



BÁNH MÌ



DAKGANGJEONG (KOREAN FRIED CHICKEN)

Versus

By Danny Fairchild

Look down below at my little bio/byline thingy. Since the beginning, I've invited both a fight and food. Versus wants to give me both. Versus thinks it can back up the smack they're talking with their "Our flavors versus your tastebuds" mentality. They think they can make me sit down. They think they can chump me. And what's more, they think they can chump YOU.

Don't worry, friend. I got this.

Okay, Versus. You think you got the goods, kid? Cuz I gotta say, even if you win against me, it doesn't mean you'll win against the rest of the Tri-States. Gotta say that while Dubuque's palate has certainly gotten more hip, bánh cuisine is quite a big swing. You're just hucking a haymaker, aren't you? You want to make this a quick fight, don't you?

Psh. Look at this little food "truck." More like a food trailer pulled behind a big Ram truck. That's not an insult, mind you. That's just what you should be looking for if you wanna step to them. And before I get too far, bánh, if you want a practical definition, is basically a Vietnamese

word that's grown to encompass a wide variety of dishes easily eaten on the go. When you hear the word bánh, just think of Southeast Asian street food. So... a food truck is actually a pretty good setting for such cuisine. It's right at home. Oh, but don't think you've won me over yet, Versus. I haven't even gotten to your food yet. We're still just sizing each other up.

Your flavors versus my tastebuds? They're not your buds, pal.

Because here's the thing... Sure, Dubuque loves Asian cuisine. But saying that is like the band Toto saying they bless the rains down in Africa. Asia and Africa are huge friggin' continents. You have to be more specific to make any sort of sense. Nobody asks for North American cuisine, but if you did, you might get a hamburger or you might get a chorizo torta. Specifying a type of cuisine to a whole dang continent just doesn't work. So while Dubuque loves a stir fry and the occasional curry, it's tough for us to wrap our heads around an Asian sandwich let alone wrap our mouths around it. You think your flavors can overcome that? Alrighty, then. Bring it. Bring on the bánh mì.

Bánh mì? Bánh you! That's what I have to say to any attacks on my tastebuds! They're not your buds, guy! But first, bánh mì is a type of Vietnamese sandwich. It's served on bread very similar to

a baguette. If this doesn't make sense to you, just remember that Vietnam was a French colony for a while. Then you'll also understand where the pâté on such a sandwich comes from. Then comes the Vietnamese meat and vegetables that really make this street foodable. Not many good things come from colonization, but sometimes good food happens.

Now bring it, Versus. Bring your buttery garlic mayonnaise and choice of beef sirloin, shredded chicken, Chinese BBQ pork, or Szechuan-style tofu. Oh, you want to throw some pickled daikon and carrots, and some fresh cukes, jalapeño, and cilantro? Okay! I can take a punch!

Hold on a second. What just happened? How long have my tastebuds been out for? Last thing I remember is I went big and opted for the sirloin and got sucker punched by some serious flavor. Like... I was ready for it, and I still didn't see it coming. The meat, the bread, the pâté, all of it has just enough toothiness to be a satisfying bite, right before all the aforementioned components start melting in your mouth and working the ol' one-two with the crispness of the veggies. Bam, right in the friggin' mouth.

Alright. My bad. I may have underestimated you, Versus. Your bánh mì took the first round. But I'll be damned if you have another dish that can dish out the same

level of—oh, hell. You got dakgangjeong?! Okay. Wait, wait, wait. Don't hurt me. Let me explain, first. Dakgangjeong is basically Korean fried chicken. How to describe it? You know how when you order General Tso's chicken and it comes nice and fresh and the breading is still crisp despite the sauce so the sauce is just kind of glazing it? That gets you kind of close to dakgangjeong. I'd never tried dakgangjeong before and was excited to put up my dukes. Crispy. So crispy. It should be, since it's deep fried TWICE! Gots to get that crunch around the succulent morsels of chicken, dontcha know. And the sauce. Sweet and spicy, but not too spicy for Dubuque. If you're worried about spiciness, they also have a garlic soy variation. The spiciness we're talking about usually comes from a red chili paste called gochujang. You've probably heard of it by now since it's kind of taking the U.S. by storm, but until a few years ago, you'd be hard pressed to find it here. But sriracha and the internet kind of opened the door for it, and here we are: We can get dakgangjeong here in the Tri-States. Nice. You haven't fully had fried chicken until you've had Korean fried chicken. Actually, you probably haven't fully had fried ANYTHING until you've had it fried Korean-style.

Anyway, fine, Versus. With your crispy breading around tender morsels



CHẢ GIÒ (VIETNAMESE EGG ROLLS)

of chicken and blessed with gochujang et. al., you did, indeed, defeat my taste-buds. They're not your buds, friend.

Vietnamese egg rolls. Chả giò, if you want to get lingual about it. I almost missed my chance to try them. Punk-ass friend who ordered them almost forgot to share. Understandable. They were that good. But I don't back down from a flavor fight, yo. I'm losing the fight 0-2, and these egg rolls were my last chance to save a little face. Versus describes them thusly: "Pork, bean thread noodles, and veggies are wrapped in a light and oh-so crispy egg roll wrapper and comes with classic savory, sweet sauce with an umami flavor." Gotta love an egg roll that lists meat as the first ingredient, eh? Hell yeah. And that dipping sauce they're talking about? It's a little miracle called nước mắm. That umami flavor? It comes from fish sauce. That fish sauce? It's made with anchovies. I mention this NOT to scare you off. I mention it because another little miracle called Worcestershire sauce is ALSO made with anchovies, so if you want to know what nước mắm tastes like, think of it like Vietnamese Worcestershire sauce. Hell, dipping any egg roll in Worcestershire sauce isn't the worst idea I've ever had.

Okay, so fine. Versus wins. I'm won over. And you will be too. Don't try to be tough.

Just take your culinary lumps and say, "Thank you, may I have another?" Follow Versus on social media to find out where they're going to be... and then be there. ■



Versus

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DANNY FAIRCHILD

DANNY DOESN'T TAKE CRAP FROM NOBODY, BUT HE'LL TAKE FOOD FROM ALMOST ANYBODY. IF YOU WANT TO FIGHT DANNY, OR FEED HIM NOM-NOMS, EMAIL HIM AT DINING@DUBUQUE365.COM.



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