

Gourmet 181

Chapter 181: Unbelievable! Owner Bu is Treating

"Still not open? Looks like there is no hope today!"

"I've been here three times already! What's going on with Owner Bu? Business has been shut down for almost two days? Could it be that he is innovating a new dish?"

"Owner Bu has changed, he wasn't like this in the past."

A crowd has gathered at the entrance, congesting the alleyway that used to be quite spacious. They all stood in front of Bu Fang's store, immersed in chatters with each other.

Ouyang Xiaoyi's pretty brows knitted into a frown as she stood by the entrance of the store, occasionally turning her head to gaze at the firmly shut doors. Her delicate lips pursed while she thought, "this Smelly Boss... no advanced notice whatsoever before closing business!"

Fatty Jin, with his protruding belly, extended his chubby neck in an attempt to peer into the store to see whether Owner Bu was indeed studying a new dish. He gave up quickly however, as he couldn't get even a glimpse of the store's interior. Plus, no aromatic scents were drifting out of the store. On second thought... there probably wasn't a new dish being made.

Xiao Yanyu put on her veil and lifted her beautiful eyes to look inside the store, but her gaze eventually landed on Xiaoyi as she murmured quietly. "Xiaoyi, let's leave, looks like Owner Bu won't be opening business again today."

Luo Sanniang had a hot temper and was already running out of patience as she stood there. If it weren't for Juan'Er, who was next to her with a food container in hand and kept on pulling her back, Luo Sanniang probably would have forced her way into the store to take a look.

However, the consequence of forcefully intruding would be dire...

Blacky was lying on the ground, and as its eyes looked at this crowd of people up and down, its lips curled, as if it sensed something hilarious and pathetic.

But Blacky was also confounded by why Bu Fang hasn't openen business for two whole days. It didn't affect him that much though, even if it meant he couldn't eat the delicious Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs.

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Splish Splash

Streams of water ran down, gliding across Bu Fang's fair skin. Pieces of hair, moisten by the water, stuck to his body. Bu Fang tossed his head, instantly sending splashes of water flying everywhere.

Warm steam rose up, both cloudy and hazy.

Having just bathed, Bu Fang's body was emanating warmth. He wiped his dripping hair with a towel and walked out of the bathroom with a satisfied look. Taking a shower after pure exhaustion is the most fulfilling thing in this world. If only one could also enjoy gourmet cuisine at that very moment...

It'd be jollier than being an immortal god!

Draped with a long robe around his slightly slim figure, Bu Fang leisurely walked to the window. The windows were firmly shut and obscured view to the dark nightfall outside.

His long hair was toweled a little bit drier, but it still felt quite damp. Bu Fang pushed open the window, instantly feeling a fresh cool breeze drift inside and glide through his moisten hair. It made him feel completely refreshed.

"Oh crap! The window just opened! Owner Bu is inside the store!"

"Damn! Can it be that Owner Bu snoozed like a pig for the past two days? He didn't even wake up at the ruckus we've caused here?"

"Who would have thought that Owner Bu didn't go out! Then, what kind of indescribable thing is a guy doing in his room? Was he really... just merely studying a new dish?!"

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When the window was cracked open, Bu Fang didn't even get to take a breath of fresh air before the alleyway started ringing with commotion. The noise was filled with shock and bewilderment... and a deep sense of resentment.

Bu Fang was startled at once, and stretched out his neck to look downstairs. His dampen hair drooped down his face, giving him a chill.

"Huh? Why are there so many people? What's everyone doing here?" Bu Fang asked innocuously as he squinted perplexedly at the swarm of people underneath grinding their teeth and glaring back at him.

Those people standing downstairs were furious. "Owner Bu, why the innocent face? Come on down, we promise we won't beat you to death!"

"Store closed for two days without a word, and you ask us what we're doing gathered here." In a flash, everyone in the crowd starred daggers at Bu Fang with spiteful eyes. It made Bu Fang shiver as he felt all his hair stand on end.

"Smelly Boss! What are you doing? Why didn't you open business for two days!" Ouyang Xiaoyi scuttled over, lifted up her tiny face to shout at Bu Fang fumingly.

She arrived at the store early for the past two days and waited by the store for a long time, thinking that her Smelly Boss would open the door. At the end... the shutters remained firmly closed for all two days, not having budged even a bit.

As Bu Fang detected Ouyang Xiaoyi's vexed tone, his pupil shrank and the corners of his mouth widened. He suddenly remembered.... that before leaving for the Illusory Spirit Swamp, he might have forgotten to hang up the "Closed" sign by the door of his store.

"Did I not hang up the 'Closed' sign by the door?" Bu Fang calmly asked the crowd beneath with a straight face.

Everyone shook their heads in unison. If there was the "Closed" sign, they wouldn't be waiting here like idiots... What happened to the foundation of trust between people!

"Oh, then some household's naughty dog must have ran off with the sign on the door for fun." Bu Fang coolly bullshitted.

The crowd was speechless.

Blacky rolled its eyes. "Only a short time no see, how did this brat get such a thick skin? "

"Wait a moment, everyone." Bu Fang calmly said to the crowd beneath as he leaned on the window cell. The robe slid down a bit, exposing his fair skin.

"I'm coming down to open shop, everyone wait for me."

Afterwards, Bu Fang retreated in his room and changed out of his thin robe. His hair was still somewhat damp, but with the use of true energy, his moisten hair began to emit warm steam, completely drying everything.

Using a velvet rope to tie up his hair, Bu Fang walked out of his room, down the stairs, and into the store.

As the store's shutters opened, a cold wind rushed in. The crowd looked at Bu Fang, a line of people starring at each other eye to eye.

Looking at the group by the door, there seemed to be around a dozen people. Most of them were familiar faces, old customers. Bu Fang's heartstring tugged, feeling slightly apologetic.

"Sorry for the long wait, come on into the store," Bu Fang took a step back and said to the crowd.

Ouyang Xiaoyi charged in first in fume, with a frown still across her forehead.

Bu Fang's lips curled as he patted Ouyang Xiaoyi on the head. The latter tried to duck away in discontent but didn't succeed.

"Sit down everyone, if there isn't enough space just try to squeeze in. As a token of my apology, everyone can taste my new dish for free. Let's count that as a compensation." Bu Fang lightly nodded at the crowd and proposed softly.

The crowd in the store was instantly shocked as everyone looked at Bu Fang with an incredulous expression. Xiao Yanyu's eyes sparkled in a bizarre way as Xiao Xiaolong's vermilion colored lips opened to a gape.

Unbelievable, Owner Bu of the black-hearted restaurant... was actually treating!

Owner Bu's treating on the house, now that was the chance of a lifetime. Owner Bu was known for his unprecedented level of blackheartedness in the Imperial City. A single serving of Improved Egg-Fried Rice was sold at the exorbitant price of 10 crystals. A black-hearted owner was going to treat its customers?

The crowd's astonishment turned into exhilaration, as they feverishly looked toward Bu Fang.

Bu Fang glanced at the crowd and solemnly nodded his head, patted Ouyi Xiaoyi's head once more, and turned around toward the kitchen.

"System, if I'm treating because of objective reasons, will my crystals be deducted?" Bu Fang asked placidly.

"The host's so-called objective reasons aren't due to system flaws. Therefore, if the Host will treat, then all expenses will be deducted from the crystals earned by him," the System replied promptly and gravely.

The corners of Bu Fang's mouth tweaked, but he nonetheless walked toward the kitchen, unperturbed.

"If that's the case... then it'll be fine as long as I don't use the ingredients provided by the system." Bu Fang murmured.

The System was speechless.

Chapter 182: The New Dish After Two Days of Experimentation

Bu Fang easily guessed that if he used ingredients provided by the system to cook, the system would, given its nature, deduct his crystals... That was why Bu Fang astutely decided to utilize the many ingredients he gathered by himself from the Illusory Spirit Swamp.

Many spirit herbs were collected during this trip, though it didn't include much high-graded ingredients, Bu Fang came across an unexpected surprise. That would be the serpent-men tribe's fleshy first-grade spirit fish. Though its grade wasn't high, every fish had extremely plump and full flesh.

Bu Fang brought back quite a few of those fishes, as he didn't actually get to taste the Aromatic Grilled Fish he cooked in the serpent-men tribe and felt awfully regretful. Though he was a chef, he was just as much a foodie. Since his heart kept on calling out to the grilled fish, he brought back a couple, not to mention this fish wasn't that valuable in the serpent-men tribe anyway.

In the serpent-men tribe, Bu Fang was able to cook such delicious grilled fish under tough and lacking circumstances. Now that he was back in his store, provided with much better equipments, the taste of the grilled fish would undergo an immense refinement.

The crowd outside greatly anticipated Bu Fang's new dish, as Bu Fang's new dish never failed to amaze them every time.

Standing in front of the cupboard, relishing in the clean and fully equipped kitchen of the store, Bu Fang took in a deep breath. He sighed in revelation. The conditions of the store were remarkably better than that of the serpent-men tribe.

With improved equipments and environment, Bu Fang became all the more confident in the cooking of this grilled fish.

Taking out two slightly squirming, plump fishes from the System's dimensional storage, Bu Fang examined the fleshiness of the fish and grew to like it more and more, even though the spiritual grade of the fish was low.

A wisp of smoke twirled around Bu Fang's hand, and the Dragon Bone Kitchen Knife appeared. The clear spring water was used to wash the kitchen knife. Even though the Dragon Bone Kitchen Knife

had self-cleansing properties, Bu Fang, being slightly germaphobic, still subconsciously washed the kitchen knife.

After washing the kitchen knife, Bu Fang began to handle the plump fish. Since he was quite proficient with handling fish, the two fishes were processed in no time. Next, he slitted the fish from belly to its back, unfolded it, and marked a few cuts on the fish.

He took out a porcelain pot, added cooking wine, placed the processed fish within, layered the fish with some marinated ingredients, and put it into the kitchen cabinet for marination.

With the System's help, the marination time could be greatly reduced.

During the waiting time for the marination to be complete, Bu Fang began to prepare the other side ingredients. He took out fruits and vegetables, twirled the knife in his hands, and finished processing everything.

Lastly, he took out a ball of blood-red Blood Crown. The blood crown of a seventh grade Black Swamp Boa was highly precious as it contained a rich level of spiritual energy. The surge of this spiritual energy would render one astounded.

Bu Fang cut off a third of the Blood Crown, and once a crimson Blood Crown was slashed open, a gush of spirit essence charged out like a lively dragon. This was none other than the essence of the Black Swamp Boa, and it was naturally extraordinary.

The texture of the Blood Crown resembled that of fungus, so Bu Fang chopped up this one third of Blood Crown into strips and mixed it with the vegetables.

Taking the two pieces of well-marinated fish out of the cabinet, Bu Fang specially requested the System to provide a pan needed for grilling fish.

Even though the System was stingy, none of Bu Fang's crystals would be deducted for providing a pan for the new grilled fish. Deduction would only occur when Bu Fang requested ingredients.

The two fishes were placed on the pan and then pushed it into the oven for grilling. Given the steaming temperature dispersing within the oven, the flesh of the two fishes gradually became well-done. When the timing became just right, Bu Fang took out the pan, and the aroma of the fish spread out.

Fruits and vegetables, already stir-fried with oil, were poured on top of the grilled fish. The Blood Crown melted gradually under the high temperature of the grill, and its spirit energy seeped into the fish meat and vegetables.

A strong fragrance dispersed along with the spirit energy, and it uncontrollably stimulated Bu Fang's appetite.

The two fishes were sizable, enough for the people outside to taste test.

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"Say, knowing how black-hearted Owner Bu is, what kind of new dish would he treat us with?" Fatty Jin extended his neck as he asked those nearby.

Luo Sanniang's eyes rolled, her lips forming a smirk. "You never know for sure. Given Owner Bu's nature, maybe he'll whip out an ordinary steamed corn bread and sternly tell you that it is the new dish."

"No... No way! If Owner Bu said it's a new dish, it'll definitely be worth the anticipation!" Juan'Er placed the food container on the table and retorted, shyly and quietly, when she heard Luo Sanniang's words.

Everyone was awfully curious to know what kind of dish Bu Fang would make for them. It was a difficult question, since they ate at the store on a daily basis and knew very clearly the quality and price of Bu Fang's dishes. If Bu Fang said it was on the house today, but only treated a dish that wasn't even worth one crystal, then they would conclude that Bu Fang was truly god damn black-hearted.

This was also why Bu Fang decided to take out the Blood Crown.

Just relying on the plump fish from the serpent-men tribe may fulfill the standards of taste, but because the spirit level of this fleshly fish was far from strong, if Bu Fang only grilled this fish, his customers would definitely feel disgruntled.

Just as the crowd was chattering tête-à-tête, Bu Fang slowly sauntered out of the kitchen with the pan containing the grilled fish in his hands.

This pan was large, so Bu Fang did not ask Ouyang Xiaoyi to serve, and instead personally carried it out and placed it on a table.

A waft of rich aroma drifted from the grilled fish, causing the crowds' eyes to sparkle right away.

"It really is a new dish! This... this is something I've never seen before. It's even served in a special apparatus!" Fatty Jin's eyes stared straight at it, he couldn't believe Bu Fang actually took out this new dish.

The corner of Luo Sanniang's mouth twitched, it was incredible that Bu Fang actually conscientiously delivered a new dish... She thought Bu Fang was going to toss out a steamed corn bread and call it a day.

But of course, having a new dish was terrific... At least they were in luck to give it a taste!

The crowd held up their chopsticks and bowls, unable to hold themselves back. Sniffing the fish's rich, mouth-watering fragrance that spread through the air, the crowd was simply intoxicated.

However, before they even moved their chopsticks, Bu Fang intervened.

"This is a grilled fish, don't be impatient... You don't get to eat delicious grilled fish if you're in a hurry," Bu Fang declared.

Thereafter, under everyone's stunned gaze, Bu Fang pried open the top half of the pan, revealing a hollow section within the grill.

Bu Fang lifted a finger and a wisp of ivory-colored true energy floated out of his fingertip, as if a spirit was pulsating upon it.

The finger pointed at the hollow inners of the grill, and right under everyone's astonished eyes, a shining luster ignited within the pan and turned into a simple magic array.

Scorching heat rose from the magic array.

Bu Fang placed the fish on the grill, the magic array circulated underneath, roasting the grilled fish within the pan.

The magic array emitted a brilliant radiance, rendering the entire pan vividly vibrant. It was breathtakingly beautiful.

"This is the new dish I invented these two days, Spirit Array Grilled Fish." Bu Fang made up some baloney with a straight face, finding a compelling excuse to justify his absence.

Under the magic array's roasting, the aroma of the grilled fish became even stronger. Gleams emitted by the magic array played with the color of the grilled fish, causing it to change constantly, pale red, dark red, pale red once again...

Sizzling hot steam became increasingly visible.

With clusters of fruits and vegetables on top, the grilled fish looked stunning. Its visual representation was enough to keep one enchanted, not to mention the fish's rich aroma under the effect of the magic array.

"This is the first plate of grilled fish. Take your time, everyone. There's another plate inside, I'll go get it," Bu Fang announced.

"Go ahead, go ahead..." The crowd murmured halfheartedly, already losing track of Bu Fang's words.

The corners of Bu Fang's lips curled, he glanced at this group of people swallowing their saliva, and turned to head back to the kitchen.

"Right, Owner Bu, when is the proper time for us to start eating this grilled fish?" Fatty Jin suddenly remembered to ask a crucial question, and inquired as he looked over his shoulder.

"Guess." Bu Fang waved his hand and answered coolly, with his figure quickly disappeared into the kitchen.

"Why would I ask if I was going to guess..." Fatty Jin wanted to snap back at Bu Fang as he turned his head back indignantly, but his pupils suddenly shrank.

"Damn it! You barbarians, save me some!"

Fatty Jin gaped grievously at the flock that had already charged toward the grilled fish. Seeing that the plump, juicy fish meat was being taken piece by piece, Fatty Jin felt as if all the fat in his own body was being sucked clean. These savage brutes... what happened to the promise of waiting for the fish to cook?

What happened to the indestructible foundation of trust between people?!

Chapter 183: The Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs Eaten by the Dog

In the dark evening, two crescent moons intertwined, emitting a chilling glow, as if the earth was masked with a gossamer veil.

Fang Fang's Little Store was well lit, with waves of hot mist floating out. There was aroma within the hot air, and spirit energy fused within the fragrance. The two intermingled and fulfilled each other.

With the passing of time, the bustle within the store slowly passed, and the hot mist waned.

Bu Fang stood perfectly straight by the store's entrance. The crowd was thoroughly relished. Tonight's grilled fish made them eat their fill, and their faces were blushing from the rich amount of spirit energy within dish. The tender and juicy fish meat, the permeating fragrance, and the bubbling soup all rendered them uncontrollably insatiable.

One by one, the pleased crowd waved their goodbyes to Fu Bang, walked out of the alleyway, and left for home with a satisfied rub on their bellies.

Ouyang Xiaoyi was no longer cross. She beckoned to Bu Fang and then left the store with Xiao Yanyu. Two shadows, one graceful and one perky, slowly disappeared into the dark night.

"Hun? Are the egg tarts you've prepared for me to taste in this food container? Remember... You only have two chances." Bu Fang glimpsed at the last two figures. One was the burping, red-faced Luo Sanniang, the other a blushing darling, Juan'Er.

Without a doubt, Bu Fang was asking Juan'Er.

Juan'Er heard Bu Fang's words, but shook her head resolutely, and said: "Not today, I'll make a new patch of egg tarts tomorrow for Owner Bu to taste. Today's... has gone cold, and thus it'll affect the taste."

Bu Fang was slightly taken back, but didn't say anything and merely nodded his head.

"Owner Bu, your grilled fish tastes truly amazing! Even though you've got flaws up and down, your cooking is sincerely good! I, Luo Sanniang, am utterly won over by your cooking." Luo Sanniang ogled at Bu Fang with a flushed face, and then chuckled.

Bu Fang remained calm, as he was well aware of this lady's unruly and crazy ways, and had already learned how to get a grip of himself.

The two also quickly bid farewell to Bu Fang and left the alley.

The alleyway, which had just been bustling with noise, suddenly regained its serenity. Bu Fang let out a long breath, glanced at Blacky who was sleeping by the door, curled his lips, turned back toward the store, and shut the door on his way in.

Exhausting... right now, he just wanted to hit the hay.

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"Blacky, time to eat."

It was morning, Bu Fang finished up his daily practice of knife and carving training, and painstakingly cooked a serving of Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs. He carried the ribs outside of the store as he softly called out.

Blacky's nose twitched and its eyes twinkled as it gawked at the Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs in Bu Fang's hands. "This Lord Dog has ribs to feast on again!"

Bu Fang placed the ribs in front of the big black dog, rubbed Blacky's silky, smooth, immaculate fur, then stood up and headed back into the store.

Bu Fang's steps came to a halt and his pupils slightly constricted as he glanced at the earthy-yellow flower pot in the corner.

"Hmm? This... this has already grown into a sapling?" Bu Fang muttered, dumbfounded. The seed hadn't been planted within the flower pot for too long, yet a bark had already sprung up. From the bark, new green leaves sprouted, and the plant was on its way to becoming a sapling.

Bu Fang became rather intrigued. He squatted down before the flower pot, and squinted at the budding leaves. On every single piece of leaf there were intricate patterns. These lines of patterns twisted and turned, dazzling its beholder.

"Four strips? No... five strips of pattern!" Bu Fang carefully counted the number of patterned lines on the leave, finally tallying up the right number.

He stood up. Even though he didn't know what kind of fruits this seed would bear, the faint spirit energy emitting from the leaves proved this seed was extraordinary.

Although it didn't have much spirit energy, it circulated inside the store, and formed a unique ambience within.

It was a deeply mystifying atmosphere.

Apparently sensing the extraordinariness of the sapling, Bu Fang merrily darted to the kitchen, scooped up a bowl of system-provided clear spring water that was bursting with spirit energy, and poured half a bowl into the flower pot. After a moment of hesitation, he poured the rest as well.

"Drink up, the store's afforestation will be on you in the future," Bu Fang said solemnly to the sapling.

Bu Fang returned to the kitchen, approached the cabinet, and took out from the System's dimensional storage the ice-blue lotus. Within the seedpod there were drops of emerald-like lotus seeds, and wreaths of rich spirit energy lingered around it.

This Monarch Lotus was considered a seventh grade spirit herb. The serpent-men tribe's head elder wasted three seeds, leaving five unused. However, this was plenty enough for Bu Fang.

The cabinet was opened, releasing a huge gush of hot energy. One half of Phoenix Blood Herb stood within, and so did the beaming Three Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit.

In addition to the seventh grade Ice Soul Monarch Lotus in Bu Fang's hands, he had gathered three types of seventh grade spirit herbs... It was rather inconceivable.

It was already incredible for anyone to possess even one type of seventh grade spirit herb, yet here was Bu Fang, just a chef of a tiny restaurant in the Imperial City, who had three types. It was simply unimaginable.

"There are enough spirit herbs for now. I can probably start brewing the wine... but there's no hurry. There needs to be an elaborate plan on the brewing procedure as well as how to start.

Bu Fang placed the lotus within the cabinet, which was extremely useful due to its spirit energy preservation properties.

Outside of the shop, Fatty Jin brought his heavysset troops. Fatty Jin, carrying an uncommon pair of sunken eyes, was brimming with enthusiasm. The kind of spiritedness... that wouldn't rest.

Bu Fang walked out of the kitchen to take a look and was immediately startled, "Oh jeez, you Fatty...what's wrong?"

Fatty Jin casted a distressing glance at Bu Fang and responded, "Owner Bu, after eating your grilled fish last night... I lay in bed, tossed and turned, with my heart afire, and could not sleep at all. I was up all night, you see?"

Fu Bang pursed his lips and lightly hummed, not that surprised at all. The grilled fish from last night contained a third of a Black Swamp Boa's Blood Crown. That ingredient overflowed with spirit energy, so it was no wonder it disrupted one's sleep quality.

Bu Fang could imagine that once Ouyang Xiaoyi and everyone else arrived, they would also have dark rings under their eyes.

"Owner Bu, one order of Golden Shumai. I'll switch things up a bit today and eat something mild." Fatty Jin sat down on a chair as he said to Bu Fang.

"Golden Shumai, mild? Don't lie to me about my own dish..." Bu Fang glimpsed at Fatty Jin but was too lazy to retort, then took down the other fatties' orders, and retreated into the kitchen.

Within the alleyway, a frail shadow drew nearer. This was an elder dressed in a gray gown, wrinkled creases clouded the skin on his face, much like the crumbling bark of an old tree.

The elder sauntered forth, one hand across his back, another griping and gently waving a fan made of some unknown spirit beast's feathers.

The waving fan seemed odd for such a cold day... but maybe that was this elder's unique predilection.

"Is this the Fang Fang's Little Store from an alleyway in the Light Wind Imperial City? Dishes that can crush Ah Wei's gourmet cooking... This old fellow must expand his horizons." The elder smiled lightly and waved his feather fan once more, and his visage betrayed an air of enigma.

"Grandpapa, aren't you cold..." Ouyang Xiaoyi stood behind the elder, ogled her big lovely eyes bemusedly at the old man waving a fan in the alleyway, and asked in a perking tone.

The elder's body froze momentarily and the air of enigma vanished from his face as he replied, "Of course... not, little lassie. Don't you think waving a fan during winter, is rather exquisite?"

Ouyang Xiaoyi could not help but roll her eyes. Was this elder there to pull her leg? It's winter, and people couldn't wait to add more layers of clothing, so who cared about exquisiteness?

"Is grandpapa going to eat in the store? Come with me," Ouyang Xiaoyi said as she led the way to Fang Fang's Little Store.

The gray-robed elder waved his fan, nodded, and trailed behind Ouyang Xiaoyi.

The elder arrived at the entrance of the store, his gaze immediately landing on the big black dog gobbling down food from a porcelain bowl. This big black dog tilted his butt with his tail incessantly wagging, reveling in his feast.

"This is Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs... a crystal tangerine tone, suffusing a delicate fragrance. It's perfect!" The elder's pupils shrank and he exclaimed with admiration.

The elder didn't bother waving his fan and immediately strode toward Blacky. He gazed at the intensely aromatic, steaming Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs within Blacky's bowl, and gulped down his saliva.

"This chef-d'œuvre of a Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs, one that this old fellow has yet to come across in his lifetime... But what a pity, why is a dog eating it? It's like throwing God's gifts to the winds! What a reckless waste!"

Blacky's ferocious assault on the Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs came to an abrupt stop, gradually lifting his doggy eyes to inspect the old man before him.

Chapter 184: This dog... Is No Ordinary Dog!

The old man stretched out his neck to stare at Blacky, and Blacky scowled back with his doggy eyes.

"What did this old man just say? That because this Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs was eaten by a dog, it's throwing God's gifts to the winds? A reckless waste?"

Blacky was instantly infuriated. "Why can't a dog eat Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs? What did this dog ever do to you, old man?"

Blacky snarled viciously at the old man, showing his teeth. Shreds of Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs still stuck to the crevices between his teeth...

"Hey ho, this dog is a hoot, what are you growling for? Surely you don't want to bite this old fellow?" The elder waved the fan made of an unknown spirit beast's feathers as he guffawed.

"Ah, but what a pity for the Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs." The elder peered down at the gobbled up Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs in Blacky' bowl, sighed lightly, and turned around to leave.

But in the split second that he turned around, a titanic force of pressure suddenly dropped on the elder's body. The elder, with one foot lifted in the air, instantaneously felt drained, and almost fell to his knees.

The elder's pupils shrank and looked around in disbelief. This daunting force of pressure... simply made his soul tremble. Here he was, a reputable seventh level Battle-Saint, who almost knelt in front of this store.

If his knees really did hit that floor, it would have been utterly mortifying.

Blacky stuck out his tongue to lick his dainty little doggy paws, grumbled, and lifted up his doggy paws, lightly flicking it toward the elder.

The elder was absolutely unaware of what went down. He had his back facing Blacky, and had no idea where this force of pressure, as if charging from all directions, came from.

Bam!!

The wrinkled skin on the elder quavered, and he felt like his entire body was crushed by a huge mountain. With a thunderous boom, he was sent sprawling on the floor, as if he had sunk deeply within the ground.

"What the heck? What's going on! Why is this happening?"

The elder lifted up his dust-covered head, with a face full of bewilderment, but he still had no idea what happened. Somehow, out of nowhere, came an unseeable force of pressure that flattened him

to the ground. Was he really this jinxed? Did he offend anyone? " If you have the guts... then come fight this out one on one!"

The elder wanted to cry but simply couldn't, and the sage-like gracefulness that he painstakingly built had just crumbled into pieces.

Blacky's doggy eyes sparkled a hint of naughty delight as he licked his doggy paws once more. "How dare you badmouth your Lord Dog right in front of him? If I don't discipline you, I'm afraid you won't even learn this Lord Dog's name."

Afterwards, Blacky reverted to shoveling his teeth into the porcelain bowl before him, it didn't take long for all of the Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs within the porcelain bowl to be completely devoured.

The elder desolately picked himself up from the floor, his expression as rotten as if he was constipating. Was this little store deadly or what... Could it be there was a supreme being attending it? But he didn't say anything disrespectful earlier, did he? He only said it was a waste that the Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs were eaten by a dog...

Dog... hmm? Dog?

The elder suddenly remembered something and suspiciously twisted his head to gaze at the tail-wagging, Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs feasting black dog...

The more the elder looked, the more his pupils shrank. He failed to closely examine this dog at first. Now, with careful scrutiny, he sensed a terrifying energy circulating within the big black dog's body.

"This dog... is no ordinary dog!"

With a dreadful glance at the big black dog, the elder turned around to step into the store.

Upon entering the store, the rich fragrance of food drifted in the air and instantaneously bombarded the elder's nose and mouth. It sent shocking shivers down the elder's body.

"It smells so good! This kind of aroma... Its been years since I've smelled this!" The elder held up his dust-covered head and exclaimed in bemusement.

Ouyang Xiaoyi perkily walked up to the elder, and asked: "Grandpapa, choose what you want to eat, Fang Fang's Little Store has always uphold business integrity, fair pricing, and absolute honesty. You can take a look at the menu behind you and tell me what you want."

The elder was taken back for a moment, but still twisted his head to check out the menu. If the price didn't matter before he took a look, now, after a quick inspection, the elder's face regained a look of ridicule.

"As the Ghost Chef, not even this old man charges this much for his dishes. This store... dares to demand such exorbitant prices?! And you call this fair pricing, absolute honesty?" The elder was dumbstruck and could not believe his eyes. In fact, anyone seeing the menu for the first time would be blown away by its intimidating prices.

"You little lassie are disingenuous, you call this fair pricing, absolute honesty?" The elder questioned in dissatisfaction.

"The price is very fair. See how, even though its costly, everyone here is happily enjoying their meals?" Ouyang Xiaoyi responded.

The elder was lost for words, he glanced at Fatty Jin and others stuffing their faces with food, and his countenance suddenly turned peculiar. He had just checked out the price of the Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs, one plate of ribs, fifty crystals...

A dog just ate a dish worth fifty crystals...

The elder felt a serious case of "a man's life is worse than that of a dog's" after stepping into the store.

"Please give this old fellow an order of the Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs." The elder pondered for a while, but still ordered the Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs at the end. He saw that Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs was the first dish on the menu, was already completely subdued by its fragrance, and thus decided to give the Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs a good try. So what if it was fifty crystals?

As the Ghost Chef, the elder was not short of money.

"Take a seat first," Ouyang Xiaoyi said, then turned around, headed to the window of the kitchen, and shouted at Bu Fang an order of Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs.

Bu Fang nodded his head and continued to cook the dish he was working on.

The elder sized up the environment within the store. The atmosphere here was completely different from that of the restaurant he built in Qingyang Town. The former was mystifyingly secluded, generating an magnificently enchanting ambience. Yet the latter, because of its fervent and adventurous customers, could not compare in terms of its atmosphere.

"This is?!" The elder's gaze froze, as if he saw something exceptional.

With a few quick and hurried strides, the elder reached the place where the earthen-yellow flower pot stood, and squatted down before the pot, with his face filled with solemnity and gravity.

He closed his eyes and took in a deep breath. The new leaves on the branches emitted a light wisp of spirit energy. This spirit energy, albeit not rich, unconsciously kept the elder enraptured.

"This... this couldn't be the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree? But... didn't Ah Wei say, this store owner had just received this prize? What's the deal with this small, burgeoning branch of the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree?" The elder was flabbergasted. He suddenly felt like he could no longer understand this world.

Owner Bu should have only received a seed of the Path-Understanding Fruit Tree a few days ago. But having been plotted in this grotesque flower pot for a few days, the seed had germinated and sprouted out a branch, on which there were leaves imprinted with the Five Stripes Spirit Nets.

"He... he actually found a way to grow the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree? This Owner Bu... what kind of immortal being is he!"

The elder had exhausted the level of bewilderment he could reach, suddenly feeling urgent to meet Bu Fang.

"The successful growing of the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree is not a small feat. Emperor Changfeng had obtained the seed of this spirit tree for multiple years, tried to nurture it for so many years, yet never witnessed it germinating. Bu Fang had only planted it in this store for a

span of couple days, but burgeoning Five Stripes Path Understanding leaves have already sprung out of the soil."

The elder took a deep breath to calm himself down. Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree, if this name promulgated, it would once again push this store to the cusp of public opinion.

And much more perilous this time around.

The Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree would bear fruit, and the ordinary Three Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit simply could not compare with the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit. Eating this Three Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit could bestow upon one the likely chance of achieving Path-Understanding epiphany.

What was unique was that as the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree grew, it would disseminate a mystifying energy, and those enveloped by this mystifying energy were more likely to achieve breakthroughs.

That was why nearly all cultivators understood clearly the preciousness of the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit.

Here's an easy example. The Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit is the sensational spirit herb that can help a seventh grade Battle-Saint arrive at the barrier to eighth grade War-God. All others aside, its capability of bringing a seventh grade Battle-Saint close to the barrier to eighth grade Battle-God alone is enough to drive plenty of people crazy.

As the elder fixated on this Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree, a tickling sense of avarice even shot through his heart.

He was also a seventh grade Battle-Saint. How badly he yearned to touch the barrier to eighth grade...

There were countless seventh grade Battle-Saints in this realm, stuck at the transition between seventh to eighth grade. At this moment in time, a Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit could practically shine light on their desperate grasp for hope, and would naturally attract numerous pairs of greedy eyes.

"Within the Imperial City, a small store actually plants a growing Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree... as the saying goes, the precious stone may land its possessor in jail... this little store, probably won't be here much longer," The elder muttered.

Bu Fang had finished cooking the Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs, wiped off the drops of water from his hands, and sauntered out of the kitchen only to see a gray-robed elder squatting before the earthen-yellow flower and gawking at the burgeoning bud.

This scene caught him by surprise.

This old man... what was he doing gaping at the store's plant? Could it be that the elder was familiar with the breed of this burgeoning bud?

Bu Fang was always curious about the breed of this sapling, and if the elder had answers, then Bu Fang had some questions to ask.

Chapter 185: You Lad, Will Regret Your Decision

"Your Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs are ready, please enjoy your meal."

Bu Fang's soft voice rang out, pulling the elder out from his train of thought over the burgeoning bud. The elder gave Bu Fang a look, and his expression was heavy with ponderation.

The elder stood up and squinted at the burgeoning bud with reluctant eyes, as his gaze gave the impression of being in the middle of a struggle.

The Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree was too big of an enticement for a seventh grade Battle-Saint. No Battle-Saints could overcome the temptation of this spirit tree. After all, once the spirit tree bears fruit, it would blossom into the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit, a Path-Understanding Fruit that may help a seventh grade Battle-Saint ascend to the eight grade echelon.

Even a handful of eighth grade War-Gods would find it hard to resist the allurements of this Path-Understanding Fruit Tree.

"Are you the owner of this store?" The elder peered at Bu Fang and inquired.

Bu Fang looked back nonchalantly, nodding his head.

"Do you know what kind of tree you are planting here?" The elder pointed at the burgeoning bud within the earthen-yellow flower pot, and his countenance exhibited a stern solemnness.

Given the counterpart's grave expression, Bu Fang couldn't help but feel startled inside.

"No idea." Bu Fang shook his head. He truly did not know what this seed would germinate into. Since this elder seemed to know, then he should give it a try and ask.

"You actually don't know? Then why would you attend the Hundred Family Banquet and win this seed?" The corners of the elder's mouth twitched violently and he asked with a rather seething tone. If it weren't for Bu Fang sticking his oar into the matter, his two disciples would have already brought the seed back.

"Could it be this seed would grow into something incredible?" Bu Fang probed tentatively. By the looks of this elder, he was bound to know about this seed.

The elder heaved a sigh and gazed at Bu Fang with pity, "You actually think this seed is something good? Yes, for some its considered a treasure, as for others... this seed is a terrifying impending death rune.

A death impending rune?! This terrorizing?! Bu Fang's heart jolted.

Surely this seed wouldn't blossom into a toxic substance? No way, the patterned lines emitted a righteous, healthy energy.

"Do you know the saying that the precious stone may land its possessor in jail? Holding on to something one has no ability to protect, no matter how precious the object is, would only be equivalent to a death impending rune.

Bu Fang blinked his eyes and his face suddenly became expressionless.

After all the fuss, it turned out that the elder was implying that this seed would blossom into something extremely valuable, but because Bu Fang's capability could not sufficiently safeguard it, it would result in an ensuing tragedy for Bu Fang.

But this news nonetheless prompted Bu Fang to sigh in relief.

If the seed would sprout into a toxic substance, then Bu Fang really couldn't do anything but discard it, but... if it was about Bu Fang being unable to guard it, then he could only give a snort of contempt.

"The security capability of this store was universally recognized. If this store couldn't protect it, then a mere seventh level Battle-God like you, old man, would have an even slimmer chance of safeguarding it."

The elder didn't say anything else, but sat down before the table and turned his attention to the gourmet cuisine. Seeing the Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs within the plate instantly stimulated his appetite.

Bu Fang's Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs, crystal-tangerine-toned, suffused with a delicate fragrance, emanated a rich meaty aroma. It made one's mouth water and in a hurry to dig in.

A bamboo chopstick picked up a piece of Sweet 'n' Sour Rib. With a gentle bite, the tangerine toned Sweet 'n' Sour juice instantaneously spread within one's mouth. The plump flesh and meaty aroma burst forth in a flash, utterly intoxicating the elder.

"Gourmet delicacy... a gourmet delicacy that is hard to come across!"

The Ghost Chef was thoroughly stunned. Not even someone like him saw that coming. The youngster before his eyes had achieved such a high standard in his cooking abilities.

However, this wasn't what shocked him the most. One piece of rib down his throat, and his eyes bulged to a new level of roundedness... because this Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs was bursting with a staggering surge of spirit energy.

"Why can a dish contain such a rich level of spirit energy? Could it be that Owner Bu has a unique method of retaining the spirit energy of ingredients? "

Pieces of Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs were eaten in a row. The delicious taste was a no-brainer, but in every piece of rib an incredible amount of energy was hidden. The energy combined was stronger than that of the elixirs he consumed.

A bowl of Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs for fifty crystals, the elder suddenly felt like it was worth it.

Bu Fang pocketed the fifty crystals that the elder handed over. His gaze fell onto the elder. He liked customers as such, who didn't drag their feet when it was time to pay.

"Owner Bu, let's negotiate about something, how about giving this burgeoning bud to me? You should know, with your cultivation level you definitely won't be able to safeguard it," the elder remarked.

Bu Fang was immediately speechless. How wouldn't it be safe in his territory... this old man was so damn ridiculous.

"No." Bu Fang rejected coldly.

The elder was instantly enraged. This fellow was merely a fifth grade Battle-King. Where did he get the guts to decline his offer?

"This old fellow isn't lying to you. Once your seed matures, it will undoubtedly attract many seventh grade Battle-Saints!" The elder earnestly explained to Bu Fang.

"Are seventh grade Battle-Saints such hotshots? If they dare to cause a disturbance here, then don't blame me for throwing them out one by one," Bu Fang said, unflustered.

...

Juan'Er wore a lilac floral dress today, thoroughly showing off her slim figure. In her arms was a food container, and in it was the egg tart on which Juan'er wanted to consult Bu Fang.

"Egg tart?" The Ghost Chef, though still preoccupied with Bu Fang, suddenly found his eyes lighting up. He inquisitively looked at the food container in Juan'Er's hands, feeling anxious.

Juan'Er's arrival broke off the back and forth between him and Bu Fang, successfully diverting both of their attentions.

There weren't that many customers in the store today, so after Fatty Jin's group finished their meals and left, there were plenty of empty spots.

Juan'Er meticulously took the egg tart out of the food container. Once the lid was lifted, a rich creamy scent spread, with a strong, swelling aroma. Thought it couldn't compare to Bu Fang's Egg Tart, just judging by the fragrance, it still seemed pretty decent.

"Bu... Owner Bu, this is the egg tart I made from scratch, please give it a taste." Juan'Er placed down the egg tart, took a step back, and glanced at Bu Fang in considerable deference.

Bu Fang nodded his head, and his gaze fell upon the egg tart. The tint of the egg tart looked fine, much better than that of the first egg tart he taste tested.

Picking up the egg tart, Bu Fang took a gentle bite, and the creamy aroma instantly burst forth, transporting him to a place of boundless sky and vast plains, with herds of cows and sheep roaming through the grass.

Juan'Er batted her eyes, solemnly fixated on Bu Fang. She wanted to hear Bu Fang offer some words of commendation, that way Owner Bu would finally teach her how to make egg tarts his way.

Bu Fang chewed, nodding his head as he munched away, and finally lifted his eyes to give Juan'Er a glance.

"How's the taste?" Juan'Er asked excitedly.

Bu Fang did not respond right away. He looked at Juan'Er, whose composure was stirring in agitation, and replied placidly, "It hasn't reached my anticipated expectations yet. Go back and practice some more, then let me try it next again next time."

From an utmost high to an absolute low, the crash can be achieved in a flash.

Having been rejected by Bu Fang mercilessly, Juan'Er's joyful complexion froze, and instantly shifted to dispiritedness.

"S...Sorry, I'll definitely try harder. I'll go back and mull over this again, next time I'll absolutely make an egg tart that will satisfy Owner Bu."

Bu Fang admired Juan'Er's temperament, because this lady had a true commitment to gourmet cuisine. Even though her egg tart had yet to reach Bu Fang's standard, she still unwaveringly persisted to continue studying its cooking method.

Juan'Er left as quickly as she arrived. Stubbornly hugging her food container as she left the store, she headed back to continue studying the egg tart.

Other customers of the store also departed in a scattered manner, and only the odd old man was left now.

"Egg tart? The ones made by that lassie should be pretty good, why didn't it pass the test?" The Ghost Chef asked out of curiosity.

Bu Fang frowned, flickered a glance at the old man, and coolly replied, "There doesn't need to be a reason. If I think it hasn't reached my expectation, then it's not there yet."

The elder blanched, suddenly at a loss for words.

Bu Fang looked at the dumbfounded elder, then turned around to head back to the kitchen.

"You truly don't intend to give me the spirit tree's burgeoning bud?" The elder gazed at Bu Fang's back and asked.

Bu Fang ignored him and scurried straight back to the kitchen to practice cooking. He could no longer be bothered to retort this old man's words.

The elder emitted a long sigh. He felt regretful as he gazed at the burgeoning branches, and announced, "You lad, will regret your decision... Just wait till you are encircled by a group of ferocious Battle-Saints. Let's see how you'll fare then!"

The elder held his hands behind his back, shaking his head as he left the store, and his shadow gradually disappeared into the alleyway.

Chapter 186: It Was Time to Start Brewing The Wine

Snowflakes fluttered in the air, as if feathers dancing. They twirled with a whistle of the wind, then softly descended, landing amidst the boisterous Imperial City.

The Gate of Heavenly Mystery, having undergone a regime-changing battle in the Light Wind Empire, transformed from an inconspicuous square to one worthy of attention, heavily guarded with an abundance of troops.

This Gate of Heavenly Mystery used to be a major route to enter the main halls of the palace. However, after the big battle, Ji Chengxue had ordered an alteration to this principal path. In the future, all those entering the halls mustn't pass through the Gate of Heavenly Mystery, and should enter instead from the westward of the Gate of Heavenly Mystery, the Gate of Peaceful Tranquility.

It weren't for any reasons other than the presence of a Double Calamity Dragon Head Array hidden in the Gate of Heavenly Mystery Square. After all, it was this array that had successfully suppressed all the sect warriors.

With such a powerful array resting on the Gate of Heavenly Mystery Square, Ji Chengxue, as an emperor, naturally had to protect it. But then again, the Gate of Heavenly Mystery had special significance for the palace, and Ji Chengxue could not completely seal it off. Activities in large scale still had to take place at the Gate of Heavenly Mystery.

In the stretched streets of the Imperial city, an elder who held his body erect sauntered about with his hands behind his back.

Snowflakes drifted like goose feathers, fluttering up and down, falling onto his body, but were eventually blocked off by an invisible force of energy.

"How many years have passed since I last visited the Light Wind Imperial City. Even Emperor Changfeng has already passed away, 'tis an unpredictable world, and time brings about inconceivable changes." The Ghost Chef's wrinkled visage was filled with nostalgia as he peered at his surroundings and exhaled a long breath.

Emperor Changfeng was a brilliant ruler. The Light Wind Empire developed at the speed of lightening under his reign, forcing countless sect warriors to acquiesce to the formidable empire.

"It's a pity, the peace and tranquility of this empire will come to an end. Once the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree blossoms, it will attract warriors infinitely stronger than those of the sects. By then, this Imperial City... will collapse into mayhem." The Ghost Chef sighed once more.

He had just stepped out of Bu Fang's store. He couldn't help but admit that Bu Fang's store was peculiar, the flavors of the dishes deserved praise even from him, and that Bu Fang could enable the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree to germinate was incredible.

The Ghost Chef recalled the mysterious force of pressure that knocked him to the ground by the entrance of the store. Even though he was caught by surprise when the force of pressure hit him, he still knew deep down that Fang Fang's Little Store, having survived the muddy waters of this Imperial City and persisted in demanding such exorbitant prices for its dishes, naturally had its foundational backbone.

With Bu Fang's cultivation level as a Battle-King alone, it was undoubtedly insufficient. From the Ghost Chef's perspective, the trump card of Fang Fang's Little Store was probably a seventh level Battle-Saint? Or maybe even a being of a higher level?

Being able to suddenly knock him down, Bu Fang's trump card was probably an upper tier seventh level Battle-Saint, but so what? Once the news of the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree leaked, the swarm of intruders wouldn't just be one or two seventh level Battle-Saints.

The Gate of Heavenly Mystery was right before his eyes, and the Ghost Chef continued his course, hands behind his back.

"Who is it!"

Guards patrolling the Gate of Heavenly Mystery had increased by manifold. Having noticed the Ghost Chef's figure, they brawled out.

The wrinkles on the Ghost Chef's face quivered, yet a smile followed. He took a step forward, and suddenly flashed past like a phantom, disappearing before the guards' eyes.

His foot landed on the snow-covered grounds of the Gate of Heavenly Mystery Square, making creaking noises. The Ghost Chef scanned the distant horizon and inhaled a deep breath.

"Double Calamity Dragon Head Array... is it right here?" The Ghost Chef peered at the stone pillars on the square, while his gaze was focused.

All of a sudden, a piercing blare blasted behind him, and a burley, robust figure manifested.

Xiao Meng gently landed on the the Gate of Heavenly Mystery Square, studied the elder standing erect, and brought his hands into a salute, "Senior, long time no see."

The Ghost Chef turned his head, his gaze falling onto Xiao Meng, and grinned. "The little brat from the old days has already reached the echelon of a seventh grade Battle-Saint by now. Your innate talents are indeed outstanding.

"I wholeheartedly thank the senior's compliment. His majesty requests the pleasure of seeing you, please proceed into the palace to meet him." Xiao Meng faced the Ghost Chef, still in deference.

"That works, this old fellow wanted to see how this new Emperor who had succeeded Changfeng is faring." The Ghost Chef lightly replied.

...

Wildlands, the center region.

A leisurely growl of a spirit beast rumbled. Almost all of the other spirit beasts of the Wildlands froze and extended their heads; they seemed to hear this spirit beast's snarl.

Boom Boom Bang!

The stubby bushes were suddenly crushed by a large figure, completely trampled into pieces. The floor shook and the surface of puddles of water vibrated.

Bang Bang! The silhouette of a mammoth-sized spirit beast appeared. It was a male lion with fiery red fur and two sharp buckteeth lashing out ferociously, resembling two razor-edged longswords.

This was a seventh level spirit beast, Fire Lion, an extremely savage spirit beast, one with formidable combat abilities.

On the back of this Fire Lion, actually sat a figure. His stature was proudly erect, with a chiseled, elegant face, covered with a scarlet long robe, and a dot of vermillion between the brows.

This was a charming, yet wild-natured man. He gently patted the Fire Lion's head, smiling lightly. "Finally a chance to walk out of the Wildlands, Lil' Fire, are you happy?"

Roar! The Fire Lion raised his head and howled, seemingly responding this man.

"Haha, take it easy, I brought along both Lil' Water and Lil' Thunder. Later on, you could all come out and get a breath of fresh air. But now we need to hurry along, our goal is... Light Wind Empire!" the man in a red robe gently stroked the Fire Lion's fur as he said.

The seventh level Fire Lion was naturally quick-witted, and as such it twisted his head, and bolted away. The man in a red robe emitted a lighthearted laughter.

Not long after the man disappeared, three similar teams of men and women riding on spirit beasts appeared. Beyond doubt, every one of them emitted a terrifyingly powerful air of energy.

"Temple Master Shao is way too fast..." commented a woman dressed in red, smiling bitterly as she stared at the long gone silhouette.

"The trademark of Temple Master Shao's Fire Lion is speed. It's normal that we cannot catch up. But no need to worry, with Temple Master Shao's cultivation level and the Fire Lion's presence, there is slim chance of danger," another man dressed in red replied.

"Us Fierce Gods of the Three Temples, all sent delegates to the Light Wind Empire. What exactly happened? Why such a large scale mobilization?"

"Allegedly the High Priest had predicted that good fortunes have befallen on the Light Wind Empire, and then ordered the Third Temple's Temple Master Shao to head down in search of it. I was also pretty puzzled. What kind of fortunes could appear in a petty Light Wind Empire, and especially within the Imperial City, that would prompt the High Priest to send all three Temple Masters?

...

"Master, are we going to find Owner Bu immediately?" Tang Yin hugged his sword. He rode a unicorn, peered at the majestic Light Wind Imperial Palace, and twisted his head to ask Ni Yan, who stood next to him, clothed in a loose robe.

Ni Yan held a gigantic spirit fruit in her hands, squirting juice everywhere as she bit into it. Her beautiful face, coupled with a bulging cheek, made an amusing image.

She mumbled some words, pointed directly at the Imperial City, and slapped the horse's buttocks, taking the lead as she charged toward the Imperial City.

Tang Yin watched his foodie of a master helplessly, and urged his unicorn to follow suit.

This was their second time visiting the Imperial City. Tang Yin did not know the reason behind this trip, but Ni Yan claimed there were good fortunes, and so he tagged along.

But coming to the Imperial City had its pros, as he could taste Owner Bu's cuisine again.

...

Having sent off the last customer, Ouyang Xiaoyi stretched out her tired body. She bid farewell to Bu Fang, and left for the Ouyang Quarters.

Bu Fang gazed at the goose feather-like snowflakes twirling in the air, took a gentle breath, and shut the doors.

Having closed the store, Bu Fang entered the kitchen. He opened the cabinet and rubbed his chin. Glancing at the three types of seventh level spirit herbs emitting spirit energy within the cabinet, he meditated in silence.

It was time to start brewing a wine that would surpass Dragon's Breath.

Chapter 187: The Danger of Owner Bu

On a dark night, the snow lingered, and two crescent moons rested partly hidden between the clouds.

Light Wind Empire Imperial City, the Palace.

The inside of the main halls of the palace were brightly lit. The sound of dance and music echoed ceaselessly and the aroma of fine wine and gourmet delicacies pervaded the air of the palace. At the center, female dancers twirled their waists, trying hard to show off their beauty.

Court musicians, sitting in a corner, heartily performed pleasant melodies. The female dancers twirled and fluttered gracefully in accordance with the music. It was dazzlingly beautiful, making it difficult to swerve one's gaze elsewhere.

In the upper tiers of the main halls, Ji Chengxue sat upon the throne dressed in fine, luxurious garments. On the two sides sat important ministers of the royal court, many of which were new faces. They were obviously promoted by Ji Chengxue after the grand cleansing took place.

The big name households of the empire were also seated. Were it the members of the Xiao family, the Ouyang family, or the Yang family, they all sat within the main halls toasting each other, emitting waves of laughter.

The Ghost Chef sat close to Ji Chengxue. The wrinkles on his face stirred, revealing his contentment within.

"Master Wang, this sovereign has heard the former emperor's praise of the master back when he was still active and well. He said the master is a legend of the empire, having travelled across the

continent for decades, and has witnessed countless wondrous spectacles as well as people and phenomenon. Allegedly, it was because the master desired to cultivate his cooking skills. It really demands this sovereign's admiration."

Ji Chengxue filled a white jade cup with Bejewelled Nectar Wine as he verbally esteemed the Ghost Chef Wang Ding. Just as his voice faded, he drained the wine within the cup with one gulp.

Wang Ding also lifted the jade cup, expressed his appreciation towards Ji Chengxue, and gulped down the wine. He smacked his lips and acclaimed that it was good wine.

"Your Majesty, you mistakenly flatter me. This old fellow is nothing more than someone who wandered about the continent, certainly unworthy of the weight of your Majesty's commendation." Wang Ding smiled softly.

Ji Chengxue sincerely revered the elder before him. Of course, a large part came from his cooking skills and other capabilities. But the story that Ghost Chef Wang Ding had journeyed across the continent was indeed truthful.

"Master Wang is being modest. The Hidden Dragon Continent is vast and without boundaries. This sovereign is aware that the Light Wind Empire is nothing more than a pellet-sized dot within the continent. My heart yearns for the vast universe out there, and thus this deference to the master comes from the bottom of the heart.

"If Master Wang can afford his time, how about introducing this sovereign to some of the places within the Hidden Dragon Continent, for the sake of satisfying this sovereign's curiosity." Ji Chengxue faced the Ghost Chef Wang Ding, rising the glass again as he spoke.

The Ghost Chef did not turn down the request. He was actually born in the Light Wind Empire, and as the Empire prospered, his fame as the Ghost Chef also spread. The numerous years afterwards he spent roaming through the continent, and it was only a couple of years ago that he settled in seclusion outside of the Wildlands, in Qingyang Town, and opened a small restaurant.

The crowd within the main halls suddenly turned to gaze at the Ghost Chef, while their ears perked up. One often felt an inexplicable yearning for the unknown, and even those as noble and privileged as the imperial aristocrats could not escape this. Even someone as almighty as Xiao Meng held his breath in curiosity.

"This old fellow had travelled across the continent for decades. It's a shame to admit that I have yet to cover the entire continent. The continent is boundless, and this old fellow believes he could never reach the ends even if he devoted an entire lifetime. But this old fellow did not end up empty-handed.

"Your Majesty should be aware of the Wildlands. It is vast in territory, filled with countless savage beasts, and is practically known as a forbidden zone to humans. But in the continent, there are many regions as such." The Ghost Chef Wang Ding took a sip of the Bejewelled Nectar Wine, emitted a long breath, and said slowly.

"Up north there is a field of vast, boundless swamp known as the Illusory Spirit Swamp. Its level of menace is not even a degree lower than that of the Wildlands. The spirit swamp is broad, but the species of spirit beasts are rich and the amount of spirit herbs innumerable. Even seventh grade spirit herbs exist there. This old fellow trekked across the Illusory Spirit Swamp for many years and has witnessed plenty of peculiar species, for example, the serpent-men tribes, the scorpion-men tribes, and more."

The crowd within the main halls gasped, taking in a chilled breath, serpent-men tribes... that sounded pretty incredible.

"There is a big city in the spirit swamp, built by the serpent-men tribes, that is towering and majestic. There are many warriors among the serpent-men tribe, much more than the Light Wind Empire can conceive. Within the Illusory Spirit Swamp, the serpent-men aren't the strongest. Instead, there is another villa erected among the clouds, called the White Cloud Villa. This old fellow has only heard of this villa's name but has yet to witness it with his own eyes."

Ji Chengxue's eyes sparkled, a gush of heated blood surged up his heart as he took in a chilled breath. White Cloud Villa, serpent-men city... The continent was immense, and it truly contained an infinite variety of fantastic phenomena.

"In the east, there is a plain of continuous large mountains, referred to as the Hundred Thousand Mountains, where there is an endless sweep of mountainous ranges and peaks. That was the most frightening zone for this old fellow, who spent a decade there but could not reach the ends of the ridges... The forces of power within the mountain ranges are complex, there are spirit beasts, humans, and unknown species. They all compete for the resources within the mountains for self development.

"In the south, there is a boundless ocean. It stretches beyond one's visual horizons, but nobody could tell where it ended..."

The Ghost Chef Wang Ding shared a great deal, or maybe it has been too long since he last told his tales. That night, he unleashed his words, describing with meticulous details his adventures. For the crowd within the main halls, this was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

It turned out that the continent... was really that limitless and beyond belief.

"Master Wang really is a saint. All these places you've mentioned are unimaginable for us here. The northern Illusory Spirit Swamp, the eastern Hundred Thousand Mountains, the Southern boundless ocean... Hmm, the mere sound of it floods this sovereign's heart with emotions." Ji Chengxue raised the wine glass once again, and toasted the Ghost Chef Wang Ding.

Wang Ding also raised his wine glass and drained it.

Suddenly, a waft of aroma drifted by, and a number of graceful court maids carrying porcelain plates strolled in. Rich fragrance emanated from the porcelain plates.

Ji Chengxue noticed this and suddenly burst into laughter, "Haha, finally here, Master Wang, give this a taste, here is the Oyster Bun that this sovereign specially ordered someone to purchase from Owner Bu. Master Wang has intensively studied cooking and would probably appreciate it."

The Ghost Chef Wang Ding was taken back. His gaze turned to the porcelain plate that court maids have laid down in front of him. Within the plate was a piece of round-shaped, plump golden fried bun.

Ji Chengxue licked his lips, picked up the piece of Oyster Pancake, and took a bite. Suddenly, the rich aroma burst forth, and with the plump oyster in his mouth he felt completely intoxicated. Because of preoccupation with busy court affairs, whenever he needed to satisfy his cravings, he could only eat this Oyster Bun.

So savory... unbelievably savory!

The Ghost Chef took in a deep breath, and as the rich fragrance provoked his taste buds, he was unable to restrain his mouth from watering.

He also picked up this Oyster Bun and took a bite. It made a light crispy sound.

As the outmost layers of the Oyster Bun was ripped open, its aroma burst out like an exploding bomb and embraced the Ghost Chef, keeping him intoxicated and unable to escape. His mouth could not stop chewing, and the fragrances from the meat, oysters, and shredded turnips intermingled, presenting him with an unprecedented taste and texture.

"Delicious! Absolutely too delicious!" Wang Ding snapped back to reality and swallowed a mouthful as he showered it with praise.

"Haha! As long as Master Wang likes it. Since this sovereign planned the banquet, he specifically ordered many people to head down and purchase this Oyster Bun from Owner Bu. Each person is limited to one order, and each order only contains two pieces. With this many orders of Oyster Pancake, Owner Bu is probably feeling exhausted by now." Ji Chengxue chuckled.

"Owner Bu? Do you mean the owner of Fang Fang's Little Store, located in the alleyway?" Wang Ding was dumfounded. He gazed at Ji Chengxue as he asked in bewilderment.

"Precisely. Could it be Master Wang is acquainted with Owner Bu?" Ji Chengxue was astonished.

The Ghost Chef Wang Ding shook his head with an odd look on his face, took a bite out of the Oyster Bun, and replied: "I had just left the store before entering the palace."

Oh? Ji Chengxue was immensely intrigued. The Ghost Chef Wang Ding was acclaimed as the man with the greatest cooking skills within the Empire. It was fascinating to know what kind of feedbacks he would give after trying Owner Bu's cooking.

"Owner Bu's cooking abilities is flawless. What is unique is that every dish of his contains a rich concentration of true energy, this is extremely inconceivable and not something a commoner can achieve," the Ghost Chef added. But just as he finished speaking, his brows formed a frown.

"But... Your Majesty, there is something to be mentioned, but this old fellow is unsure whether that is appropriate."

"Speak your mind freely." Ji Chengxue regained a serious posture.

"This little store has an ambiguous origin, and Owner Bu is of an unknown identity. Their existence in the Light Wind Empire Imperial City, within the capital of a kingdom, may bring about unthinkable disaster to the Imperial City." The wrinkles on the Ghost Chef's face froze as he spoke earnestly.

At this claim, Ji Chengxue, Xiao Meng, and Grandpa Ouyang all blanched in astonishment.

Owner Bu will bring catastrophe to the Imperial City? Now that sounds like a joke...

Chapter 188: The Jar Within The Jar, Wine Within The Wine

"Why does Master Wang suggest so? Owner Bu has helped the Imperial City through various obstacles..." Ji Chengxue knitted his brows, and asked.

That was correct. He did not know Bu Fang's identity, nor the origin of the small store, but this didn't affect his trust toward the store. Because if it weren't for Bu Fang, the entire Light Wind Empire would have fallen to the sects during the last battles.

Even though he revered Master Wang, as the ruler of an empire, Ji Chengxue also reserved his own judgments. He did not believe that Bu Fang would bring disaster to the Imperial City.

Xiao Meng and others also thought this way because they have had numerous contacts with Bu Fang. Even though they could not fully comprehend Bu Fang, by his looks, he did not seem like someone who would bring about catastrophe.

Wang Ding was rather surprised. Based on Ji Chengxue's behavior, he seemed to have absolute faith in Owner Bu.

However, he was not too astonished and only gave a light smile as he said: "Does Your Majesty still remember the Hundred Family Banquet?"

"Of course I remember, it was the first Hundred Family Banquet after this sovereign succeeded the throne. It was remarkably grand, and Owner Bu happened to emerge as the winner of that Hundred Family Banquet," Ji Chengxue replied.

The Ghost Chef smiled, but it seemed like a mirthless grin. "This old fellow's two good-for-nothing disciples also participated, with the goal of coming in first to win Your Majesty's prize."

Um... now this was awkward. Ji Chengxue's complexion froze slightly.

"Your Majesty's grand prize was a seed, right? Your Majesty may not know what kind of seed it is, but this old fellow does," the Ghost Chef stated.

Ji Chengxue became rigid. That seed...

"That seed is from the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree. Once mature the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree will blossom into the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit. Your Majesty should be aware of the utility of the Three Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit, so, what do you suppose the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit can do?"

Once this was said, all those present instantly drew in a chilled breath.

Three Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit was a seventh grade spirit herb, then what about the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit? This... made one's hair stand on end!

"The Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit, once ingested by a seventh grade Battle-Saint, would endow the Battle-Saint a large probability of gaining enlightenment to the path, even a breakthrough to... eighth grade War-God!" Internally, the Ghost Chef still felt bewildered. He took a deep breath after saying that excitedly.

Ji Chengxue paled. Eighth grade War-God... what kind of an existence would that be?! But... that seed could not germinate. Ji Chengxue finally snapped back into reality and gazed at the Ghost Chef. He knew that the seed was valuable, but it was impossible to make it bud. The empire tried countless methods and still failed to germinate the seed.

Xiao Meng, from beneath, took in a deep breath. The echelon of eighth grade War-God was a state he yearned for irrepressibly. But... he was still light years away from that level.

The Ghost Chef sipped a mouthful of Bejewelled Nectar Wine, calmed his agitated state of mind, then gradually lifted up his head, peered at those nearby, and lightly announced:

"Owner Bu, he got the seed... to germinate."

...

In Fang Fang's Little Store, the lights shone dimly.

Bu Fang scrutinized the three types of seventh grade spirit herb before him, sensing the rich spirit energy that emanated from within, and squinted his eyes.

Afterwards, his mind started to ponder over how to utilize these spirit herbs to brew wine.

For wine brewing this time, the Nine Brewing Method could no longer be used. The Ice Heart Jade Urn Wine was technically a rice wine, yet the ingredients this time were spirit herbs and spirit fruits, hence it called for a different brewing method.

This was precisely what gave Bu Fang a headache. However, that was still fine. In his previous lifetime, Bu Fang had experience brewing fruit wine. In that sense, he wasn't too worried, but was only concerned with how to brew this spirit wine to perfection.

"System, any recommendations for brewing spirit wine?" Bu Fang contemplated for a bit, but still inquired the system at the end. He believed it was safer this way.

The system did not reply immediately, and instead remained silent for ages, before finally replying solemnly: "Brewing the spirit wine counts as the host's temporary assignment. The assignment requires that the host independently brew a wine that can surpass "Dragon's Breath". Therefore, the system will not provide any particular methods."

"As expected..." the corners of Bu Fang's mouth curled up. He knew that given the system's nature, it would leave no loopholes for him to exploit.

He knitted his brows into a frown. Since the system wasn't providing a method, Bu Fang had to come up with something on his own.

The most difficult part about fruit wine brewing was the length of fermentation... This timing he had to control himself. If he unsealed the jar too early, the essence within the wine jar would be lost, thereby naturally reducing the quality of the spirit wine.

Bu Fang rubbed his chin and dwelled on this for a long time.

Next, Bu Fang stopped thinking, and instead took out a pile of lower grade spirit fruits from the system's dimensional bag. The grades of these spirit fruits ranged between two to three, not very high at all.

This was a purple spirit fruit, each plump and ripe. Bu Fang had tried a piece before, it was sweet and sour at the same time, quite suitable for making the wine nectar of this fruit wine.

A wisp of smoke twirled around his hand and a black unadorned knife appeared in his hand.

With a heavy smack of his palm, the surface of the table instantly vibrated, and all of the spirit fruits on it flew into the air one after another.

Bu Fang twirled the knife and utilized the Meteor Cutting Technique, waving the knife closer to cut the spirit fruits.

"Spoosh! Spoosh!"

A huge wine jar was placed underneath the spirit fruits. Every fruit that had been shredded by Bu Fang's knife fell into the large wine jar.

There was a great amount of these spirit fruits. After being all shredded into bits by Bu Fang, they filled up half a jar.

Taking out an extremely small wine jar, Bu Fang cleaned the wine jar, and brought out the Three Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit.

This spirit fruit was a seventh grade spirit fruit, on top of which were three stripes of cloud shaped moires. Light and gentle as ever, the knife in Bu Fang's hand whirled, and with a play of the blade, it came down cutting without a trace of hesitation.

This seventh grade Three Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit was shredded into bits.

Because of the unique properties of the Dragon Bone Kitchen Knife, almost none of the spirit energy within the Three Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit eroded.

Having deposited the shredded fruits into the small wine jar, Bu Fang placed the small wine jar into the large wine jar filled with minced spirit fruits.

Using identical methods, the remaining half of the Phoenix Blood Herb was shredded and placed into the big wine jar. So was the Ice Soul Monarch Lotus.

With all three placed into the large wine jar, an invisible force seemed to entangle one another. The wine jar bearing the Phoenix Blood Herb emanated a fiery redness, and the wine jar holding the Ice Soul Monarch Lotus emitted a faint blue tone.

The wine jar with the Three Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit was rather peculiar, as three stripes of indistinct cloud energy actually formed outside.

The jar within jar, the wine within wine, all four elements fermenting simultaneously.

Closing the lid on the large wine jar, Bu Fang's eyes focused, after which both of his hands clasped on top of the large wine jar. A wave of true energy circulated naturally within his energy core, suddenly surging through and flowing into the jar.

Spoosh Spoosh!!

The shredded spirit fruits within the large wine jar were originally minced by Bu Fang. Under the pressurized force of the true energy, they squeezed out nectar, and this nectar quickly seeped through the flesh of the fruits.

Bu Fang's true energy slowly stirred within. As it ceaselessly circulated, his true energy also gradually permeated the wine nectar.

Having mixed and blended for half a night, the true energy within Bu Fang's body was nearly consumed to exhaustion.

Bu Fang released his hands from the large wine jar. He stumbled backwards numerous steps, lifted up his palms, and discovered that they were twitching slightly.

The true energy output this time was an immense depletion for him. Whether for his energy level or physical stamina, both had reached the limit.

"Using true energy to assist fermentation, the outcomes should be pretty good..." Bu Fang muttered, then lifted up the extremely weighty large wine jar, and walked toward the kitchen cabinet.

This cabinet was especially reserved for wine brewing.

Bu Fang took out the three jars of Ice Heart Jade Urn Wine within, and placed the large wine jar inside.

In this cabinet, the passing of time was accelerated, so perhaps after a few days the fermentation could be completed.

But Bu Fang was still unsatisfied. His brows knitted into a frown, and he felt that this was overly simplistic. Back then, Ni Yan had suggested that the brewing method of the Dragon's Breath was extremely intricate.

During the fermentation process, it was likely buried under the Heaven Alps Spirit Lake, and finally became wine after three years...

"System, can this cabinet simulate particular environments?" Once again, Bu Fang turned to the system. He felt that by applying such a common brewing method, the Dragon's Breath could not be defeated. Due to the variation in fermentation, diverging environments made a world of difference in terms of the quality of the wine nectar.

"The Time Elapsing Cabinet can simulate particular environments. It costs ten crystals per consumption and will be deducted from the host's revenue sales." The system replied promptly this time.

Bu Fang rolled his eyes. He knew that given the nature of the system, replying this quickly meant monetary deduction.

But it was merely ten crystals, he could afford it.

Bu Fang paid the ten crystals, after which his mind connected with the cabinet before his eyes.

Having placed the big jar within, Bu Fang found scenes after scenes of varying environments before his eyes. There was a world of snow and ice, an erupting volcano, the Heaven Alps Spirit Lake, and even a boundless ocean.

Which environment should he choose? Bu Fang contemplated for a while, and ultimately configured the environment to the bottom of an ocean.

The amalgamation of fire and ice, on top of the ocean's mighty current... this spirit wine even excited Bu Fang himself into fervent anticipation.

As for the time within the cabinet, Bu Fang thought it over carefully. Given the amount of true energy he injected himself, it still needed to ferment for around three years. Hence, Bu Fang configured the passing of time as three years within The Time Elapsing Cabinet, it would take up around a month.

After completing all of this, Bu Fang was in a state of exhaustion. Feeling the drained true energy within his body, and with his brows knitting into a frown once more, he recognized the pressing urgency of creating a snack that could help one quickly regain true energy.

Having left the kitchen and crawled into his room, Bu Fang took a shower. The heated steam blurred his vision.

Even though his body was completely enervated, Bu Fang was extremely excited inside. A spirit wine brewed with three types of seventh grade herbs... Even Bu Fang himself had difficulty imagining its level of enchanting superiority.

At least he was certain that the Ice Heart Jade Urn Wine could not compare with this spirit wine.

Suddenly, Bu Fang became distracted as he lay onto his bed and narrowed his eyes...

There was another crucial question, this spirit wine... what should it be named?

Chapter 189: Once News Spread, Winds and Clouds Shook

The Hundred Thousand Mountains stretched beyond one's visual horizons, an unbroken continuous plain with layers upon layers of peaks and knolls.

Suddenly, amidst the mountainous range, there arose a thundering roar. A black dot flew from afar, and continually grew bigger as it charged forth.

It was a black falcon, impressively enormous, and the feathers on its body fluttered at god's speed, rattling and whistling. The falcon's eyes were incredibly sharp, emitting a radiance that sent chills down one's heart.

With a falcon's bellow that reverberated through the highest heavens, the Hundred Thousand Mountains rang with birds fluttering their wings.

On the back of the falcon sat a maiden dressed in a warrior's robe. The maiden's long hair formed a ponytail, making her look adept and unadorned. The maiden had fine, delicate features, she looked bashful and simultaneously adorable.

She carried a longbow behind her shoulder, and was seated on the falcon's back. Despite the fierce howl of wind, an invisible layer of barrier shielded her, and the maiden, utterly unperturbed, happily munched away at spirit fruits.

"Brother Diao, master told us to head to the Imperial City of the Light Wind Empire, take your time." The maiden extended her pale, tender hand, gently patted the falcon's head, and muttered with a smile, after which she continued eating the spirit fruit in her hands.

The soaring falcon rolled its eyes in a rather humanly fashion and picked up its speed.

...

Mahayana Island was a piece of enormous island floating upon a vast stretch of ocean, within which countless high rising buildings erected.

In the center of a secret chamber within a nine-story-tall tower, the silhouette of a figure quietly sat cross-legged. His energy continued to float and sink, as if an odd wave circulated around him, a light golden true energy that encircled his body.

A golden relic rotated, within which echoed the singing of a sacred voice, giving one a sense of heavy peacefulness.

After a long time, the relic descended. It hovered above the person's hand, and was tucked away.

"The battle at the Gate of Heavenly Mystery nearly backset my cultivation level... the bitter hatred, this old fellow cannot just let it pass, Bu Fang... Fang Fang's Little Store, just you wait."

The cross-legged person suddenly fluttered open his eyes, and a beam of gold light spilled out, illuminating the entire secret chamber.

Zhao Musheng's complexion were filled with awe, and he gradually pulled up his body. Suddenly, a knocking sound rang by the door.

Zhao Ruge gradually walked in with an air of deference. Seeing Zhao Musheng with his hands folded behind his back, he bent over in a bow.

"Ruge, what is it, is something big about to go down in the Imperial City?" Zhao Musheng noticed that the visitor was Zhao Ruge, and his face broke into a gentle smile as he inquired.

Zhao Ruge's complexion still displayed some excitement as he gazed toward his father, "The Ghost Chef Wang Ding went to the Imperial City of the Light Wind Empire, and he even visited Bu Fang's little store."

"Oh? Ghost Chef Wang Ding? Isn't he living in seclusion by Qingyang Town?" Zhang Musheng kept his countenance.

"That's right, the very Ghost Chef Wang Ding, known for having traversed the entire continent. Ji Chengxue welcomed him with a banquet, and a highly important piece of information... was disseminated."

"Traversed the entire continent? Haha... this old man kept his thick skin as usual. Go ahead, what important piece of information?" The corners of Zhao Musheng's mouth curled, and he snickered with some disdain.

Zhao Ruge took a look at his father, and solemnly announced: "The first place prize at the Hundred Family Banquet was a seed of the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree. And that seed in Bu Fang's little store... germinated."

Boom!!

A mighty surge of force suddenly erupted from Zhao Musheng's body. Zhao Ruge, once hit by this terrifying force of energy, speedily took multiple steps back, and smashed into the walls of the secret chamber.

"What did you say? The Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree? Is this piece of information true or false?!"

Zhao Musheng's pupils swelled as he was immensely anxious.

The Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree, recorded within the Mahayana Island Buddhist collected works, was a miraculous spirit tree that could help a seventh grade Battle-Saint gain enough enlightenment to enter the echelon of eighth grade War-God.

But wasn't the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree already extinct? Why would it appear... and especially in Fang Fang's Little Store?

"This message was spread from the palace. The Ghost Chef Wang Ding said so himself... it shouldn't be inaccurate." Zhao Ruge rubbed his chest, alleviating the pent up sense of suffocation, and finally said.

"Hahaha! The heavens have come to my aid. Bu Fang, ah Bu Fang! You've brought this upon yourself! This old fellow only needs to further broadcast the news, and when the time comes, how will your little store survive a siege by numerous seventh grade Battle-Saints? Perhaps... even eighth grade War-Gods will stick in a foot! By then, there will be no need for this old fellow to lift a finger... and you'd be done for good!" Zhao Musheng guffawed at ease.

Zhao Ruge, seeing the chortling Zhao Musheng, hesitated for a bit, but still opened his mouth: "Father, by the entrance of Bu Fang's little store still lies a supreme beast..."

"What supreme beast! You listen to their rumors, but have you ever seen a supreme beast? That is a sublime, paramount existence... how could it be the guard dog lying by the entrance of a small store?! Perhaps it's merely an eighth grade spirit beast... but even if it is an eighth grade spirit beast, in the face of numerous seventh grade Battle-Saints and even eighth grade Battle-Gods... it cannot protect Bu Fang."

Zhao Musheng had never believed that a supreme beast would lie by the entrance of a small store. He had witnessed a ninth grade spirit beast with his eyes before, and that air of command felt nearly apocalyptic. A trivial Light Wind Empire, in front of a ninth grade spirit beast, was as flimsy as a papier-mâché.

Zhao Ruge choked. He was at loss for words.

Zhao Musheng continued to howl with laughter, and turned around to leave the secret chamber. "This old fellow is going to reach out to the elders of other sects. Those cowardly old men have always refused to join hands, but this time with the appearance of the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree, let's see if they can still hold their composure."

...

Early morning, Bu Fang opened the door boards of his store, walked out with a richly aromatic Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs, and placed the bowl in front of Blacky.

Having patted the gluttonous dog who became lively at the sight of Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs, Bu Fang turned around to head back to the kitchen, and opened shop for daily business.

Fatty Jin brought along his heavysset troops and flooded into the store. He greeted Bu Fang, and began ordering food. He was incredibly familiar with the routine by now.

He had tried nearly all the dishes in Bu Fang's store, but had yet to get tired of them. This was pretty miraculous, probably attributable to Bu Fang's incredible cooking skills.

After Fatty Jin's party left, Ouyang Xiaoyi skipped in. Behind her followed her three idiotic brothers, the three Ouyang barbarians. Those three were rare guests.

"Hehe, Owner Bu, I have a craving for wine today, a jar of Ice Heart Jade Urn Wine." Ouyang Zhen scratched his head and smiled at Bu Fang.

"Do you need an order of Lees Fish? It goes well with the wine." Bu Fang batted his eyes, and marketed his food coolly, without changing his composure.

Ouyang Zhen, however, hastily waved his hands. He was not going to fall into Bu Fang's trap again. Back then he had ordered both the Ice Heart Jade Urn Wine and Lees Fish, but after having drunk the wine, the taste of the Lees Fish was all lost... what a waste of crystals.

Bu Fang felt it a pity as he turned around, amidst Ouyang Xiaoyi's giggles, and entered the kitchen to take out a jar of Ice Heart Jade Urn Wine.

"In the near future, there will be a new wine. When the time comes you could give it a try. Its taste is bound to surpass that of the Ice Heart Jade Urn Wine," Bu Fang said solemnly to the three Ouyang barbarians.

The eyes of the three brothers instantly sparkled. Owner Bu was coming out with a new wine, so they definitely had to show support. The three brothers nodded their heads in excitement.

...

In the Immortal Phoenix Restaurant, Qiao Bao stared at the women dressed in a long robe before him in desperation, and the corners of his mouths twitched.

"Why the hell is this woman back again? Hadn't she left the Imperial City already?"

"Hey oh, long time no see! Owner Qian's life looks pretty good." Ni Yan's stunningly beautiful face held a naughty grin, but it made Qiao Bao's hair stand on its ends. When this woman gave off such a smile, she was up to no good.

"My... great great lady, hadn't you already left the Imperial City? What are you back again?" Qian Bao's entire face scrunched up as he wailed sourly.

"This lady misses Owner Bu... 's dishes. Can't I return to the Imperial City? Stop with the blabbering, tell people to empty the kitchen for me. This lady just learned a new dish, and want to seek Owner Bu's insights on it," Ni Yan announced.

Owner Qian was boiling with rage... "If you wanted to seek Owner Bu's insights, then shouldn't you go directly to Owner Bu's kitchen... how could you bully someone like this!"

Qian Bao wanted to mutter something, but suddenly shrank down by glare of Ni Yan's gorgeous eyes. Recalling the terrifying cultivation level of this phenomenally beautiful woman, he thought, "Never mind, we shall tolerate her this time."

"You are one of a kind, the kitchen is yours!"

Next, Ni Yan merrily occupied the kitchen of The Immortal Phoenix Restaurant. After a while, she carried a food container and left in jubilation toward the direction of Bu Fang's store.

Tang Yin witnessed his master dashing off and felt torn between laughing and crying at this sight. He took out a few crystals, offered them to Qian Bao, and expressed his apologies before rushing after Ni Yan's footsteps.

Qiao Bao shook his hands, glanced at the crystals in his hands and quietly tucked them away as he pursed his lips.

"Seems like... it wasn't such a loss."

Chapter 190: Owner Bu, Did You Miss Me?

In the main halls of the palace.

After a night of dance and music, the main halls regained their solemnity and desolateness. The ministers have already left one after another, and the eunuchs swept the main halls until they were spotlessly clean.

The former hustle and bustle were as if a dream by now. Beyond the halls, only Ji Chenxue was left sitting on the throne. His body was crouched as he rubbed his chin in contemplation.

Xiao Meng's figure gradually walked into the halls from outside. He stood from beneath, and bowed slightly to Ji Chengxue.

"Has the news been restrained?"

Ji Chengxue gave Xiao Meng a glance, and rubbed between his eyes and brows in fatigue.

Xiao Meng nodded his head, and replied gravely: "Your courtly servant was ordered to prevent all news from spreading the moment the banquet ended. As of now, information about the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree in Fang Fang's Little Store is mainly contained, however..."

Ji Chengxue glanced uncertainly toward Xiao Meng, who had swallowed back the words on the tip of his tongue.

"Your Majesty, you should be aware that, even though our Imperial City has been harmoniously civil despite having gotten rid of many sect individuals from the last war, there remains many sect figures hidden within the Imperial City. The news may still leak that way, so it is best that we take safety precautions..."

Ji Chengxue frowned, held his body straight as he ruminated for a long time, and then gave a long sigh, "It is unbelievable that this old fellow, the Ghost Chef, would release such information at the banquet, this sovereign was really caught off guard..."

"Back when father, the emperor, was still alive, he had mentioned this Ghost Chef. This old fellow...incredibly thick skin, would often find ways to cut corners. In the past, the Imperial City had hosted quite a few cooking competitions, and this man relied on unseemly methods to defeat

many opponents... It never occurred to me that after this many years had passed, the man's nature had not changed one bit."

The muscles on Xiao Meng's face quivered, "That's true... Given this old fellow's temperament, he must have offended many people during his trips across the continent. That he wasn't beaten to death... is certainly a miracle."

"The Ghost Chef, Ghost Chef... He is filled with devilish and wicked ideas, that's why he was given the name Ghost Chef. Of course, his cooking is also spectacular," Ji Chengxue stated calmly.

"To think I saw him as a senior elder, with a cultivation level of seventh grade Battle-Saint, and possible to ally. I never thought we would end up getting played by this old fellow. He had just left Owner Bu's store, and must have gotten the short end of the stick."

Ji Chengxue stood up, unhurriedly walked off of the throne and into the main halls, stretching his body.

"He acted as if it was a careless gesture, but actually wanted to publicize the news. I'm afraid it was to intentionally torment Fang Fang's Little Store... By then, once a crowd of War-Gods encircled the store, this thick-skinned old fellow can grope for fish in muddy waters. It's not like he hasn't done this in the past."

Xiao Meng nodded, but his complexion still displayed a trace of perplexity. He knew that Ji Chengxue definitely thought of what was on his mind as well.

"But this old man is quite dense, um... or perhaps he isn't clear of the ins and outs of Fang Fang's Little Store. He obviously did not gather intelligence before visiting the store." The corners of Ji ChengXue's mouth curled up. He walked to the entrance of the main halls and stared at the featherlike snowflakes falling from the air as he coolly remarked.

"Nevermind a crowd of seventh grade Battle-Saints... even if it were eighth grade War-Gods, Owner Bu's brows won't even crease. He wanted to grope for fish in muddy waters, but will probably be frightened out of his senses once the time comes." Ji Chengxue seemed to have envisioned a comedic scene and couldn't help but emit a light chuckle.

However, Xiao Meng was not as optimistic, and couldn't help but reply: "Your Majesty... the subject of concern should not be Owner Bu's store, but the Imperial City. A flood of seventh grade Battle-Saints charging into Imperial City may not intimidate Owner Bu at all, but..."

"How I wish to give that old man a good beating... no, the blame is on me, for attracting a buttload of wasps." Ji Chengxue's complexion instantly froze. He clenched his teeth but couldn't help mutter a curse, he was seething in anger.

"General Xiao, pass down the command... Strengthen the Imperial City's defense capabilities. In addition, reinforce the inspection measures for visitors to the Imperial City and immediately report any findings of suspicious figures. When the time comes, the order and stability of the Imperial City... will have to fall in General Xiao's hands."

Xiao Meng brought his hands into a salute, and the corners of his mouth tasted a trace of bitterness. A crowd of seventh grade Battle-Saints...what a headache, that damned old scoundrel!

...

Bu Fang looked at the phenomenally beautiful woman before him with a deadpan expression. The woman carried a food container, and her body leaned against the wall as she batted her eyes as she gazed at him.

"Is she still making the ogling eyes..." Bu Fang thought in his heart.

"Owner Bu, long time no see. Did you miss me?" Seeing that Bu Fang couldn't be bothered to acknowledge her and her fluttering eyes, and that he was about to head back into the kitchen, Ni Yan clenched her teeth angrily as she asked.

"Why would I miss you? You don't owe me any crystals," Bu Fang replied soberly.

Ni Yan's complexion froze, "Does your idiot brain only ever think about crystals?"

"Senior, long time no see." Tang Yin hurriedly stepped in just in time to see Bu Fang, and instantly greeted him excitedly.

Bu Fang nodded his head at Tang Yin, and calmly said: "It's been a while indeed. Are you coming in to dine? Recently, the store has got a new dish, it tastes pretty good."

Tang Yin's face immediately lit up, "A new dish? Yeah, the Senior's cooking skill is second to none...uhh."

Tang Yin's step forward suddenly froze as he peered at the food container being carried by Ni Yan, who was glaring at him with her teeth grinding.

"Owner Bu, this is the spirit dish I just cooked, please give me your opinion on it." Yan Ni crossly walked into the store, placed the food container on the table, and said to Bu Fang in a cranky tone.

As expected, this woman was there to seek his advice. To be honest, Bu Fang was not interested in people seeking advice of this sort.

Taking a look around, Bu Fang realized that there were actually no customers at the time being, and instantly scrunched his brows.

All of a sudden, Bu Fang looked toward Tang Yin and said: "What do you want to eat?"

Tang Yin was taken back and swiftly responded: "Oh oh... an order of the new dish, and a jar of Ice Heart Jade Urn Wine."

"Alright, please wait momentarily." Bu Fang nodded in satisfaction, then turned around to head back into the kitchen.

"Right now is business hours, I don't accept any kind of advice request. Please wait until after regular operating hours," Bu Fang said as he walked away.

Ni Yan was instantly at a loss for words. Tang Yin was also drenched in cold sweat... "Senior, you shouldn't play people like this."

Of course, Ni Yan's gaze toward his direction was stone cold.

"Little lassie, I also want to order. Give me an order of the Red Braised Meat and a jar of wine." Ni Yan took a seat on a chair and waved at Ouyang Xiaoyi, who sat not far away in boredom.

Ouyang Xiaoyi huffed, as she did not have any good impressions of this woman. But since she was ordering food, it wouldn't be right to reject her. And so she walked to the window of the kitchen and relayed the order to Bu Fang.

As Ni Yan waited for her food to arrive, she started to look around the store.

This time she stepped into the store, she felt like something was different from before. There was an exceptionally mysterious sentiment stirring inside of her heart.

This kind of exceptionally mysterious sentiment only appeared when she was undergoing cultivation, and rarely surfaced otherwise.

Ni Yan clamped her hands behind her back as she walked around the store in a hunt. After a while, she noticed the far from eye-catching earth yellow colored flower pot in the corner. A tiny burgeoning sapling erected from the flower pot.

The green leaves were covered with mystifying patterns.

"This...this is a Path-Understanding Tree?" Ni Yang blanched, as she never imagined that Bu Fang would grow a Path-Understanding Tree in his store.

She evidently knew about Path-Understanding Trees, as there was one growing in the Celestial Arcanum Sect. The Path-Understanding Tree was categorized into three types, one-stripe, three-stripes, and five-stripes. Ancient works also recorded Path-Understanding Trees with even more stripes, but those only existed in legends.

The Path-Understanding Tree in the Celestial Arcanum Sect had leaves that were over hundreds of years old. As they swayed about, they emitted a mystifying wave of energy. Disciples of the Celestial Arcanum Sect frequently sat cross-leggedly under the Path-Understanding Tree to undergo cultivation, as it gave them a higher chance of reaching a breakthrough.

"Five stripes... these leaves have five stripes, this is a Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree?!" Ni Yan counted the patterns on the leaves, and her exceedingly beautiful eyes widened in bewilderment.

Oh gosh, now this was a wonder! There was actually a Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree in this store!

No wonder there was that exceptionally mysterious sentiment. This was the first time she had seen an alive Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree.

"Could this be the so-called good fortunes mentioned by the Supreme Elder?" A thought flashed through Ni Yan's mind, and her heart jolted.

The Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree, once blossomed, would bear the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit. This was the spirit fruit that, once ingested, could aid one to a possible revelation, or even break through to the echelon of eighth grade War-God...

Just as Ni Yan became dumbfounded, Bu Fang had finished cooking the dishes and sauntered out of the kitchen.

"New dish, Rainbow-Colored Water Dumpling, please enjoy." Bu Fang placed the Rainbow-Colored Water Dumpling in front of Tang Yin. Ouyang Xiaoyi tailed him, scuttled in with a jar of Ice Heart Jade Urn Wine, and also placed it before Tang Yin.

"Thank you Senior." Tang Yin politely expressed his gratitude.

"Owner Bu, you... you're actually growing a Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit Tree in your store? You've got quite a bold.... nerve!"

Ni Yan twisted her head and halted Bu Fang, who was ready to head back to the kitchen, with her carefully enunciated words.