knew it was to be a social occasion as well, because I had been told to byob."

"What's byob ?"

"Bring your own bottle of booze."

"Why wouldn't you ?"

"Things were different then, everyone had more than enough for themselves. At that time, about 25 years ago, I knew only one or two other magicians in New Zealand, so I was unsure of what to expect. I decided to prepare magical breads, known as real-breads, to take to the party. I cooked some very thin, crisp, rye biscuits.."

"Did you grind the flour yourself ?" The apprentice massaged her hands and stretched her fingers.

"No, and I didn't have an apprentice at the time. I bought it in a shop. I said some spells over the rye flour, which is for Saturn and cold reality. The spells were designed to make the eaters, not so much tell the truth - that is too much to expect of any follower of Hermes - as to show themselves as they really were.

"Then, I added the spices. I used plenty of Cinnamon, to invoke Mercury in Gemini, which brings talkativeness. Unfortunately, while Mercury means communication, it does not necessarily mean truthful communication, although it does not automatically mean lying. It was perhaps unwise of me to have omitted anything to counteract the links Cinnamon also has with the explosively peculiar Uranus energies. I did not actually invoke Mars, but I didn't anticipate the need for Venus.

"I added a few drops of almond essence, to invoke Jupiter, which would bring the situation closer to reality, and also should mean an open and frank atmosphere. Then a pinch of Salt; I used table salt, which traditionally links to Saturn in Aquarius and can be used to invoke reality. I should have used rock salt, which is Saturn in Capricorn and much more down to

earth. I had forgotten what I did in fact know, that table salt has trace quantities of iodine in it, which would bring in Neptunian influences of lying, deceit and fantasy."

"I thought Salt was Neptune. What was Table Salt?"

"Refined salt, made in a factory, with all sorts of chemical additives, like iodine to prevent goitre. You know what a goitre is, that young man who sweeps out the store has one, all swollen around his neck.

"In these days, salt corresponds to Neptune, because all our salt comes from the sea. This is a pity. I myself liked the earthy character of Rock Salt, rather than see it slip over to such a watery energy as Neptune. In those days, Salt was Saturnian, and sometimes it was even fiery.

"Then, I added a tiny pinch of Comfrey, which is also Saturnian, to invoke a more 'real' atmosphere, but not so much that it noticeably flavoured the real-breads.

"Rye is a Saturnian grain and is used to make people act as they really are. Using hindsight, I would have been wiser to have made the biscuits from ordinary wheaten flour, with its links to Venus. As the evening turned out, some peaceable Venus influences might not been amiss. I will not detail the actual spells I used ..."

"You mean you've forgotten them," the girl interrupted."

" ... Any experienced magician composes such spells to order for each occasion. I murmured appropriate Words and God-names while rolling the pastry and as I added each of the spices.

"I also ensured that we timed our arrival at the convocation for when my strongest and most favourable planets were in the ascendant, or in good aspect to it. I put the platter of magical real-breads which I had made on the buffet and waited to see what might happen. It was a very interesting time, in the Chinese proverbial sense of the word."

"What's that mean?"

"It is an old Chinese curse, 'May you live in interesting times.' China was a northern hemisphere country.. "

"I know that."

"Well, people were still talking about that evening 20 years later! I survived the evening largely by minimising my alcohol intake and engaging in interior meditation on the follies and foibles of human beings. One or two others also withdrew into themselves and, like my friend and I, were wary observers.

"The other 'heads of holy orders' put on an amazing series of performances. Two of them decided to do one of the advanced rituals of the Order of Saturn on the dining room table ..."

"What's that mean?"

"You're too young. Ask me again in ten years time."

"Ten years!"

"The rest of them behaved like a pack of medieval barons squabbling over newly plundered territory. Accusations were flying everywhere ... poaching members ... fraudulent charters ... enormous initiation fees charged well-to-do ladies from Remuera ...

"That used to be a few miles east of Auckland, didn't it?"

"Yes, it was a suburb in which only the wealthy were allowed to live. Someone took it out in 1999 with a portable nuke, in the early days of the People's Revolution. That was before the New Raw Anarchy was established and things settled down. Let me finish the story.

"The evening culminated with one Head of a Holy Order being publicly stripped of his clothes and all magical insignia by other members of his Order and expelled, rather violently, from both his Order and the front door.

"It was a very interesting evening, and an excellent example of the effects of real-breads, just one of the many ways to use spice magically. Here end the lesson."

The old man stretched out in his chair and wriggled his toes nearer the radiator.

"Now, off with you and warm up my side of the bed. That's the first duty of every magical apprentice. Never forget it."