

# Versus 2.0

By Danny Fairchild

Do words like “kare raisu” or “bulgogi” or even “curry” make you think twice about what you’re about to eat? Are words like that just too far out of your comfort zone to even consider tasting let alone chewing and swallowing? Do you refrain from chasing waterfalls, sticking to the chilis and the stews that you’re used to?

In short: Are you a culinary coward? Yeah, you heard me right. I called you a coward. I’m calling your butt out. Oh, sure, maybe you’re not afraid of spicy. Maybe your chili is measured by number of alarms. Maybe you’ll try any high-Scoville hot sauce with a titter-worthy name. But the second you’re not sure how to pronounce it? Suddenly you shrink. Coward.

And I’m not the only one calling you out. The good people at Versus have expanded their food truck business to include a new brick-and-mortar restaurant where Buddy’s Supper Club used to was. It’s called Versus 2.0. It’s their flavors versus your tastebuds, and they’re here to knock your butt outside



CHẢ GIÒ



BULGOGI FRIES

of your comfort zone and show you what you’ve been culinarily missing.

I know that my opening to this column leaned heavily on the idea of spicy food, so I just want to dispel the notion that all the food on the menu at Versus 2.0 is spicy. That’s very much not the case. And even many of the traditionally spicy dishes can be ordered at lesser levels of heat. Boom. Disclaimed.

I’m super excited about Versus getting their brick-and-mortar on. Due to

their popularity, the lines at the Versus food truck are often prohibitively long. The food is undoubtedly worth the wait, but I don’t always have time for waiting. I’m sure you can relate. Now I can have a sit-down meal from one of my favorite food trucks. Life is good.

There’s still some artifacts left from the old supper club. I didn’t see the model train running, but the track is still overhead. And I’m guessing the salad bar was included in the sale of the property because it’s a proper little supper club salad bar. And don’t worry, there’s nothing scary there on the salad bar. The lettuce might include some romaine instead of all iceberg, but other than Thai peanut being one of the salad dressing options, you’re safe. Daddy won’t let anything bad happen to you. Coward.

The apps. The menu stressed that we must try the chả giò, and so we did. Two orders. We’re not cowards like you. But seriously, if there’s more than two of you, get more than one order. One will not be enough. Oh! Are you going to let a little foreign culinary term like “chả giò” scare you? Calm down. It’s just egg rolls, fool. And Versus’ egg rolls have won awards, yo. If you’re still a little cowardly, you can just eat the egg roll like any other egg roll. If you want your damn mind blown, however, you’ll wrap that egg roll in the provided lettuce leaf along with various fresh and pickled veggies and housemade nước mắm (a kind of fish sauce) and eat it that way. So damn good. There’s three to an order. Unless you’re not going to share, it won’t be enough. Two orders. Maybe three.

Continuing with the apps we tried, I’d like to give you a bit of advice. I know that “bulgogi,” though gaining acceptance around these parts, is probably new and scary to your cowardly sensibilities. My advice is this: If you ever see anything “bulgogi” on any menu... order it. Seriously. It’s Korean barbecue,

usually beef, and if you think the good ol’ U.S. of A. is the only good player on Team Barbecue, you’re not watching the whole game. You’re just getting the local highlights. And you’re a coward. Can’t stress your cowardice enough. Anyway, you’ve probably had and loved cheese fries. You’ve probably *veni vidi vici’d* some delicious chili fries. Just you wait until you try bulgogi beef fries. When you think “bulgogi,” think teriyaki beef, but chopped up and even better. Yeah, that sirloin is nice and bulgogified, but almost everything else on this friendly monster of an appetizer are things you already know and love. The gochujang cheese sauce might stump and scare a coward like you. Gochujang is a Korean flavor that’s really gained traction in the States over the past decade. Maybe you’ve never heard of it, but you’ve probably had it in some Asian cuisine without even knowing it. Just focus on the words “cheese sauce,” and all will be nice and safe. Everything else you’ve heard of and like. Plus... it’s fries. There’s probably a topping that doesn’t go well with fries. But I haven’t found it yet.

The entrees.

Look, coward. I’ll make this really easy on you. If you don’t want to get anything spicy or anything too “out there” flavor-wise, I highly recommend the kare raisu with tonkatsu. That’s a Japanese curry with a pork cutlet. People often see the word “curry” and think “spicy.” Oh, sure. It CAN be spicy. It often IS spicy. But that’s not a defining characteristic of a curry. There’s so many kinds of curry, it’s difficult to define in general, but spicy is NOT definitive. If you’re afraid, try thinking like this, you coward: When you think of “curry,” don’t think “spicy.” Think “stew.” That’s it. It’s a stew. Just like chili is a stew and is often spicy. And the kare raisu at Versus is a perfect example to get this across. The first word they use in their menu to

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KARE RAISU WITH TONKATUS (TOP LEFT), GAI PAD MED MAMUANG (RIGHT), MAPO TOFU (BOTTOM )

describe the kare raisu is “hearty.” And they ain’t kidding. So rib-stickingly hearty with potatoes and carrots and a big ol’ panko-breaded pork cutlet that you can easily cut with a fork. Not spicy AT ALL. If anything, it’s a little sweet. Just a little. Curries can be like that, too. It’s okay. Nobody is going to make you do anything you don’t want to do here. This dish is base. If you want to be safe, stay on base.

Oh, but then things get a little more interesting with gai pad med mammu-ong. Just kidding. It’s just Thai cashew chicken. You like cashew chicken, right? You know what cashews are, and you know what chicken is because you are one so you should be fine. Think of all the cashew chicken you’ve had and enjoyed. Versus’ Thai version isn’t too far from what you’re familiar with. Stir-fried chicken and vegetables with crunch cashews. Duh, right? But the Thai twist is there and worth exploring. But certainly not worth fearing. Unless you’re a bigger coward than I originally feared.

Stick with these two dishes if you’re afraid or are just having your taste-buds spar against Versus 2.0 instead of putting them in a fully sanctioned fight. If you want the heat, the heat is there, and it ain’t hard to find.

But I want to make you feel safe and cozy, coward, because I want to spring something on you that was almost out of our comfort zone. And there’s not much we won’t eat. I don’t like beets that much. Other than that, game on. I want to talk to you about dessert. I want to talk

to you about Mommy Ning Ning’s Maja Blanca. It’s a Filipino coconut pudding. Sounds good, eh? It is, but... let me walk you through it. It’s a pudding, but more of a gelatin consistency. But without the gelatin flavor. Creamy like a pudding, too.



MOMMY NING NING’S MAJA BLANCA

If you like the flavor of coconut but not the consistency, you might like this dish a lot. But there’s a surprise. It’s not the caramel sugar sprinkled on top. No. It’s the whole kernels of corn throughout. Now... come on. This is the Midwest. You’re going to let CORN scare you, of all things? I mean, I kind of get it. What the hell is corn doing in ANY dessert, let alone a coconut dessert? It lends sweetness and texture to it. And a fun texture, not a nasty texture. You know what corn is like. Prepare to taste how corn CAN be. Compared to the creaminess of the pudding, the corn kind of bursts on your tongue. I don’t know why it works, but dammit it just works.

Versus 2.0 itself just works. It’s their flavors versus your tastebuds. And if you’re really that much of a coward, they know how to go easy on you. ■



**Versus 2.0**

2364 WASHINGTON ST, DUBUQUE, IA  
563-663-6113

**Kitchen Hours:** Wed-Sat: 5-9 PM;  
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