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This Halloween, release the vegetarian beast inside

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Does this Chili Cheeze Dog frighten you? What if we told you there's no meat in there?

Justin Da

By Justin Davis October 28, 2010

Halloween inspires talk of those nightmares that make people bolt upright in bed, covered in cold sweat: spiders crawling on your body, a masked madman with a machete, **Ke\$ha**'s performance on ***Saturday Night Live***. Not many horror movies revolve around foodstuffs (the dessert-born terror of, ahem, ***The Stuff***, aside), but the mere thought of a vegetarian—or worse yet, vegan—meal has frightened many a meat eater. *The A.V. Club* wants to help these individuals face their fears, so we visited a few local Austin eateries with meatless options that even the most committed carnivore can enjoy—and one eatery with an option that might be an acquired taste.

Iggi's Texaterian (1104 E. 6th St.)

The non-creature feature: So good, like Sam Raimi and Bruce Campbell opened a vegan trailer

Awards for Best Meat Disguise and Quirkiest Vegetarian Menu Item both go to this cash-only trailer for its Chili Cheeze Dog and Monster PB & J. The hot dog has a bit less bite than its packed-with-meat inspiration, but this meal could easily be mistaken for a “real” chili cheese dog any day. It's not enough that the Monster PB & J (also tongue twistingly referred to as a P.B.T.B.J.J.) uses organic peanut butter and jalapeno jelly in a crunchy panini—Iggi's also stuffs the sandwich with tempeh bacon. Don't let the unappetizing fact that tempeh is a fermented

soybean product dissuade you from this sinfully good sandwich—especially if you harbor a love of peanut butter *and* spicy foods. The tempeh bacon adds a clever, meaty revelation to this already much-beloved classic. It's analogous to the infamous **Luther Burger** in its blending of meat with sweet, sugary flavors. (Unlike in a Krispy Kreme donut, though, there's no sugar in Iggi's peanut butter.) But the Monster PB & J isn't as likely to stop your heart for any reason beyond pure, harmonious joy.

Mangia (3016 Guadalupe St., Suite 100, 512-302-5200)

The non-creature feature: Portobello mushrooms—The *Soylent Green* of fungi

Best known for its stomach-expanding pizzas, Mangia now offers a Portobello Philly that exemplifies how the mushroom's steak-like chew and meaty texture regularly substitute for meat. The sandwich comes loaded with sautéed onions and your choice of hot or sweet peppers. (Go with the sweet variety, as the hot peppers have an oddly tart taste that overpowers the mushrooms.) Add the pizzeria's signature fries and secret dipping sauce, and it's doubtful you'll walk away unsatisfied. In fact, it may take a while before you can get up to walk away at all.

Karibu (1209 E. 7th Street, 512-320-5454)

The no-creature feature: A bloodless massacre rivaling the lawnmower scene in *Dead Alive*

Karibu offers two vegetarian plates, one filled with different types of lentils and split peas, and the other even more packed with hearty vegetables. The kik alicha—yellow split peas in a flavorful herb sauce—stands out in the first selection, largely because the sauce provides an unprocessed and fresh base. Karibu's second vegetarian plate has a bit of everything: Cabbage, carrots, onions, tomatoes, spiced string beans, and collard greens all fight for room on the plate. Every element of the second dish is outstanding, and the greens may be the best non-soul-food collard greens you'll find in Austin. Their flavors are delicately balanced, yet still intense.

Beets Café (1611 W. 5th St., Suite 165, 512-477-2338)

The non-creature feature: Like *The Thing*, it's an accurate enough replication—but something's off.

What better choice for an avid meat eater to try at the raw-food and vegan Beets Café than the E.L.T., a sandwich that takes its name from a traditionally bacon-filled dish. Sandwiching crispy, spiced eggplant "bacon," lettuce, tomato, avocado, high-vibe sprouts, and cashew dijonaise between sprouted almond sunflower flatbread, Beets' E.L.T. unfortunately misses a savory touch to counteract the sweetness of the dijonaise. Even the eggplant "bacon"—created through a drying method—comes off as a bit too sweet, lacking the smokiness and other flavors of pork bacon. The veggie chips have a mysterious, dried herb sprinkled on them that gives off the distinct taste of grass. While not a bad sandwich overall, it's far from a substitute for the standard B.L.T.

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