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This food is offal: Eating entrails and organs around Austin

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Sichuan Garden's roly-poly fish's head in casserole soup

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By Justin Davis July 22, 2010

Tongue. Liver. Intestines. Brains. No, this isn't a list of props for the next George Romero film—these are all cuts of meat that fall under the culinary classification of offal, the parts of an animal butchers traditionally throw away as waste products. Unprepared, offal might turn stomachs as well as include stomachs, but when prepared correctly, it can be an attitude-altering, mouth-watering delicacy. You have to do some digging to find eateries serving entrails and organs in Austin, but the adventurous tongues of *The A.V. Club* were eager to do so.

Taqueria La Canaria (5101 Airport Blvd.)

Now severing: tongue, face, and skin

This small yellow trailer dishes out ridiculously cheap tacos and gorditas. The barbacoa taco consists of onion, cilantro, and cow face, some of the most tender shredded beef available in a taco. The trailer's lengua (tongue en español) tacos, meanwhile, hold cubed, dark brown meat that is the antithesis of chewy. But La Canaria's doesn't limit its offal to tacos—it also features gorditas stuffed with the unmistakably smoky flavor of chicharrón, or fried pork skin.

Parkside (301 E. Sixth St., 512-474-9898)

Now severing: pancreas, tongue, liver, bone marrow, and jowls

This upscale Sixth Street eatery routinely rotates its menu, including one or two offal offerings with each go-round. Currently, Parkside's appetizers include small sweetbreads, stacked atop three irresistible towers composed of veal tongue, cucumber radish salads, lemon, Thai chili, and a cumin tuile. The veal tongue has a velvety roast beef quality, and the sweetbreads hide their succulence beneath a crispy outside. The Tex-Mex touch of the cumin tuile with the Thai chili creates an earthy and spicy mix.

Elsewhere on the menu, Parkside's blonde pate—a silky-smooth blend of cream and **foie gras**—is outshined by a fancy, breakfast-like bowl of polenta, a 45-minute poached egg, braised pork jowl chunks, crispy onion strings, and freshly-grated parmesan. (Consider it a gourmet alternative to KFC's Famous Bowl, the dish comedian **Patton Oswalt** famously described as "**a failure pile in a sadness bowl.**") The pork jowl chunks, with **Ras el hanout** spice, blend with their surroundings to form a savory and sweet balance.

Sichuan Garden (110 N. I-35, Suite 240, Round Rock, 512-238-0098)

Now severing: a lot

Sichuan Garden boasts plenty of descriptively daunting menu items, including a rare seafood offal option: fish head in casserole soup. Swimming among bamboo shoots, snap peas, tomatoes, oyster mushrooms, and tofu chunks is a whole salmon's head, the meat of which easily scrapes off with a spoon. The cheek meat is the tastiest, as it's cooked in its own fattiness, but the eyeball? Not recommended—its flavor is the very essence of the stench hovering over seafood markets worldwide.

Of the many parts of a pig (intestine, blood, stomach) you can eat at Sichuan, sliced pig's ear in hot oil sounds the most palatable. Unfortunately, other than the hot oil, the dish lacks any flavor and has an odd way of making you smell its pork-ness from inside your own mouth. The soft cartilage of the ears dissolves on the tongue, but firmer, thin lines of the stuff give the unpleasant feeling of chewing on old, brittle plastic. Maybe there's a reason some of these cuts tend to get disposed of.

Twin Peaks (701 East Stassney Ln., 512-383-9699)

Now severing: testicles

Twin Peaks (sadly unassociated with the David Lynch-Mark Frost TV series of the same name) has the trappings of any restaurant built around a scantily-clad female waitstaff: Music directed toward the LBJ High School class of 1993, neon beer signs, and assorted gastronomical concessions to masculinity like a salad and chili menu. However, it's also the only "boobs-and-

beer" chain that toys with its clientele's collective castration anxiety by serving Rocky Mountain oysters, a.k.a. fried bull testicles. Still, these tasty morsels could easily be confused for a standard fried oyster appetizer. Battering them in a manner similar to chicken-fried steak, the restaurant doesn't overlook that texture and flavor profile and offers diners white country gravy and cocktail sauce as dips, both of which act as further reminders that the diner is eating a plate of fried testicles.

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