

## The T Burger

I walked into the Burgo's outlet, the familiar smell of meat patties wafting up my nose. Ah, that was the smell that I had missed out on for so long! That was the smell of sinful pleasure, and a rare treat that one afforded on celebratory occasions. I told myself that today, I would pig out and indulge myself in the new burger they were releasing — The T Burger.

Nowadays, having the good, old-fashioned burgers filled with real beef, the good stuff, was rare. Cities around the world began to not just upwards into the sky and downwards into the ground, but also sideways, as the world's population became to balloon. There just had to be a way to find some place, somewhere to accommodate everyone. Land meant for agriculture was cleared, with the crops gone and replaced by concrete towers and steel and glass. That left very little land to grow most crops, let alone land for cattle grazing, or for growing grain feed for chicken. Meat in general was a rare commodity now around Singapore, and of course the limited cuts of meat went to the wealthy, leaving the ordinary people like me stuck with the unwanted cuts, or having to turn to "alternative meat" instead. Now, when Burgo's launched their T burger, it led to crazy media coverage and snaking queues at the outlets before they even opened. It was revolutionary. Not only did they promise the same taste, texture and juiciness of real meat, but it was also free from all those nasty preservatives and trans fat. I've been eyeing it since its launch, but yet I had to control my diet to curb my hypertension and cholesterol. Today would be *that* day, the day I would take the plunge.

I walked up to the automated cashier.

"How-may-I-help-you-today?"

I quickly keyed in my order for the T burger and waved my watch to tap and pay. "Thank-you-for-visiting-Burgo's! See-you-again-soon!" the voice said with an excessively excited robotic voice, coupled with Burgo's store jingle playing in the background.

I found a seat and looked around. The outlet was full and everyone was tucking into their T burger. There were other items on the menu, but it was obvious that everyone was here for the T burger. What was the tagline again? The Triple Ts — tempting, tasty and tantalising? All too soon, the burger was served, with a side of fries and a soft drink. It was here, it was finally here. The moment that I had been waiting for. The fragrance of meat permeated the surroundings. The burger glistened and almost seemed to be glowing and standing out among the brightly-coloured decor of the restaurant. I felt like the burger was calling out to me, begging me to taste it. I picked up the burger and took a bite.

As I took my first bite, a mishmash of flavours exploded inside my mouth, each interplaying with another. The flavour of the patty, mixed with the sauce, mixed with the lettuce, created yet another new flavour that was not only delicious, but layered. If this was the food served in heaven

everyday, please, send me up to heaven right now! I could eat this everyday, forever.

I took another bite, and yet another followed by another. It was impossible to stop eating it. The burger was amazing, the bun soft and fluffy, the lettuce crunchy, the patty perfectly grilled and juicy, this was the encapsulation of perfection. I wolfed down the burger voraciously, eyes darting around, trying to spot the manager. The burger was divine, I *had* to know what was inside it.

I spotted a well-dressed man in a suit, perusing a booklet and talking in hushed voices to a guy dressed in an oversized T-shirt. Perhaps he was the manager? It would seem odd for someone to wear a suit in a fast-food restaurant. I walked over.

“Hello, are you the manager?” The well-dressed man quickly slammed the booklet shut, and reflexively stepped back from the man in the oversized shirt.

“Yes, I am the manager. How may I help you?”

“Oh, your T burger is amazing! I’d just like to know, what goes inside it? It tastes brilliant!”

The man in the suit cast a furtive glance at the other man, before replying with a professional smile, “Sorry, but it’s a company trade secret. We hope you understand. We’re really glad you liked it though, please do feel free to order another one if you’d like!” He ended with a cheeky wink. How charming!

“Don’t worry, I was just about to! In fact, it’s so good, I’m ordering three more sets!”

I turned and was about to head back to the automated cashier to order more T burgers, when I heard someone call my name. I turned around. It was the man in the oversized T-shirt. He said, “Wait, are you Johnny from Uni? Do you still remember me? I’m Steve! Fancy seeing you here.”

Steve? The Steve I remembered from Uni was a plump, geeky student, who had an obsession with everything science-related, from biochemistry to astrophysics. He was the encyclopaedia of the cohort, if anyone wanted to know something science-related, he was your man. It wasn’t that hard to find him too — everyone knew him for his thick glasses that made his looks appear to bulge and make him look a little nerdy, and honestly, he probably was. He always seemed to be buried in his books, or stuck in the labs. Thirty years on, and it appears that age had caught up to him as well, as his belly stuck out noticeably through the outline of his shirt.

“What are you doing here?” I replied.

“Oh... nothing much, just here for work. We should catch up soon, why don’t we reconnect after I’m done with my work here!”

I nodded in agreement. Thirty years was a long time, and it was always a nice thing to reconnect with someone after so long. I walked back to the automated cashier, looking to order another set of T burgers.

They were served not long after, and each bite of the burgers seemed to provide me with the same mind-blowing taste as the very first bite. I ate and ate, and time seemed to pass by in a blur. I felt bloated by the time I was done, slouching back into my chair.

Steve came over and sat opposite me, and we started discussing the latest developments in our lives and reminiscing about the foolish moments we had had in Uni. It turns out that following graduation, Steven entered the waste collection industry and had made a pretty big name for himself, now owning his own waste management start-up.

“So what about you, what are you doing here?” he asked.

“To try out the T burger, of course. There was so much hype around it, and everyone told me that it tasted so good, of course I had to try it for myself! It did not disappoint. Have you tried the T burger? I could get one for you right now.”

Steve reflexively made a face. He lowered his voice.

“So...you’ve eaten the T burger... Do you know what goes inside it? I must tell you about it.”

He quickly got up and signalled for me to follow him outside. Just then, one of the rubbish trucks from his company pulled over just outside the Burgo’s outlet. He signalled to the driver to stop. I was anxious and asked him to continue. “This Burgo’s... they’re absolutely crazy. They’ve devised a way to take the trash that I collect, throw it in some machine, add some flavouring, chemicals, even some scrap metals, and voila, you get a patty! Technology is really mind-blowing these —”

My eyes opened wide. I couldn’t believe my ears.

“What? So the T burger —”

“Yes, the patty in the T burger is made from the trash up there.” He gestured vaguely to the truck that pulled over. The pungent stench of garbage wafted up my nose. I was beginning to feel queasy. He continued, “What else did you think the T stood for? Of course it stood for Trash.”

I felt sick and started puking uncontrollably by the roadside...