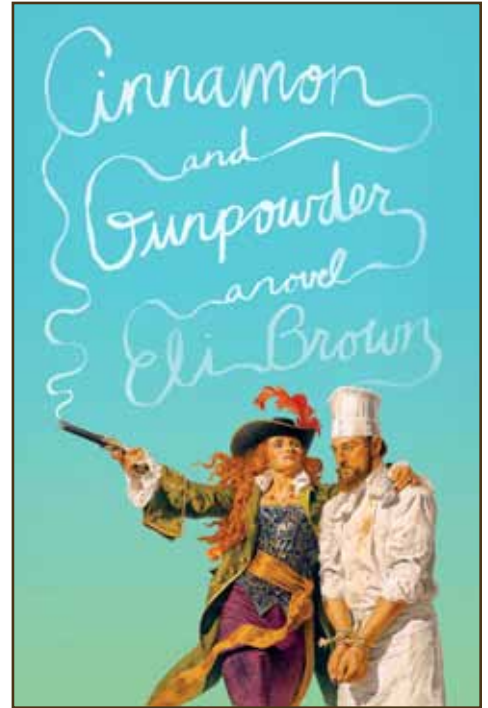


Reading Group Gold

Cinnamon and Gunpowder

by Eli Brown



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In *Cinnamon and Gunpowder*, the prizewinning author Eli Brown serves up the audacious tale of a fiery pirate captain, her reluctant chef, and their adventures aboard a battered vessel, the *Flying Rose*. As these unlikely shipmates traverse the oceans, intrigue, betrayal, and bloodshed churn the waters.

The year is 1819, and Owen Wedgwood, famed as the Caesar of Sauces, has been kidnapped by the ruthless captain Mad Hannah Mabbot. After using her jade-handled pistols on his employer, lord of the booming tea trade, Mabbot announces to the terrified cook that he will be spared only as long as he puts an exquisite meal in front of her every Sunday without fail.

To appease the red-haired tyrant, Wedgwood works wonders with the meager supplies he finds on board, including weevil-infested cornmeal and salted meat he suspects was once a horse. His first triumph is that rarest of luxuries on a pirate ship: real bread, made from a sourdough starter that he keeps safe in a tin under his shirt. Soon he's making tea-smoked eel and brewing pineapple-banana cider.

Even as she holds him hostage, Mabbot exerts a curious draw on the chef; he senses a softness behind the swagger and the roar. Stalked by a deadly privateer, plagued by a hidden saboteur, and outnumbered in epic clashes with England's greatest ships of the line, Captain Mabbot pushes her crew past exhaustion in her hunt for the notorious King of Thieves. As Wedgwood begins to understand the method to Mabbot's madness, he must rely on the bizarre crew members he once feared: Mr. Apples, the fearsome giant who loves to knit; Feng and Bai, martial arts masters sworn to defend their captain; and Joshua, the strangely mute cabin boy.

A giddy, anarchic tale of love and appetite, *Cinnamon and Gunpowder* is a wildly original feat of the imagination, deep and startling as the sea itself, and ideal for reading groups to feast upon. This

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guide features a recipe for scrumptious Vanilla Rose Amaretti in addition to discussion topics. May you enjoy every last morsel of the journey.

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How did your opinions of Mad Hannah Mabbot, Alexandre Laroche, and Lord Ramsey shift throughout the novel? What separates the heroes from the truly mad characters in *Cinnamon and Gunpowder*?
2. On page 75, Owen Wedgwood explains culinary harmony to Hannah, describing the six tastes: salty, sour, sweet, bitter, astringent, and umami (which Wedge calls the Pearl Gate). Which of these are you drawn to? Do you share Wedge's poetic interpretations of flavor?
3. On this voyage, what did you discover about the opium trade of the nineteenth century? Where does Mabbot draw the line between acceptable and unacceptable piracy?
4. Mabbot is a woman in a man's world. How does her gender influence her perspective and behavior? What role does it play in her relationships with Ramsey and the Brass Fox?
5. After being kidnapped, Wedge makes an inventory of the meager ingredients available aboard the *Flying Rose*. If you had to run to your larder (pantry) right now and prepare a meal as if your life depended on it, what's the best dish you could fashion?
6. On page 209, as the showdown with Alexandre Laroche intensifies, Mabbot declares that all cargo, except for provisions, must be thrown overboard. She sets an example by jettisoning her precious jewels and asking, "We love our silver but consider this: What would you pay for your life?" How would you respond? Which of your possessions would be most difficult for you to part with?
7. How is Wedge affected by his memories of losing his wife, Elizabeth, and their child? In chapter six, how does cooking become his ultimate antidote to grief? Is he doomed to experience love as loss?
8. Wedge and Mabbot share humble beginnings. Which played the greater role in their successes: fate or wits? How did they become masters in the sensual seduction of power brokers?
9. If Mabbot were to write a motivational book on leadership, what would she advise readers to do? Is violence the only source of her power? How does she maintain law and order—and achieve victory—on the *Flying Rose*?
10. What makes it easy for Wedge to bond with Joshua? What mutual needs does their friendship fulfill?
11. What are Mabbot's underlings hungry for: power? fortune? praise? How do Conrad's motivations compare to those of Mr. Apples? What is the basis of Feng and Bai's loyalty?

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12. Discuss the dishes that appealed to you the most, from Wedge's first death-defying meal (potato-crusted cod served with saffron rice and a red-wine reduction sauce made from garlic, peeled shrimp, and dried figs) to his subsequent masterpieces (herring paté with rosemary on walnut bread, rum-poached figs stuffed with blue cheese and drizzled with honey, pigeons fried with smoked babirusa pork and simmered in a molé sauce—to name just a few). What makes him a master at flavor-hunting and flavor-pairing? What is the most exotic food you've enjoyed?
13. How does Kerfuffle change Wedge's perception of rabbits, and of life?
14. In his epilogue, does Wedge describe his new life as paradise, or does it seem bittersweet? Can he experience true freedom without the *Flying Rose*?

PRAISE FOR *CINNAMON AND GUNPOWDER*

"Both sizzling and swashbuckling." —*Kirkus Reviews*

"I just got home from holiday and found *Cinnamon and Gunpowder* awaiting me on my doorstep. The first pages immediately caught my interest, so I read on, putting down what I was already reading to do so. Thirty-six hours and 318 pages later, I'm so happy I did. A great beach read that doesn't sacrifice beautiful writing, the rare 'foodie' book that doesn't cloy, and, oh, Hannah! What a character she is—sexy, hilarious, tough, and with such heart. *Cinnamon and Gunpowder* reads as if Joss Whedon and Patrick O'Brian sailed to Copenhagen together and, after surviving a ninja attack and a firefight at sea, fell in love over a seven-course meal at Noma." —Julie Powell, author of *Julie and Julia*

"Most unusual . . . Think *Babette's Feast* meets *Pirates of the Caribbean*!" —Wilda Williams, *Library Journal*

"What an original and exquisite novel this is—salty, smart, and sensuous. Eli Brown unfurls a pirate story that's also an eloquent disquisition on human appetite and the mysteries of taste." —Carolyn Cooke, author of *Daughters of the Revolution*

"Brown concocts a clever tale in which history, ethics, action, and romance blend harmoniously. Tantalizing descriptions of the smells and flavors of the dishes Wedgwood creates may send readers running to their spice cabinets in search of the blends he exalts in, even as they are entranced by Brown's delectable tale." —Amber Peckham, *Booklist*

"An early nineteenth-century tale of culinary seduction and swashbuckling antics, featuring characters who evoke the desperate ingenuity of Scheherazade and the hell-bent ruthlessness of Ahab . . . Brown explores the mysteries of flavor with prose that any word-savoring foodie will delight in." —*Publishers Weekly*

FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eli Brown lives on an experimental urban farm in Alameda, California. His first novel, *The Great Days*, won the Fabri Literary Prize.

Guide written by Amy Clements

The recipe for Vanilla Rose Amaretti is on the next page.

VANILLA ROSE AMARETTI

Prep time: 15 minutes

Total time: 1 hour

These simple delicacies are close to what Wedgwood prepared for Mabbot in chapter twenty of Cinnamon and Gunpowder—proof that one doesn't need rubber spatulas or fancy appliances to make something special. Of course, poor Wedgwood was obliged to make his own rose extract from the flower scraps in a stolen potpourri. We're lucky enough to find rose extract available in specialty groceries or online. In a pinch, food-grade essential rose oil will work as well—simply replace the rose extract with one drop of rose essential oil; a little goes a long way.

Vanilla Rose Amaretti are gluten-free, vegan, and free of refined sugar—the perfect treat for any party.



1 1/2 cups shredded coconut, packed

3/4 cup almond flour, packed

1/2 cup maple syrup

3 tbsp coconut butter

1 tbsp almond butter

1 1/2 tsp vanilla extract

1 1/2 tsp rose extract

1/4 tsp sea salt

Preheat oven to 350° F.

In a medium mixing bowl, combine ingredients with a fork until well mixed.

Line a baking tray with parchment paper.

Using your hands, squeeze dough into plum-sized dollops and distribute evenly on the tray. You may need to rinse your hands with warm water if they become too sticky.

Bake at 350° for 10 minutes.

Rotate tray for even cooking. Reduce oven temperature to 200° and continue baking for 25 minutes.

Remove from oven and let cool before serving.