

The Murtabak Defence Campaign

The legendary Murtabak -- in the books, the hero Jamie's favourite meal -- is a critically endangered foodstuff.

It needs YOUR help.

Similar to, but subtly different from, a keema naan, the Murtabak is stuffed with minced lamb and is best eaten dunked in a curry sauce and ideally washed down with military-grade coffee sweetened with condensed milk. This noble bread is incredibly vulnerable to the forces of globalisation, entrenched prejudice, and nutritionists.

Few recipes exist. It has one small Wikipedia entry. You will search YouTube in vain for videos of Afghan master-chefs breaking eggs in one hand while spinning Murtabak dough with the other. At its peak of elastic tension, true Murtabak dough will be thin as a frisbee and up to a metre in diameter, one of the wonders of the world, or at least one of the tourist wonders of southern Afghanistan.

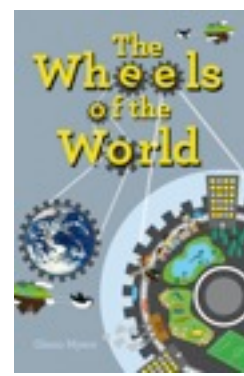
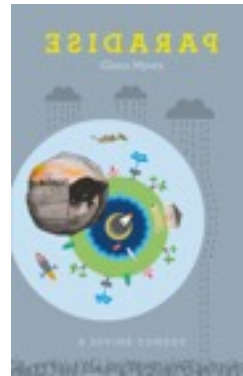
Wikipedia claims it is originally an Arabic food, carried far and wide by Indian traders. Our hero Jamie knows it as an Afghan bread.

Today the Murtabak, this primal, manly meal that from one sitting can fill your stomach for up to 48 hours, ekes out a precarious existence on the printed menus of dodgy cafes in grimy streets of the great cities of the earth. A few unfortunate expansions of the MacDonal'd's franchise, an extra Taco Bell here or there, and all could be lost.

The Murtabak could become just a memory, a dream, lodged in the affections of toothless, and —let us be honest—rather fat old men.

But there is hope.

Sham Hardy @ Flickr



Paradise and *The Wheels of the World* by Glenn Myers are fantasies about the world we don't see, and include a lot of respectful references to the murtabak.

Once a word enters the Oxford English Dictionary it becomes immortal. It is never removed. It can never die. Let globalization do its worst, let the hamburger patty rule every street, still, future civilisations will know of the Murtabak, and, perhaps, will one day boldly attempt to re-engineer it.

To enter the OED, the esteemed editors have to be persuaded that the Murtabak is a genuine word in English usage. These guys need photos of menus from the mean streets. They need a search of ancient literary sources (surely the Murtabak cannot have been overlooked by the masters of Sufi poetry?). Do recipe books, translated into poor English and smuggled over the Khyber Pass into Peshawar, contain a mention?

Think of what photos of freshly cooked Murtabaks would achieve! Or a video of one of the Master Bread Chefs about his holy work! Or the testimony of one who has sighted a Murtabak, and preferably eaten it, and ideally not had to go to hospital afterwards!

Men! And you women who love all that makes men true, good, overweight and smell of coffee! This is our battle cry! Send me your links! And the Murtabak shall live forever!

When the future is dark

And I'm under attack

Give me naught but the holy Murtabak!

(11th century Sufi poet, found unattributed but miraculously translated into English on a scrap of paper in a waste-bin in Kandahar)