

Ching Ho and Bun Foo—renamed Brian and Charles—would be kidnapers from an unnamed land. Scanlan approved the changes and came up with some benign new lyrics: instead of “I won’t stand by while critics praise ya/You’re getting shipped to Southeast Asia,” Mrs. Meers would now sing, “Bye-bye to dreams of critics cheering/Hello to someone well worth fearing.”

Amid the uproar, the retrofitted “Millie” opened to a packed house. The two Asian girls cast as Brian and Charles got big laughs, as did the budding Carol Burnett type who played Mrs. Meers. At intermission, Jenny Mollet, a junior at LaGuardia (she appeared in “The Color Purple” on Broadway), said, “I’m really happy they put it back on.” But, of the racial material, she added, “Now that we’re in the twenty-first century, we should be more careful about these things.” Afterward, Scanlan, who had watched from the sixth row, stood in the lobby giving proud hugs to the cast. “It’s a great lesson to learn at this age, that you can stand up to a no,” he said. “I didn’t learn it until I was thirty-two.”

—Michael Schulman

HOT ENOUGH FOR YOU? WING NUTS



Matt Reynolds, a filmmaker, grew up east of Buffalo, New York, in what he calls the Wing Belt. Several years ago, he recruited six iron-tongued glutons and a camera crew and led them on a quest to identify the best Buffalo wing

in the region. They visited seventy-two establishments in sixteen days, during which time the group ate one non-wing meal. (It was steak.) “The Great Chicken Wing Hunt,” Reynolds’s documentary about the trip, came out last month, in time for the Super Bowl, the wing world’s Christmas. On game day, according to the National Chicken Council, Americans ate seventy thousand tons of wings.

Some history: Teresa Bellissimo invented the dish at the Anchor Bar, her family’s restaurant in Buffalo, in 1964. Before then, many butchers treated wings like gizzards—fit only for soups and sauces. “Imagine if you could go back to sixteenth-century Naples and talk to the people who invented pizza,” Reynolds said. “With the wing, we actually could.”

New York City barely figures in Reynolds’s film. To compensate, he recently called in some wing fans, and convened a less great Manhattan Wing Hunt: three stops in one evening. As usual, Reynolds appointed himself leader and his wife, Lucie, scorekeeper.

Their first stop was Down the Hatch, a bar on West Fourth Street, which serves food made by Atomic Wings. Atomic’s founder, Adam Lippin, claims to be the man who brought wings to Manhattan, in 1989. “I was working in real estate, and every Friday night I’d take a Greyhound to Buffalo and apprentice at Anchor Bar,” Lippin said. “Then I discovered yoga, and I started teaching at Jivamukti, which has a pretty intense vegan philosophy. For a long time, I led this double life, not telling my yoga students that I sold animal flesh for a living.” Eventually, the wings won out. “We have vegetarian options at four of our locations,” Lippin said. He put three red plastic baskets lined with waxed paper in front of the judges: a dozen me-

dium, a dozen hot, and a dozen “suicidal.”

“My rule is not to eat anything called ‘suicidal,’ because I do not want to die,” Lucie said. She passed out scorecards, on which judges rated the wings according to nine criteria, including appearance, aroma, sauce quantity, and sauce heat.

“I’m not getting enough textural contrast,” Ryan Hohman, from Columbus, Ohio, said. “What you’re looking for is crispy skin and tender, juicy meat. This is sort of a soggy mess.”

A Buffalo wing, according to the rules of the Hunt, must be fried but not breaded, and must be slathered in a sauce made with butter (not margarine!), vinegar, and chili peppers. Add spices to taste, or not; serve with blue cheese, celery, wet wipes, and beer. Mudville 9, a restaurant in Tribeca, served “novelty wings”—jerk, honey mustard, Thai peanut. “Enjoy these if you want, guys, but we’re not scoring them,” Reynolds said.

While they waited for traditional wings, Peri Cohen, the only female judge besides Lucie, described a first date. “I was rummaging in my purse, under the table, and I felt something mysterious—lipstick or something—so I pulled it out.” And? “Stray chicken bone.”

Hohman, who ate two thousand and eleven wings in 2011, said, “When I finished my last wing of the year, I slept with the bone under my pillow.”

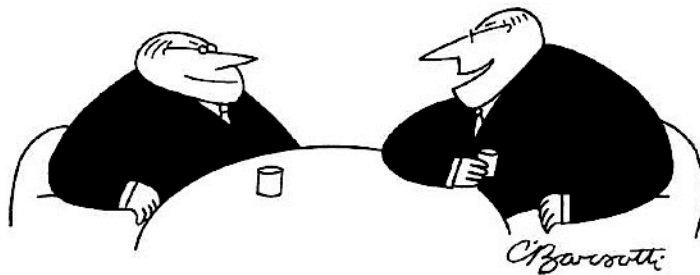
The traditional wings arrived. Clint Weiler, a media consultant from Pennsylvania, said, “Sometimes hot is just hot. This has flavor.”

The judges hailed cabs to Croxley Alehouse, a bar on Avenue B. The flavors on offer were medium, hot, and Cry Like a Baby, doused in a bright-red sauce studded with habañero seeds. The air above the table grew piquant; the judges blinked rapidly. Weiler ate one of the extra-hots and turned scarlet. “That is just fucking painful,” he said. Cohen took a nibble and collapsed forward, her head on her forearms.

“Would you like some milk?” the manager said.

The judges voted, and Lucie announced the final tally: Mudville 9 by a mile. “I do think Mudville deserves the title,” Reynolds said. “But I still wonder if there’s a better place somewhere in the city. I’ve heard good things about Wogies.”

—Andrew Marantz



“I need to relax? Oh, you’d love that, wouldn’t you?”