

Less-than-Happy Meals (Inanimate TF)

The first thing Alice saw as she stepped into the restaurant was the advertisement glowing above the counter: TRY OUR NEW WORLDBURGER– NOW WITH TWICE THE WORLD – A PLANET OF PLEASURE IN YOUR MOUTH! – ONLY AVAILABLE AT WORLD EATERS!

“So, what are you planning to have?” asked Diana, as the two of them joined the queue. Around them, men and women alike chomped down on their meals—the place was packed. “I’m thinking of getting one of the new Worldburgers—I hear they added more world to it!”

Alice shrugged. “I don’t know...” Her eyes flicked to the menu beside the ad. There were so many different options she couldn’t *start* to decide: Spiral Smoothies, Continuggets, RealityRibs, and more. She didn’t have any idea which she wanted.

A young man stepped away from the counter with a tray full of food, and the queue shuffled forward. “Well, you better pick quickly,” said Diana. “We’re going to have to order soon.”

“Ahhhh...” Alice screwed up her eyes. She couldn’t decide.

One by one, the people ahead of them received their orders, and the line moved forward, step by step, place by place. Soon enough, Alice and Diana were only a single person away from the counter.

Alice’s eyes pinged from one side of the menu to the other. Should she have the Worldburger? The Spiral Smoothie? The RealityRibs with Fries...? Ah!

The man ahead of them picked up his order and left. Diana stepped forward. “Hi, I’ll have a Worldburger with fries and a soda. And my friend will have...” Alice stood frozen. Diana elbowed her. “*And my friend will have...?*”

Alice swallowed. The person on the counter was giving her that supremely pleasant smile reserved for retail workers dealing with an utter idiot. “I’ll have a MiniMeal!” she said. It was the first thing that came to mind.

It took her a second to realize what she’d said.

“Aaand one MiniMeal,” said the server, turning away with a smug grin.

As Alice’s ego collapsed in on itself, Diana laughed. “What made you order one of *them*?”

Alice blushed. “I don’t know!” she said. “I just panicked.”

Diana simply shook her head and smirked.

Seconds later, the server returned with two trays. “Here, you go,” she said, passing one to Diana. “One Worldburger with fries and a soda.”

She turned to Alice, a smug grin on her face. “Aaand one MiniMeal. With a free toy. Enjoy~.”

Steam rose from Alice's head as she took it. "Thanks," she mumbled. She kept her eyes on the tray as the two of them left the counter.

Slipping into a seat, she watched—still red—as Diana set about unwrapping her Worldburger. "Right," said Diana, a hungry look on her face, "let's see if it's as impressive as the advertisements say."

The wrapper came away with a crinkling, revealing what looked, at least from a distance, like an ordinary burger.

Alice knew better. Leaning in close, she trained her eyes on the burger's bun. You'd have to have been living under a *really* heavy rock not to know about World Eaters, but even an unprepared eye would soon tell something was off with the bun.

"Hey, I think I can see Hawaii!" With a laugh, Diana picked the top half of the bun off and tossed it at Alice.

Snatching it out of the air, Alice held it to her face and squinted. Strange shapes covered its surface. At first they looked like nothing more than random pressure or burn marks, patches where the bun had been cooked slightly too hard.

The more you looked, however, the more familiar the shapes became... There... that jagged edge... doesn't it remind you of a coastline?

Once you made the connection, the true nature of the patches became obvious: the shapes were the shapes of continents. The bun was—or at any rate, had *been*—another world.

This wasn't really surprising though. After all, it was World Eaters' whole gimmick. Flicking a glance back at Diana's burger, Alice saw a similar pattern spread over the remaining half of the bun. Several of its continents had been cut in half as it was sliced.

The patty atop it showed similar dark patches, as did the lettuce, the tomato, the cheese. You could even see them on the mayo dripping from between.

The sight—and the scent—made Alice's stomach rumble. Leaving Diana to enjoy her meal, she unboxed her own and examined its contents.

World Eaters' MiniMeal came with almost the same items as Diana's order: a burger, a packet of fries, and a soda. The only real difference was that they were all slightly smaller.

Oh, and that they came with a toy. In this case, it was a tiny globe on a keyring. Frowning, Alice put it aside without a thought.

"What's wrong?" asked Diana, a smug grin on her face. "Aren't you gonna play with it?"

Alice threw her a glare.

Ignoring her friend, she turned her eyes back to her meal. Leaving the burger wrapper for now, she picked up the fries and plucked one from the box for inspection. Unlike the burger's components, the fry's pattern was less obvious. It took her a second to realize why: the shapes continued on the other fries—the entire box had been made from a single world-turned-potato.

Turning the fry she'd picked out over and over in her hand, she finally raised it to her mouth and slipped it between her lips.

To think that an entire alternate Earth had been sacrificed to produce this one box of fries... She wondered which countries had ended up on this chip... and how many people remained trapped inside it...

Taking a bite, she chewed with a frown.

...Frankly, it was a little too salty for her taste.

Putting aside the fries, she turned her attention to the burger. Peeling off the wrapper, she raised it to her face. Aside from being that little bit small, it looked almost identical to Diana's, with continent shapes spread over its bun. Out of curiosity, she grabbed the top half and peeled it off to expose the patty inside. Steam wafted from the meat, making her stomach rumble once more. Ignoring it, she tightened her eyes.

The patty looked like any normal patty from a distance, of course. Only when you looked closely could you tell it was another Earth, an Earth that had been squashed not-quite-flat in the process of being turned to meat. In the very center of it stood a darker brown Arctic. The other continents surrounded it, running over the patty's sides and disappearing underneath.

Her stomach rumbled again. With a sigh, Alice put the burger back together, raised it to her mouth, and opened wide. Her teeth cut through the alternate Earths without the slightest resistance. She felt her incisors slice through the bun, felt her canines stab into the patty. She even sensed the sesame seeds popping, one by one, between her molars.

Pulling back, she chewed and chewed, reducing several alternate Earths and large chunks of several others into a saliva-sodden mess on her tongue. As she swallowed, she wondered what it would feel like for the inhabitants. World Eaters assured them its techniques were non-lethal, but they were surprisingly coy about what happened to its ingredients afterward. Would they die on her teeth or melt in her stomach acid? Maybe they'd even survive to end up as her...

Shaking the thought aside, Alice plopped the burger back on its wrapper, wiped her mouth with a napkin, and reached for her drink. Instead of bringing the straw to her lips, however, she popped the cap off and peered inside the cup.

What she found was another altered globe, the continents reduced to froth on a sweet brown ocean. Ice cubes floated near the surface—if you looked closer, you could see the same familiar shapes there too.

Curious, Alice swept the straw in a circle, swirling her liquid map into an unrecognizable whirlpool.

Finally, with a frown, she slipped the straw between her lips and sucked. As she did, she watched the soda in the cup, watched as South America flowed towards the column of the straw. As it disappeared up its length, she ceased sucking and swished it around her mouth, wondering what it felt like for the tens of millions of people she'd caught.

At last, she swallowed with a gulp and turned her eyes back to her meal.

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Giant teeth fill the sky of Anthony's hometown. As they approached, he tried to scream, but he simply wasn't able.

One moment, he'd been going about his life as normal, walking from the bus to his college just like any other day. The next, a strange light had filled the sky, and when it faded, the clear blue was gone, replaced by the harsh metal of a gigantic factory.

This would have been terrifying enough, but what had followed had made it look irrelevant. The walls and ceiling of the factory had *moved* and been replaced by the harsh grid of a pressure cooker. Anthony had had just enough time to scream before it closed on his reality.

A terrible, intense gravity struck him, forcing Anthony to the ground. An equally terrible heat had followed, leaving him sweating all over. With every second that passed, both gravity and heat grew, till Anthony thought he would burn into charcoal.

Instead, things turned brown. *Everything*, from the trees, to the buildings, to the asphalt of the road, to Anthony's own body and the fabric of his clothes. Where they touched, they melded, forms fused together. In seconds, he and everything around had become one single, inseparable mass of hot, steaming *beef*.

As the teeth crashed towards him, Anthony tried once again to scream. It couldn't end like this—it couldn't end like this.

He wasn't meat. He wasn't meat. He wasn't—

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No! thought Stacy, staring at the absence. *No! Please! You can't do this to us—* If she'd still had real eyes to cry with, Stacy would have cried, but all she was one of billions of tiny protrusions on the surface of a bun, and no matter how much she wanted to cry, she couldn't.

Beneath her lay a cuboid of dough that had been her bed. Beside her, a statue of bread in the shape of her best friend, Sarah. Around them both in turn, the rectangular bubble in the bun that had, until minutes ago, been her bedroom. Half of it was gone, sliced cleanly away

by a wall of ivory larger than anything Stacy had ever imagined. It had taken her friend Hannah—and everything else beyond the mid-point of her bedroom—with it.

Now as she stared at the empty expanse remaining, and the vast, dripping cavern of the titanic mouth beyond it, Stacy wanted desperately to beg.

Why? Why? Why had this happened? What had they ever done to deserve it?

A second later, the wall of whiteness descended again, slicing towards Stacy like the blade of heaven's guillotine.

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As she slid down the giantess's throat, Misty wished she still had her own left to scream with. Reduced to a lump on a slice of cheese, melted apart by the heat of a burger, and finally crushed into an unrecognizable mush by a giantess's molars, she wanted nothing more than to burst into tears.

Why? Why had this happened? How could have happened. Life had been going so well! She'd finally finished college, finally found a stable job. She finally thought she might find a cute boyfriend... And now?

How could it possibly get any worse?

The endless biological slide she'd been tumbling down vanished from beneath her. With a silent scream, Misty dropped through open air...

...and landed with the tiniest of splashes in a pool of bubbling stomach acid.

As she dissolved into an indeterminable broth of amino acids and lipids, Misty once again wished that she could scream.

*

Andrew floated as a bubble in the froth, one bubble among hundreds, thousands, millions, more. Some were car-shaped. Some were house-shaped. Some were shaped like trees and bushes and plants.

And many—many, many, many—him included, were shaped like people.

Floating through the froth of his former life, he wondered what he and all his friends and family had done to deserve this. Was it some kind of punishment? Or was it simply the callous hand of fate?

An answer—if you could call it that—came in the form of a giant straw. Stabbing into the froth of his old world, it slurped Andrew and everything around up without pause. One moment, he was floating in the abyss, the next, he shot up its shaft like a bullet through a barrel.

Flying out of its end in a stream of soda and bubbles, he had just enough time to the cavern of his murderer's mouth, with its giant teeth and vast tongue, slick with saliva.

A second later, he struck its surface with a *pop*.

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As Alice finished the last of her burger, Diana snapped her fingers to catch her attention. "Hey!" she said, "hey look!" She pointed to a door at the rear of the restaurant, where a small queue of people had formed. "...What?" said Alice. "Are they queuing for the toilet? Do you need to go?"

"Of course not," said Diana. "Look, they're showing people how they make everything!" Leaping out of her chair, she grabbed Alice by the wrist. "Come on, let's take the tour before we order dessert."

Swallowing, Alice let Diana drag her out of her chair and across the restaurant floor to the queue. As they joined, a server swung open the kitchen door and beckoned the lot of them inside.

As they stepped through the door, the noise of the restaurant faded, replaced by the quieter, yet in some ways more intense, cacophony of the restaurant's backstage. It looked more like a factory floor than the kitchen of a restaurant. Conveyor belts trailed from one strange machine to another, while thick pipes coiled and tangled across the ceiling.

The server led their group to what appeared to be the start of the vast, branching production line. "This," she explained, "is the multiversal extractor. This is where we acquire our 'ingredients'." She flicked them a knowing grin.

Alice took a step forward. The extractor looked like a vast tree of pipes and wires, all interwoven and dangling from the ceiling. As Alice watched, the server pulled a lever, and the whole vast assemblage started to shudder and groan. Finally, after several long seconds of gurgling, the machine rose as if drawing in breath... before spitting an Earth onto the conveyor belt below. *Plorp!* It was the size of a tennis ball.

Plorp! Plorp! Plorp! Earth after Earth followed the first. Alice watched the conveyor carry them away as if they were nothing more than cheap, mass-produced knickknacks.

"If you follow me," said the tour guide, leading them on. She brought them to a point where the conveyor split, branching into several distinct lines that then led off to different devices. A sorting machine divided the passing Earths evenly among them. "We use alternate Earths for all of our products," explained the guide. "Everything from patties to buns to cheese to lettuce. We even use them to make our ice cream!"

Without waiting, she led them on to a machine like a giant pressure cooker. Alice watched as one Earth after Earth funneled off the conveyor and into the device's grid. The second it was full, the lid slammed shut, and the machine started to whirr and shake until...

With a *ding!*, the lid swung back open, revealing a perfect grid of Earth-patterned patties, steaming and delicious. The conveyor swiftly hauled them away to a station where the finished burgers were assembled.

Watching them, Alice wondered what it must feel like for the people whose Earth had just been pressure-cooked. The more she thought about it, the more she felt like finding somewhere private... Just imagine all those billions of people screaming in horror as...

Diana tugged on Alice's sleeve. "Hey, hey," she said, "this tour guide's kinda slow. While she's busy with the main course, why don't we try and find dessert?"

Alice cocked her head. "What do you-?"

Before she could finish, Diana dragged her away, leading her along one of the other raw-Earth belts and towards a giant silver vat. As they watched, a hatch opened on its side, releasing a blast of frigid vapor, and the belt shunted forward, dumping a batch of Earths inside. The hatch slammed shut, and the machine whirred and shook.

Sharing a cautious grin, the pair approached. A porthole on the side of the vat allowed them to peer inside and see the stirring process in action: the newly added Earths floated on the top of the mixture, moved in circles by blades of the stirrer. With each revolution, they lost a little more of their shape and color, till at last they were indistinguishable from the ice cream beneath. Only the gray shapes of continents on their surface suggested their true nature.

Alice peered around the side of the machine, where a giant pipe pumped the finished ice cream away.

Diana sighed. "Damn. I thought we'd be able to try some here. ...I guess we'll have to use the machine like everyone else."

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"What's happening?" Mary screamed as she hugged her sister Annabelle tightly. "What's going on?!"

One moment, they'd been walking together through their local park, the next a strange light had filled their sky. When it faded, they found the clouds patterning an endless expanse of gunmetal girders and plates, as if their entire world had been transported to some kind of giant factory.

As the two tried to assure each other everything was okay, a cacophony whirring filled the air, the new sky of their world moved, as if they were being carried to some terrible new fate. With every second, their fears grew greater and greater. What was going on? What was going to happen to them? Tears forming in their eyes, they hugged each other for comfort.

At last, the whirring stopped, and a terrible cold filled the air. As the air turned silver, the two hugged each other closer, shivering and whimpering as their breath came out in clouds.

Just as they thought it couldn't possibly get any worse, something dropped from the sky. At first Mary thought it snow or hail—it wasn't until one landed nearby that she realized what she was looking at:

It was ice cream: a dollop of smooth, white ice cream.

Beside her, Annabelle screamed.

As Mary watched through quaking eyes, the ice cream fell faster and faster, large as tennis balls. Where it struck the ground with resounding splats, the grass, the pavement, the gravel—all turned as white as the giant, creamy hailstones. Mary could only stare as a wave of whiteness washed over the park.

Finally, just as she thought they might be spared, one of the snowballs struck her sister. Annabelle screamed—then went silent as her flesh turned pale and frozen. In an instant, she was gone, replaced by an ice cream statue. Its surface felt cold against Mary's hands.

"Annabelle!" cried Mary tears, pouring from her eyes. Before she could say anything else, her eyes caught her hands. Where she'd touched her sister, they were white as snow. "No!" she cried as the paleness spread up her arms. "Nononono—" In seconds, it reached her mouth, and Mary went silent.

Standing there, unable to move, or speak, or scream or anything, she could stare in despair as something titanic appeared on the horizon. Mary watched as it tore through the ground, slicing through the white of the park like a sword through paper.

It looked like the blade of a gigantic mixer.

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As they returned to the tour group, Diana leaned close to the belt. "I wonder what it's like to touch one?"

Alice frowned. "I—I don't know if you should..."

"Relax," said Diana, "I'm not gonna, like, contaminate it or anything. I want a souvenir." Leaning in, she grabbed one of the Earths of the belt, and held it up like a trophy. "Huh, it feels weird. Kinda rough."

"Let me feel it," said Alice, snatching it out of Diana's hands. She felt the Earth crumple in her grip, and when she turned it round, she found deep grooves where her fingers had been. "Oops," she said, "there goes France."

"I dare you to take a bite," said Diana.

Alice frowned. "I don't know..."

"Aw, come on. What are you, a chicken?"

Alice huffed. “Fine.” Raising the Earth to her mouth, she opened wide and took a great bite out of America

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Rebecca stood on the edge of her family’s ranch and screamed as the giant teeth scraped the landscape, upturning mountains like a rake turning stones. With every second, they slid across the plains, closer and closer, larger and larger, preceded by a tsunami of dust.

She had just enough time to see it coming. Just enough time to get over her shock. How could this be happening? Why? Why? *Why?!* What kind of merciless monster would allow this to—

The dust and the teeth struck her with a sound beyond hearing.

*

“Ech!” said Alice, spitting it back out with a groan. “It tastes like dirt!”

“Hmm, I guess it *is* raw,” replied Alice. “Maybe we should have seasoned it first.”

With a moan of disgust, Alice tossed the damaged Earth at the floor, where it exploded into hundreds of tiny shards. She promptly crushed them beneath her boot. “Can we go and get something else to eat now?”

Diana laughed. “Okay, okay.”

The end of the tour rolled about shortly, and the two of them returned to the entrance. Alice’s stomach rumbled as she walked—despite the size of their ingredients, World Eaters really wasn’t that filling. She wanted more!

“Come on,” said Diana, “seeing how they made their ice cream made me hungry again. Let’s go get one!” Grabbing Alice’s hand, she dragged her into the queue.

“W-wait!” said Alice, “I haven’t decided what I want yet! Di!”

As they stood in the queue, Alice’s eyes pinged from one end of the menu to the other. What should she order? What should she order? A ContiCookie? A MegaMuffin? A Baked Earth Pie?

Her mind returned to the vat of ice cream and all the little Earths she’d seen being stirred into the mix. Her stomach rumbled. Just imagine all those billions of people melting in her mouth and sliding down her throat. Oooh~.

They reached the counter. “Hi,” said Diana, taking charge. “I’d like a MegaMuffin, please. And my friend would like...”

Alice gulped. "I'd like a Gelato Globe, please."

The girl behind the counter winced.

"Sorry, our ice cream machine's broken."