Sean Evans
Hey, what's going on everybody?
For First We Feast, I'm Sean Evans and you're watching Hot Ones.
It's the show with hot questions and even hotter wings, and today we're joined by Bruce Wayne.
He's a philanthropist, industrialist, and New Jersey's – and probably America's – most famous billionaire celebrity, running not just Wayne Enterprises by day, but fighting illness and poverty at night as the founder of the Thomas and Martha Wayne foundations.
Today though, the man who's managed to survive more brushes with death than most is going to try his hands at the wings… of death.
Bruce Wayne, welcome to the show.

Bruce Wayne
Hey, thanks for having me.

SE
How are you feeling?

BW
A little– You know when you're feeling confident and then immediately think, "hmm, that's going to bite me later?"

SE
Like you know your confidence isn't earned?

BW
Yes, exactly.

SE
Well, don't psych yourself out *just* yet. You've traveled to a lot of different countries and, I have to assume, had a lot of different kinds of meals. How are you around spicy food?

BW
Not great. (Laughs)
I'll be honest, I try to eat– I try to experience something from everywhere I go, but I have a pretty sensitive stomach, so I tend to stick to the more tourist-y kind of meals, you know.
Does that one have a picture of radiation on it?

SE
Oh, yes, Da Bomb is–

BW
I take it back, I'm not confident anymore. (laughing) But ready to go.

00:01:21 - Graphic (First bite: Hot Ones The Classic Garlic Fresno Hot Sauce (SHU: 1,700))

SE
So today is actually a special episode because these wings were supplied by Wayne Foods.

BW
(coughs) Sorry, keep going. Hrrm.

SE
Has a bit of a kick, right?

BW
It's not, it's not that bad, just unexpected. It's good. I like it.

SE
So when you travel, you say it's mostly because of social obligations and you're often seen in the company of other celebrities, but almost every time you travel somewhere, there's some humanitarian… I don't want to say crisis, but–

BW
An event?

SE
Yeah, an event that takes place, right. Do you anticipate that these sort of environments might put you in a position where you think you'll be able to do some good, or do you consider yourself to just be very lucky?

BW
Oh, wow. Uh, I think… I think I try to go to places I haven't been to yet where I get the feeling that just… looking at map or a, spreadsheet, you know, I won't be able to get the same information as when I'm, I'm–

SE
Boots on the ground, so to speak.

BW
Yeah, exactly. And almost every time I find that, you know, people, communities, that kind of thing, they're usually missing the opportunity to, to really achieve their potential.

SE
And you can give that to them.

BW
Exactly.

SE

So the parties are just a smokescreen?

BW
Not really, no, it's just that, you know, all that is, it's taken into account when I decide where to party next.

00:02:47 - Graphic (Second bite: Double Comfort Seeing Double Hot Sauce (SHU: 6,200))

BW
Oh, that's good.

SE
Feeling it more?

BW
Definitely. I'm getting sort of into the rhythm now, I think.

SE
And it is a rhythm.

BW
You know, my girlfriend, Selina, she told me "you should get on that show, Bruce, you're going to be terrible." (Laughs)
She's always trying to get me to push my boundaries.
(Is about to rub face)

SE
Don't! Don't touch your eyes.

BW
Oh, right, I almost forgot. (Laughs, then wipes face on upper sleeve)

SE
You might not survive.

BW
(Looks confused for a second, then laughs) What a way to go, though, right?

SE
Yeah, exactly. So, I understand that you've been both accused of murder, you've been a jury member, and you got your Law degree from Yale at the top of your class. How has being on both sides of the law influenced your perception of the kind of crime that you've been directly affected by, and is there something you think you could be doing that you think might be missing right now?

BW
Oh, wow.
That's a, a *tough* question. I mean, I try to do what I think helps the most people now, you know? It's, it's rough. I think my law degree definitely helps me, helps me see the flaws in the system, you know, so I think there's a lot of giving people the benefit of the doubt.

SE
Like Batman.

BW
Hmm?

SE
The court case you were a jury member on, for Victor Fries. Anonymous sources have said that you were, you were very harsh on Batman, but ultimately you see him as–

BW
I think Batman is a complex character, you know? He's someone who decided to, to make the world a better place by punching people in the face, and we – you know, people of Gotham – we have to believe he's doing the right thing because if he *isn't* then we're all a little bit guilty.

00:04:31 - Graphic (Third bite: Mark's Fermented Kimchi Hot Sauce (SHU: 18,000))

BW
Oh, Kimchi! I do love Kimchi.
(coughs)
That's good. That's really good.

SE
You seem to be doing a little better?

BW
Oh, definitely. The first two are kind of… They're not *that* bad but they sort of set a, a precedent, you know? Like "this is where it starts, it's only going to get worse from here," but I think I'm really feeling it now.

SE
Feeling that rhythm?

BW
Yes, exactly. I'm going to hold off on the milk for now.

SE

In 1997 you officially became a parent, adopting Dick Grayson after the accident that killed his parents. Now, twenty years later, obviously being a father has changed the way you engage with your persona as a socialite and business magnate, but do you think that kind of high-octane environment might have also affected your son's way of seeing the world, and do you think there's something you'd do differently?

BW
I mean, there's no parent, I think, that wouldn't do things a little differently, you know? But I love him and I'm so, so proud of him. He's been doing a lot of good work.

SE
In Blüdhaven, right? Just down the road.

BW
Haha, yes, exactly. The Alfred Pennyworth foundation is… it's inspired, and I like to think I helped, sort of, light that spark a bit.

SE
He's building on your legacy?

BW
In a sense, though I mean it's called the Alfred Pennyworth foundation, you know, not the, the Bruce Wayne foundation. I think, I *like* to think I did what I could raising Richard but Alfred was just as much there in raising him.

00:06:07 - Graphic (Fourth bite: Hot Ones Los Calientes Barbacoa Hot Sauce (SHU: 33,000))

BW
Los Calientes? And it's *green*? I'm, uh, how are you holding up?

SE
I'm just trying to keep it cool, you know?

BW
Like how you stay calm during a thunderstorm so the dog doesn't get scared?

SE
(Laughs) If you like, yeah. I'm just trying to be a support system.

BW
(Coughs, drinks water)
Well you're doing a fantastic job so far, Sean.

SE
Well, thank you.

Over the years, you've continued to adopt, and you now have four children, including a biological son. So we asked before how you think your work and your life influenced your son, but how has being a parent, especially children who lost their parents like you, four times over now, affected your own stance on philanthropy and a business leader?

BW
That's a tough question. I think, I think they've made it easier in a lot of ways. They keep me… they keep me focused, I think, but they also push me to be more…
Oh, that burns around the mouth.
I think I have a tendency to be a bit of an island, you know, and I think they remind me that everyone needs, needs people around them. I think before I used to think I had to, had to take on the world myself.

SE
Did they know you were going to be on the show?

BW
Oh absolutely. Hey, Tim, I hope you're happy. (Laughs)
I think Damian is the one that ultimately dared me to do it, but they're all complicit.

SE
Regrets?

BW
None. I'm nothing without my family. Or do you mean the show?

SE
The show, yeah, but that's still good to hear.

BW
I stand by it. About the family. I'll let you know about coming on the show when we get to the one with the bomb on it, haha.

00:08:11 - Graphic (Fifth bite: Fat Cat Chairman Meow's Revenge Hot Sauce (SHU: 54,000))

BW
This one feels a little targeted.

SE
How so?

BW
Sean, I'm a landlord.
(Looks serious for a moment, then laughs)

SE
(Laughs)
I'll be honest, we didn't consider that, I'm sorry.

BW
(Laughs)
No apologies necessary, I know how this works.
(Chewing)
Oh, that, that really hits the, the back of the throat.
(Takes another bite)

SE
You're really digging in there.

BW
Just trying to get a feel for it.
(Laughs)
I want to make sure I get the whole experience.

SE
So usually we do a segment on this show where we ask you to explain the context behind an instagram post, but if it's okay with you I'd like to dig into that a little bit. In 2003 the Martha Wayne foundation became owner of several smaller subsidiaries in and around Gotham City, including a not insignificant number of rental management companies. How do you square your actions as a philanthropist with the more profit-driven motives of being a landlord?

BW
I'm glad you (coughs) ask. I mean, that's what the Wayne Institute is for, right? It's trying to figure out how to use these sort of traditional systems and then approaching them through these, wow, that's (coughs), that's not nothing. (Laughs)
It's about trying to figure out a way to sort of mix the old with the new, you know? You can try to go in and fix everything from the get go but the old systems are still there.

SE
So you're saying you're doing something new.

BW
I like to think so, yes. The thing is that I'm technically a landlord, right, through the foundation and everything, but at the end of the day most of the people who live there pay… negligible rent. I don't think we ever break even.

SE
So it's more like a homeless shelter?

BW
I don't, I mean, no, not really. It's not a shelter. It's just a home. That's the idea. Providing homes for the people who need them.
(Wipes mouth)

What about this instagram post?

SE
Okay, so we'll just put the picture here on the monitor.

(The picture on the monitor is of Bruce Wayne, covered in debris, cuts and bruises, sitting on a gurney, being treated by medical personnel and smiling at the camera.)

SE
I'm especially liking the quote. "Sometimes the heroes are the friends we made along the way." Can you tell me a bit about the story behind that picture, and the heroes you would consider friends?

BW
Oh yeah, that was, that was a rough one. That was the… I want to say July of last year, the bombing of the Kane Memorial Hospital. I got really, really lucky, stuck under the rubble with a couple of doctors and patients. We got stuck there for a while, and it was kind of a miracle nobody got more badly hurt than they did.

SE
People say Batman was there, is that how you two met?

BW
No, the Batman and I have met a few times but he was busy at that moment. (Laughs)
The heroes in question were the fire-fighters that got us out and the doctors that were helping their patients while several tons of concrete were slowly collapsing on top of us.
As for your other question, I *have* to mention doctor Leslie Thompkins. Just a true gem of a human being, and a personal hero of mine.

00:11:18 - Graphic (Sixth bite: Il Mig Onima Hot Sauce (SHU: 71,000))

SE
We're past the halfway point.

BW
All uphill or downhill from here?

SE
I suppose that depends on your perspective, but it's not going to get any easier!

BW
Oh, I like this. There's, wow, that's a lot of chillies at the bottom there. (laughs)
I'm hanging in there.

SE
You're doing *great*.

BW
I'm just trying to keep it going, you know, trying not to think about it too much.

SE
Going with the flow.

BW
Yeah. It's all getting a little foggy, but I'm hanging on.

SE
So your family has always been doing well, financially, but in 1994 you officially became New Jersey's fourth billionaire. Now, that would be a momentous occasion for most people, but at the time you were in Simikot, in Nepal. How did your staying there in that community affect the news, and do you think it influenced your decision to go back in 2015?

BW
How did you–
Wow. You really do your, whew, research. This is a *hot* one.
(Laughs, coughs)

SE
Yeah it's a big step up.

BW
Well, at the time I was, I was traveling a lot, really trying to, to find myself, you know, and I think at the time the difference between being a millionaire and a billionaire didn't mean all that much to me because I was trying to figure out who I was without the money, you know?

SE
Did you?

BW
I mean, I think the most important lesson I've learned since then is that the question doesn't really matter, but I mean, I was young and stupid at the time. I thought if I lived near poverty for a while that it would help me figure stuff out and that was, all things considered, not a, not a great move.

SE
But you were trying to see things from their perspective.

BW
Sure, but at the end of the day if I got my hands on a telephone I could've had a helicopter come in and just fly me off. I think that's kind of the lesson I got there. That no matter what I do, I'm always going to, going to have that privilege. (Coughs)
And I think that's why I went back, you know. After the earthquake that year, there was a sudden influx of tourists and I think I went back to make sure people like me didn't, didn't make a mess of things. So I did what I could to help out. But it's a balancing act.

SE
How so?

BW
Well because it's tempting to just throw money at it, you know? I could just give them ten million to expand their housing and hope it all works out but in my experience just dumping a truckful of cash on the people in charge usually doesn't end up making the lives of the average people better, you know?
(Pauses, takes a sip of water)
But they have a council fund now, a better radio connection, and regular supply runs. Every bit helps, you know?

00:14:18 - Graphic (Seventh bite: Black Eyed Susan Spice Co. Red Flag Hot Sauce (SHU: 126,000))

BW
Black Eyed Susan? I'm trying to figure out if that sounds scarier than "Da Bomb". On the one hand it sounds like a monster but it's not as straightforward as a nuclear bomb, is it?
(Laughs)
Should I be worried?

SE
I'll be here, don't worry.

BW
(Coughing)
I… wow. Is that… I mean, it can't get worse than this, can it?

SE
It can get a *lot* worse, I'm afraid.

BW
I can feel my eyeballs. That's, that's definitely new.
I have to, I have to-
(Drinks milk)

SE
Whatever you have to do.
(Also drinks milk)
I mean, I'll admit, I'm glad you're going for it.

BW
(pulling at shirt collar, loosening tie)
You have to be used to it by now, no?

SE
Oh, it's an adventure every time.

BW
Wow.

SE
So there's this question I've been wanting to ask, but most people don't really have a chance or the opportunity. Of all the eccentric characters you've had a chance to meet over the years–

BW
And there's been a lot.

SE
Exactly. Out of all of those, which do you think scared you the most, and is it Batman or the Joker? (Laughs)
But more seriously, you're a regular guy – I mean you clearly work out–

BW
Thank you
(Laughs)
I like to keep in shape.
(Drinks more milk)

SE
But you're still just a regular person. Which encounter had you the most, like, "Oh, I might not walk away from this"?

BW
I mean, as, as one of the most visible people in Gotham City, I think it's kind of, kind of natural for me to attract the attention of some of these figures, right? So I mean, it's been touch and go a few times and it's *always* scary, isn't it? There's always a risk when you're around maniacs like that, so I think trying to quantify it is difficult.
But I think the scariest is when–
I think it's when my family–

SE
You don't have to answer the question if it's too much.

BW
No, it's fine. The, uh, the wings, they're messing with my head. (Laughs)
I think it's when Bane broke into the family home. I think Batman is scary, you know, and maybe that's the point, but there's nothing scarier than not knowing if your family is okay.
(Takes another bite)
I think, at the end of the day, if you're in a position like me, if you're more scared for yourself than you are for the people around you, then you're not doing it right.

SE
Wow.

BW
Sorry, got a bit heavy there. Alfred was, he was a lot like a father-figure to me in many ways, and I think not bringing him up would be, would be doing him a disservice.

SE
Well, thank you for answering. So no word on the Joker?

BW
At the end of the day he's just another maniac, Sean, and if you're a gothamite you end up falling into this kind of… serenity, I guess?

SE
Haven't heard that before.

BW
Obviously you're scared of the Joker. He could do anything. But when the whole city is being threatened by bombs or gas or a guy who shoots mustard and ketchup all over the place, you learn to roll with the punches. (Coughs)
So yeah, you're scared when you see the Joker, but at the end of the day, you get kinda used to it.

00:17:38 - Graphic (Eighth bite: Da' Bomb Beyond Insanity Hot Sauce (SHU: 135,600))

BW
Here we go.

SE
Here we go.

BW
Hrm. (Coughs). Oh. Oh wow. I, oof. (Coughs more and drinks milk)
That's, that's definitely a new threshold.
My eyes feel like they're… woah.

SE
(Laughs)

BW
Goodness gracious. Wow. I'm… wow.
I hope you didn't have any more big questions waiting. Wow.

SE

Oh it's not the questions, just the sauce. (Laughs)
In all your years trying to help Gotham, you've had a lot of setbacks and seen the city under attack from all sides, both from individuals and natural disasters. Do you ever feel like it's not worth the effort, that you're going about it the wrong way, or that you're actually making the problem worse?

BW
(Coughing) I mean, all the time. I have to, wow, okay. (Drinks milk) You kind of have to, right? If you're not asking yourself if you're doing the right thing, how would you know if you weren't? But I, I have to believe that I'm making a difference, you know? I have to.

SE
And what about the accusations that you are a part of the problem?

BW
(Pauses for a second)
I think in a way I am. (Wipes hands, wipes mouth, coughs) But I think I'm a part of the solution, too. When I'm, when I'm being Bruce Wayne, the Billionaire, right, I can do a lot more than if I gave it all away at once. And I think, I think change, it, it (coughs) It starts at, oh, goodness…

SE
It starts at home?

BW
Exactly. I want to make a difference.

SE
A positive one.

BW
Yes, obviously. I mean, there's always going to be people who think this is self-serving and, and maybe, in a way, I guess it *is.*

SE
What do you mean?

BW
Well, I mean, trying to solve Gotham's crime problem is, I mean, it's my way of, of dealing with the death of my parents, you know, but I also think that, that if I focus too much on the big picture I'll, I'll forget that there *are* people out there, right now, who need help. Too much big picture thinking, I think it drives you insane a little bit.

SE
And you're trying to stay sane by going out there and making a difference.

BW
I guess so, yeah.

00:20:41 - Graphic (Ninth bite: High River Sauces Peppers Up Hot Sauce (SHU: 700,000))

BW
What do you mean this one is *six times* as hot?

SE
It's a rough jump up, yeah, but after Da Bomb, you'll be able to do it. If I can do it, you can do it. After that last one, this one's, it's a little nicer.

BW
My teeth hurt.

SE
So I imagine, being sort of a celebrity in Gotham, that people recognize you in the street. When you're an actor or an entertainer there's a sense that that's a part of the job, but at the end of the day you're a businessman. Does it bother you when people come up to you asking for help?

BW
I mean, no, not really.
(Drinks milk, water, spills on shirt)
Ah, dang it. My lips aren't working right anymore. It's weird, I can feel my face but like it's, sort of, over there, you know?

SE
Yeah, it does that, yeah. Careful sips.

BW
(Wiping shirt) But yeah, no, it doesn't. I mean, there's a, there's a lot of bad people in the world and I think, I like to think that I can make it a little better by helping people when they ask me to. I think *that's* my job more than running the company is. I think the board would probably a little annoyed at me saying that, but they're just a bunch of boring old geezers.
(Laughs, then empties glass of water)
But yeah, no, I think if I can't spare a moment of my time to help someone when they ask me, what's the point of all that money, right? Can I get another glass?

SE
So if I asked you for, like, ten thousand dollars, you'd give it to me?

BW
Cash or cheque? (Laughs, coughs)
I mean, there's this, this element of "does this person need what they're asking for" but at the end of the day, asking for help is already pretty hard for most folks, and asking for money is double that. (Wipes mouth several times, coughs, empties glass of milk)

There's a, there's a humiliation to it, and I think then *not* listening and assuming that they're asking in good faith, I don't know. For me, ten thousand is not a lot of money. That's like you asking someone for change for the parking meter.

SE
It's that little?

BW
If you have less than ten thousand dollars in your savings account, I have a million times that. And don't get me wrong, I'm trying to spend it in the right places, but yeah, it's tempting sometimes to just give everyone in Gotham a thousand dollars and just be done with it. But it's not that simple.
(Coughs)
My mouth is on *fire.*

SE
You seem to be doing okay, you're holding up.

BW
The worst is behind me, you know?

SE
We're in the home stretch now.

00: (Tenth bite: Hot Ones The Last Dab Xperience Hot Sauce (SHU: 2,693,000)

SE
All right, so this is the last dab. We call it the last dab 'cause it's tradition around here to put a little extra on the last wing.

BW
I know someone who has this one, actually.

SE
Oh, have you tried it?

BW
God no!
(Laughs)

SE
Well, are you ready for it now?

BW
Let's do it!

SE
It's been a heavy day. You've really bared your soul a bit, maybe burned it a bit, what do you say we bring it home?

(They toast the wings like glasses)

BW
Let's do it.
(Laughs, coughs, drinks whole pint of water at once)
Oh my god.

SE
You okay?

BW
You really saved this for last, huh?

SE
Every time.

BW
I'm (coughs) struggling.

SE
You'll pull through this, Bruce. I believe in you.

BW
(Laughs) That's all we need at the end of the day, isn't it? Someone to say that?

SE
It's been interesting, I mean, you're, you're quite famous, and you're one of the richest people in the country, but you do clearly struggle with some of the same things I do.

BW
(Coughs)
I mean, definitely, right. I mean, even in what we do. I think you set out to, to entertain, and that's – God – that's important, because where would we be without– (sniffs, blows nose)

SE
Careful not to touch the eyes

BW
Thanks. But yeah where would we be without art and entertainment, but also, like, you sort of unmask people on this show, right, show us who people kind of really are when you strip it all away.

SE

Burn it away, if you will.
(Laughs)
Yeah, we say sometimes that there's no pretending here, you know? There's nowhere to hide from the hot sauce. They'll come to bite you with a vengeance.

BW
Exactly, yeah. And at the end of the day that's what I'm trying to do too. Like, yeah, a lot of what Wayne Enterprises does is, is not public information, but I do try to be a light in the darkness, and I– am I grasping at straws here? (Laughs)

SE
No, I think I know what you mean, Bruce. I mean, at the end of the day, we're both about, about that kind of "truth about the human condition," you know?

BW
Yeah.
(Coughs)

SE
And we did it, we made our way through your, your personal rogues gallery of hot sauces, and you're still standing.

BW
I can't back down from a challenge, Sean. Especially if my family's rooting for me.

SE
Well, this last part is going to be familiar, at least: Let's roll out the red carpet. This camera, this camera, this camera, let the people know what you have going on in your life.

BW
I think, I think the Wayne foundation…
No, I think I'm good. Dick, Cass, Selina, Damian, Tim, Jason, you're all deeply evil, thank you for putting me through this.
(Laughs)
It's been a privilege and an honor, Sean. Let's never do this again.

SE
No promises, B-man.

BW
Sorry?

SE
Bruce, my man.

BW
Oh. (Laughs) Well, next time maybe let me pick the menu.

SE
Thank you so much, Bruce Wayne. Best of luck to you and your efforts to “clean up Gotham”, and until next time.

(They shake hands as the crew applauds)