



### **Dystopian Chocolate.**

*The Illusion of Standards You Never Agreed To - Yet Accepted Anyway*

Easter is upon us. A holiday that for many Christians and Catholics means a reminder of the sacrifices of Jesus Christ. Dying for our sins - then resurrecting. For the rest of us, it means less about sacrifice - more about indulging in one thing.

Chocolate.

Easter Sunday begins with our usual boiled eggs and soldiers, the eggs painted to resemble a pop culture intellectual property that is currently relevant - for our daughter who is about to turn one's first real Easter, we have gone with characters from her favourite show, Bluey.

Following this, it's time to be naughty, so the wife begins unwrapping a Cadbury Easter egg.

"It feels so dystopian that most chocolate can't even be called chocolate anymore..."

She said it casually. Barely thinking about it.

I didn't have that luxury. Something sparked inside me. It's these kind of sentences from my wife that I tend to wander off with, and get inspired. This time is no different, and within seconds I find myself exploring.

I had questions that needed answers; how can something keep its name, despite it no longer being the thing it claims to be? When did chocolate change, and why?

Have consumers been blinded by the dopamine hit from their favourite confectionaries, leading them to be ignorant to the fact that they are no longer eating the real deal?

When I say 'real deal', I mean in two distinct terms; not legally and not chemically. Chocolate in the UK doesn't meet the standards it once did. In fact, chocolate in both the UK and the EU isn't just a treat, it's now a concept that only exists based on the former definition - a legal one.

Due to regulations like the EU Chocolate Directive (2000/36/EC) - Largely mirrored in post Brexit UK Law - the product has to meet incredibly low minimums to be named, advertised and sold as chocolate. Some rough thresholds:

- **Milk Chocolate - minimum 25% cocoa solids**
- **Dark Chocolate - minimum 35% cocoa solids**
- **White Chocolate - contains cocoa butter only**

As long as the above requirements are met, they can proudly affix the label of chocolate to their wrapper. The sad fact however, is that even if they meet these low standards, the reality is that you're not eating chocolate. You're eating something chocolate *flavoured*.

Following this realisation, I went through our food supplies. Phrases of consumer mockery were seen all over our stores from freezer to pantry.

"Chocolate-Flavoured Coating"

"Milk Chocolate-Flavoured Bar"

"Cocoa Confectionery"

So, if these items are indeed only flavoured and have met a 25% minimum of Cocoa solid, then what else is being put into the mix? The answer, is that they use vegetable fats (Shea or Palm Oil), add more refined sugars and emulsifiers - with a not so healthy dose of artificial flavourings in an attempt to mimic that classic chocolate flavour. A flavour that now dawns on me, may have already long been forgotten, or in fact no longer exists - at least where I am in the UK.

This method of manufacture is starting to seem familiar. It parallels practices of the illegal drug trade.

In their underworld, they would call this something else. Cutting a product. Stretching it, diluting it - all with the aim of increasing the margins whilst keeping the name intact.

Cocaine cut with paracetamol. Weight added whilst reducing purity. Sold the same as before.

Chocolate may be a different product, but it's the same con.

One cut happens in the shadows. The other gets branding and a barcode.

One empire gets you arrested. The other gets you shelf space.

The reason for this method of manufacture is simple. Cocoa is expensive and volatile due to the climate crisis that is creating harsher weather to farm it - meaning that the supply chain is now plagued with systemic issues. The product that makes chocolate what it is, can no longer be optimised in the way it used to be, which for the big confectionary companies means low margin - a slur in the world of big business.

Less shelf life = lower bonuses. No company would stand for it, so there is no other option than to roll with meeting minimum standards for less.

There is a foreboding feeling that this whole thing goes much deeper than chocolate. What we're seeing in society is not only a lowering in food standards, but is an act to erode definition entirely. Labels are used for definition - humans affix them to everything - but how can we be changing things so absolutely whilst believing we can keep the label intact?

Legality doesn't equal morality. Keeping this in mind, it's perplexing to see standards being lowered as they are, whilst we are all kept ignorant to the move, being forced to accept a new world full of more lies. The only indicator in the case of chocolate, is that we've all been walking around saying the same old slogan, "this doesn't taste like it used to." We noticed, we just didn't care enough to question it.

Dystopian chocolate is us noticing a change, but slowly we are learning to enjoy the taste of less - what else in society are we learning to savour that we shouldn't?

As long as the label says so, that's more than enough for most of us.

There are indicators that standards are slipping. You can see them in the obesity crisis, and the strain it puts on the system.

But I suppose we've learned to accept those too. So the question isn't whether things are changing. It's how long we stop noticing altogether -

Or worse...

before they change the label on our systems too...

**Doc**