

The Fault in Our T-shirts

College, with its fleeting two-year-long period, was one of the most neutral experiences of my life. Neither did it have the judgmental and clueless kids of high school nor did it have many life-defining moments that life itself has to offer in the future. The students were oozing with the spirit of being in a relatively new domain as inferred from their gazillion selfies in the college premises despite smartphones being banned.

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There's one thing that doesn't require an introduction, the most booming business industry among college students. It's the college merchandise industry. College merch featuring cheap fabric and an ugly design proclaiming how everyone is a special little snowflake could overpower other clothing options any day, regardless of how pricey your go-to outlet was or how many diamonds were encrusted onto your buttons.

I was given the task to design the t-shirt for my section in college. Like always, my design was put up against the best arbiters of the relevant sector — my classmates. They suggested that I get rid of any intricate symbolism to embrace something that everyone would get, a boastful tag line saying how all the students of the Notable College are legends, with 11 spelling errors spanning across 7 words; not to mention the 3 other grammatical mistakes that accompanied them.

I personally used to believe that such items are more like memoirs of an experience that one had been a part of, rather than a gimmick to show off to people. And most people who go around wearing the self-proclaimed braggart pieces of merch don't spend much time in college anyway, as their attendance percentages merely float above the bare minimum.

The t-shirts were distributed and everyone started wearing those on-spot. Eventually, I gave in and wore it as well. Nothing changed. Not that I was expecting anything to change. I started to feel uncomfortable. Firstly, for designing a t-shirt with the corniest tagline ever and secondly because I hate everything I make. After hopelessly waiting for one of my friends to come out, I zoomed out of my college to catch the bus that was about to leave in 5 minutes.

The first anomaly took place when I got into the bus. I noticed that a bunch of people were staring at me through the window, looking like I'm about to give away ration to war victims. I fumbled in my pockets to check if I had dropped any valuables or not, but I hadn't. I tried my best to ignore them and waited until the wheels started moving.

Half an hour had passed and

the bus helper came to me. I was about to take my wallet out to pay the fare and not argue over two bucks for the good citizen I was but was stopped midway by a tone used by social media managers —

"Sorry for the inconvenience caused by the delay, sir. To make up for the loss of your valuable time, please accept this small token of gratitude we've designated for fellow Notable College students."

"Excuse me?" I uttered. Usually college students are ones to nag about fares but there he was, kneeling down in front of me with the 'Inconvenience Fee' in his hand, which also happened to be the fare he had collected from all passengers so far. The whole thing left me dumbfounded for a split minute but just as soon as I regained myself, I noticed that all the other passengers were also rooting for me to accept the oddball mixture of bank notes from all walks of life. Conveniently enough, I took a seat close to the door and the bus was at a stop. The situation was so weird for me to process that I didn't think much before dodging the guy and then storming out of the vehicle.

Quite a distance away from the bus and still running — I paused near a pole. I fumbled through my pockets again. No, I didn't lose anything. All of a sudden my phone started sending haptic feedbacks one after another. I picked it up — 34 messages. More than half of these were replies from the people who had seenzoned me years ago, which included my high school crush, the aunt who lives next door, the dog of the aunt who lives next door and the infamous coaching centre known for demolishing an average student's mental health with automatically-generated texts — Iris.

I felt a tug on my shirt and turned over. I knew this day couldn't possibly get any weirder but here it was, an entire group of people flocking next to me once again. The demographics included parents in their early 40s. I knew this type and it's worse than any rapper suffering from success. It was a bunch of overly-enthusiastic parents who care about the future of their children more than the children themselves. Oftentimes, they can be seen in monthly intervals roaming around students of the so-called prestigious institutions, asking for the same advice over and over, even when there is nothing new to offer.

I knew I had to run as fast as my legs could. By then I had realised the immense power that the misspelt and wrongly capitalised Notable College merch held. My mere vessel was just not ready to deal with that much power yet. I ran as fast as I could and after a tiring 45-minute haul, I finally reached my own doorsteps. I changed my clothes, wrapped the merch in a bin bag and went out with a shovel looking like a cheap Grim Reaper rip-off. I went to the nearby park to bury it five feet below, away from any average human's access.

There were still around a hundred other copies of this merch. I could only imagine the amount of attention one would drag in if he wore more than one t-shirt at a time. I knew that I had to be the hero no one asked for.

Why did I have a shovel in an apartment with barely any space for breathing, you ask? For gardening, of course.

Deeparghya Dutta Barua likes to feel apprehensive whenever there are more than two people around. Help him in finding new ways of butchering his name at deeparghya@rantages.com

