

Crispy Spadelweiss Worm

Hi. You may have noticed I'm a robin. I've been asked to tell you about our winter festival. The *Return of the Great Spade*. I know. It sounds like a superhero comic for gardeners. But it's the most important festival of the year for Robinkind. Nowadays it's usually just known as *Spadelweiss*.

First of all I'd better tell you a bit about myself. I'm a Robin model and I've just come back from a spade-handle shoot. There's a lot of seasonal work available for robin models at this time of year for Christmas cards and wrapping paper. Most of it is bread and butter stuff...you know in the background behind children-in-unfashionable-bobble-hats-building-snowmen sort-of-thing.

We used to do the winter shoots in Wincanton but they don't get snow there nowadays, so we have to go further afield. This year we were in Saudi Arabia. Yeah I know. But they've towed a bit of broken ice-cap down there, and they had a great solar-powered snow machine.

But its great when you get a spade-handle job. Not only are you the supermodel, but for me it gets back to the true meaning of the festival, which of course is why I'm here. Our group, *Put the Spade back in Spadelweiss* goes round gatherings like this and I'd like to thank your organiser, Eric Sparrowhawk, for inviting me.

For me *Spadelweiss* is all about our Provider the *Great Spade* who gives abundant worms and perching for all robins regardless of genus or territory. Throughout the year She turns over the soil and brings us our very lifesource. But in the winter she disappears.

I believe She returns to the navel belly of the world known in many cultures as the *Sacred Shed*. But for millennia we robins have performed the rituals and ceremonies of *Spadelweiss* to bring her back, so she can once again be our Great Provider.

Many robins give a half-hearted sort-of-nod to the *Great Spade*. In surveys most robins say they believe in *some* kind of digging implement. But many say that they believe that all digging implements are part of the same *Great Plough*. Yet when it comes to *Spadelweiss*, most robins still practice the traditions of *Ucomminit*, *Ebid Catchew* and the feast of *Crispy Spadelweiss Worm*. More of these shortly.

But how many robins understand the true significance of *Spadelweiss*? And how many practice the rituals correctly? The reason I am here today, is to ask any robins among you this question: 'If we fail to do these rituals properly, will the *Great Spade* return at all?'

At *Put the Spade back in Spadelweiss* we believe it's vital to keep up the proper traditions and beliefs of robins. Those who don't will not enter into the *Wonderful Wormery* at the end of their days.

So how can robins practice the *Return of the Great Spade* with proper devotion and commitment? I will deal with the ceremonies one at a time.

1. **Ucomminit.** The sacred ceremony of *Ucomminit* is performed on *Spadelweiss Eve*. As you know, robins are fierce and territorial, territorially fierce and indeed fiercely territorial. This is an advantage for the *Ucomminit* ceremony. The robins gather in secret, sacred and mystical holly groves. The ritual begins with both male and female robins drinking deeply from the fermented juices of the holly berry, a beverage known as *Ouch*. As the sacred nectar takes effect the robins select a partner and square up to each other. They then sing the holy song. This is hard to translate from Robinish so I will give it to you first in the beauty of its original tongue:

Tweet, Tweet, Tweet, Tweet

Tweet, Tweet,

Tweet, Tweet, Tweet, Tweet

Tweet, Tweet.

As I say, this is hard to render into English, but an approximation would be:

Ucomminit U bastard

I cud 'ave you any time

Ucomminit U bastard

Ucomminit, yeah!

The robins then begin the ritual head butting.

This doesn't need too much explanation as I understand humans have a similar ritual. For robins it serves a twofold purpose.

Firstly, although many scholars and robologians have speculated on the origins of the robin's red breast, I can tell you now that sacred blood flows from the robins' heads on *Spadelweiss Eve*. It streams from their wounds and replenishes and revives the glorious redness of their chests.

Secondly, the combination of the *Holly Ouch*, the head butting and the loss of blood takes the robins into the ecstatic state of *Woh Noh*. Here many have visions of the future and revelations of truth before collapsing into a trance state ready for the next stage of the *Spadelweiss* ceremony: *Ebid Cat Chew*

2. **Ebid Cat Chew.** Although this sounds like an online auction for pet food, many robologians think that this ancient and sacred tradition is derived from the saying *The early bird catches the worm*. There may be some truth in this as the *Ebid* ritual is started very early. At dawn on *Spadelweiss*, the

unconscious robins begin to revive in their secluded and mystical groves. The first thing they do is pee en masse on the cold or frozen ground. This has the dual function of thawing the ground and bringing the worms to the surface. Hang on, I hear you say. 'Robins don't pee. I've never seen a robin pee.' In turn may I ask you a question? Have you ever seen a Robin drunk and high with a bladder full of *Ouch*? And have you been to a sacred, secluded and mystical robin holly grove at dawn on *Spadelweiss* morn?

Once the worms have come to the surface, they have to be culled. You humans have your Halal and your Kosher. We robins have *Tweet*. Again, this doesn't translate well. The worms are carefully pulled from the ground as robanely as possible, taking care not to cause any distress. Over years of symbiosis between robins and worms (skewed somewhat in favour of robins it has been said) robins have learnt the rudiments of *Wormese*. Once a worm has been removed fully from the ground the removing robin whispers to one end something along the lines of: 'Have you seen that fine and fit worm over there. My mate told me she really fancies you.'

To the other end the robin says: 'I should look out if I were you. See that worm over there. He's got nothing but evil intentions.'

At this stage one end of the worm begins to chase the other, whilst the other flees from the pursuit. Robins call this *The Wheelie Worm Lifecircle*, which paradoxically leads rapidly to the death of the worm. They are quickly exhausted of their life-force with all this sudden movement and excitement.

Now we are ready for the final part of the *Spadelweiss* ceremony. The preparation and consumption of the *Crispy Spadelweiss Worm*.

3. The feast of Crispy Spadelweiss Worm

This is the culmination, indeed the zenith of the *Return the Great Spade* festival. Without it would the spade return from the *Sacred Shed*? And if the spade didn't return from the *Sacred Shed* would there be worms in all their plumpness, and perfect perching on the Handle of Life? If there are any robins among you, consider the noble robinity of your red breasts. Pre-packed *Crispy Worm* will not do. No mass-processed worm can capture that combination of external crispiness and internal gooeyness that is necessary for the final ritual magic of *Spadelweiss*

The worms should be marinated in a combination of larks fat, motorcaravan oil and buzzard beak scrapings. The lark's fat must be from free-air larks, not farmed. Approach traveller robins for the motorcaravan oil, overcome your prejudice about their lack of proper territoriality. Only theirs is unhydrogenated and often infused with the fragrance of joss sticks. As for buzzard beak scrapings - many robins have lost their lives in this quest and few attain it. But with this magical ingredient nibblers will get fast tracked through penance to the *Great Wormery*.

While the marinating is happening, robins give and receive weeds as presents. It is hard to find weeds in winter, but effort must be found to locate remaining leaves of ground elder, dandelion and bindweed. The robins adorn their feet with the foliage and take deep meditative breaths towards their feet in a ritual called *Pant a' Claws*. The weeds are to lure the *Great Spade* from the *Sacred Shed*. More *Holly Ouch* is drunk at this stage and then the *Spadelweiss* dancing begins. As this becomes increasingly frenzied ecstatic trance states may occur. Feelings of universal peace are common and robins can often be heard saying to each other:

'Yore sher besht robin, yer really are. Yer sher besht robin in der whole world yu'ar'

Then each robin collects earth and clay and they build it not into a nest, but a spade-shaped oven. It is fired with twigs and sticks to robulo 6 and the weeds are fed down the flue of the fire. Finally the worms are introduced, tails in mouths, mouths in tails, little circles of life, and as they bake all the robins join wings and sing this secret song:

Tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet

Tweet,

Tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet

Tweet.

Tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet

Tweet.

This is sung three times and then, at that moment, the worms are perfectly baked. The external crispiness - the dry, dead, old year. The internal gooeyness - the soft new life within, ready to burst forth.

Finally, the worms are eaten, not with reverence, but with abandon and *Ouch*-induced carousing. Ornithologists have it wrong. Most robins are conceived not in the spring but in the passion and ecstasy of *Spadelweiss Day*.

At the climax of food and wine and sex and ritual, the *Great Spade* hears the cries of the robins. She begins to stir from her winter slumber and as She does realises that She must return from the *Sacred Shed*. She must return to be the robins' *Great Provider* for another year.

Thank-you for listening to my talk. If you are a robin...if have any repressed feelings for robins...or better still if you are thinking of joining us and becoming a robin, I ask you to reflect on what I have said. To question your soul and examine your heart. May spring always come and with her, the

Great Spade, that we may have worms and have them more abundantly.
Thank-you.

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