



BLAZIN BIRD



SOUTHERN CHARM

SOUTHERN EGO

STORY BY DANNY FAIRCHILD

14 November, 2019

My Dearest Annie,

I thank you for your letter dated 12 October and am glad to hear that all is well on the homefront. Your words of love have comforted me in these harsh, yet crucial times. Though the chicken sandwich war has raged on for these many months with no end in sight, please rest easy that my resolve has not wavered. The rights and indeed the personhood of many a marginalized loved one hangs in the balance, and I aim to see this conflict through to the end.

I take up my pen not only to dote on you, my dearest angel, but to share news from the front. Though the enemy's chicken sandwich is reputed to be of high calibre and substance, a dark horse has risen from Nashville like a modern day James K. Polk. And, indeed, Nashville plays an important role in what I have to relate. This force, I believe, has the capability of turning the tide, settling the question of chicken sandwich superiority once and for all... at least on the field of battle that is the Tri-States.

I write, my dear, of Chef Gerron Hurt's Southern Ego.

It's possible that the name of Chef Gerron has previously reached your ears. No stranger to battle, he overcame great odds to prevail on Season 9 of *MasterChef*. Indeed, he was the first black winner of *MasterChef*. Though raised in Louisville, KY, he now calls Nashville his home, and I hope that he will find Dubuque to his liking and choose to spend more time in and around

these parts. Such an action would truly mend the morale of the soldiers taking part in this delicious conflict.

It is no secret that Chef Gerron's base of operations is Southern Ego, located in the Novelty Iron Works building at 333 E 10th St. Here you will also find, among other things, the new comedy venue The Comedy Bar, as well as Backpocket's offerings of beer and various new-fangled amusements of an electronic bent. Southern Ego serves a much needed battery of flavor against the pangs of hunger that often strike in this sector. Though stationary, Southern Ego is dressed under the guise of a motorized food conveyance, demonstrating that one may take one's order anywhere.

I was honored to march beside my chicken-loving patriots at the VIP launch of Southern Ego. I have witnessed first hand what Southern Ego can do against violent taste buds and cravings. I've written thus far almost exclusively of the chicken sandwich Chef Gerron has appropriately monikered the Blazin' Bird, though this is by no means the only weapon in his arsenal. But it is the weapon I believe can bring us peace.

By his own words, Chef Gerron has described the Blazin' Bird as, "Our take on Nashville Hot Chicken. Lightly fried chicken tenderloins, cooked to perfection and tossed in our signature 'Nashville Hot Oil.' Topped with our horsey slaw and a dill pickle. Served on a buttery crescent bun." For those who have encountered Nashville hot chicken before, the Blazin' Bird is likely to lay all heretofore chicken to waste. And though the people of Dubuque are oft averse to things described as "hot," be easy, my dearest. The Blazin' Bird can be

ordered at one's own choice of heat. What is so striking about the Blazin' Bird, and indeed all of Chef Gerron's Southern Ego sandwich offerings, is that the man understands not just flavor, but texture. He understands that flavor doesn't just end at taste. He understands that the battle must be fought with all your senses. The retention of crispiness despite being tossed in sauce while also paying heed to the chicken's juiciness and tenderness is a sight to behold on any battlefield. Chef Gerron marshals his talents and his soldiers to decisive victory. I heard one bystander say, and I agree, "This is one of the best pieces of chicken I've ever had." I hope upon reading this, dearest Annie, that you do not suppose I am prone to exaggeration in this declaration. Though you are first in my heart, the Blazin' Bird ranks second.

Though turkeys are known to not migrate, Southern Ego is also a purveyor of a sandwich that fits right at home both in the South and here in Dubuque. I write, of course, of the Goodness Gracious Turkey, described by those under Chef Gerron's command as "Our take on a Kentucky Hot Brown. Braised turkey piled high on our homemade cornbread stuffing topped with smoked Gouda cheese and crispy bacon. Served with a cranberry dipping sauce." A Kentucky hot brown is usually an open-faced sandwich. Chef Gerron, to be sure, understands that open-faced does not always translate well into open warfare, and this hand-held version is not unlike our own turkey-and-dressing sandwiches, though the two principle ingredients remain separate. The cranberry dipping sauce joins the fray to invoke memories of Thanksgiving...and I hope to be



MAMA'S MAC AND CHEESE

with you upon the next celebration. I am most thankful for you, my dear... you...and this remarkable sandwich.

I mustn't close this letter without relating to you, my roll in clover, the tactical mastery with which Chef Gerron deploys his signature pork sandwich: The succinctly and appropriately named Piggy Pork, succinctly and appropriately described as "Crispy pork butt, horsey slaw and pickled vegetables piled high in between a buttery crescent bun." Pulled pork is almost commonplace. This sandwich, my light in my eyes, is not. The shredded pork is subjected to even further Maillard reactions to create a wonderful texture. It's like consuming the crispy outside of a smoked pork butt throughout. I'm not sure who first made the world a better place by putting slaw on pork sandwiches, but Chef Gerron has perfected this tactic with his horsey slaw and he employs it to devastating effect.

Though vegan options are scarce on this battlefield, Chef Gerron's army does offer a vegetarian option, The Southern Charm, featuring creamy pimento cheese made from scratch, dressed with a fried green tomato and horsey slaw; served on a crescent bun. I did not partake of this delight, but I see the advantage of it, and have high hopes that it will serve bravely.

While these sandwiches form an unstoppable frontal assault, Chef Gerron takes great care to not be outflanked on his sides. By sides, of course, I mean his aforementioned horsey slaw, his Mama's mac & cheese, and his Granny's

green beans. The mac & cheese, though a bit too sweet for my tastes, is very inventive in its sweetness. This mac & cheese may not be for everyone, but for those who do enjoy it...their world is about to be changed. The green beans do become a bit soft (which is going to happen when they're braised) but the flavor is extraordinary.

I must close now, my dearest Ann. I hope this letter finds you in good health and high spirits. And I hope that these tidings of hope brought forth by Southern Ego warm your bed in my stead. I hope the livestock are not giving you much trouble. Please write soon.

Always,

Your loving Daniel ■



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