

Gourmet 231

Chapter 231: Elixir Cuisine, Dragon Gate Leap

The flow of true energy in his body was almost depleted. Bu Fang's face became pale as sweat dripped down his forehead.

Buzz...

There was a strange fluctuation from within the steamer. Bu Fang's eyes brightened up and he removed his hands from the lid of the steamer, cutting off the input of true energy. He took a step back and breathed deeply.

"It's finally done. My true energy was almost depleted. The requirement of true energy cultivation is really too high," Bu Fang mumbled. His cultivation was only at the level of Battle-King and this was far too low. When cooking dishes with true energy that had some ingredient of higher grade, he would be fully exhausted.

However, fortunately, Bu Fang predicted that his recent turnover was reaching the breakthrough point to become a Battle-Emperor, and thus his true energy capacity would increase significantly.

When the time came to display his true energy culinary, he would have lesser problems when dealing with ingredients of a higher grade.

Looking at the steamer that was overflowing with warm energy and giving off a strong aroma, Bu Fang could not help but lick his lips. This tempting aroma made people want to start feasting.

As the lid of the steamer was removed, the water vapour gushed out and dispersed, giving off a strong aroma and the same fluctuations as before that had a mind clearing effect.

With a flick of a hand, the water vapour diffused into the air, and Bu Fang fixed his gaze onto the steamer.

A brilliance surfaced from within the steamer. This brilliance was not too overwhelming, but a little obscure instead.

"A dish that can glow." Bu Fang smirked, feeling a sense of accomplishment.

He heaved a sigh of relief as the dish that was taken out from the steamer remained hot. As the dish was displayed on the stove with the lights in the kitchen shining brightly on it, its brilliance was evident.

The blue and white porcelain bowl contained a fat fish that looked as realistic as ever. It almost seemed alive. A strong feeling of vitality along with that strange fluctuation flowed throughout the whole fish. There was a slight movement by the fish within the hot mist, as if it was flying within the clouds.

Cloud-shaped moires gathered on top of the dish. The fish looked as though it was a dragon swimming among the clouds in the air.

This was a spectacular dish, at least to Bu Fang, who was definitely amazed by it.

This was the charm of culinary. Who would have thought that the final product would look like this.

"This dish... is beyond my wildest imagination. It's too beautiful," Bu Fang whispered. He then started to brainstorm on the name of this dish.

"Steamed Path-Understanding Fish? Well... this seems a little too straightforward. How about Dragon Gate Leap? Not bad. It sounds good."

Bu Fang pleasingly and confidently decided on the name of this dish, to call it Dragon Gate Leap. A fish that leaped through the dragon gates after eating the Path-Understanding Fruits sounded pretty symbolic.

"System, how do you find this dish?" A hopeful Bu Fang asked.

This time, the system did not give Bu Fang a quick answer. It took it some time before it said sternly, "Name of dish: Dragon Gate Leap; Chef: Host Bu Fang; Spirit energy level of the dish: ninety percent; Path-Understanding Factor: ninety percent; Final evaluation: After a Battle-Saint

consumes this dish, he will definitely break through to become a War-God. Hence, it passes the evaluation."

Bang!

As the system finished its sentence, Bu Fang started to smirk and snapped his finger, expressing his joy.

Indeed he passed the evaluation, while the process of making this Dragon Gate Leap looked easy but every step really tested the skills of the chef, be it how the flesh was treated at the start or the handling of true energy during the steaming process.

The requirement of every step was very strict and there was no margin for error. Once there was a mistake made, the efforts previously would have been wasted.

To control the spirit energy level of the dish, Bu Fang used the steaming method. This method was the easiest to preserve the ingredient's spirit energy. As for retention of the Path-Understanding Factor, Bu Fang firstly spread the juice of the Path-Understanding Fruit onto the flesh of the fish. This allowed the Path-Understanding Factor to be retained well during the steaming process.

Taking a deep breath, Bu Fang controlled the happiness he felt in his heart.

"System, since this dish has already passed the evaluation criteria, does this mean that this temporary mission has been accomplished? Then this dish.... Can i choose to sell it?"

"Congratulations to the host for completing the mission in time: using the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit to create a dish that passed the system's evaluation. The reward for completing the mission will now be released, and the sale of the dish will be allowed. The system is currently determining the price of the dish..."

This time, it did not take too long for the system to come up with a price for the dish.

"Dragon Gate Leap, elixir cuisine, the price will be five thousand, five hundred and fifty crystals."

Bu Fang was stunned. Five thousand, five hundred and fifty crystals for one dish. This was the most expensively priced dish ever by the system.

There was a gurgling sound, and Bu Fang got excited. If this dish went for sale, his business volume would reach the requirements for advancement straight away.

Lifting up the Dragon Gate Leap, Bu Fang slowly moved out of the kitchen.

In the presence of everyone's eyes, and from the shadows of the kitchen, a tall and thin silhouette started to emerge slowly.

With both hands, Bu Fang held a bright and shiny dish that radiated heat and an aroma. The dish was beautiful, looking similar to a cloudy fog, causing people to be bewitched by it uncontrollably.

Zhan Kong and Bian Changkong clenched their fists as they came into the shop, and their facial expressions revealed that they felt comfortable.

In the alley, the Ghost Chef felt extremely miserable, with his head swollen to the point that it looked like a pig head, and he could not stop coughing up blood. He was about to run out of breath.

His eyes were filled with rage, but were even more filled with fear.

Bu Fang placed the dish on the table, and a rich aroma dissipated and slowly filled the entire store, causing people to feel pleasant and comfortable.

"Owner Bu... is this the dish made using the Path-Understanding Fruit?"

The old drunkard asked as he laid down his wine gourd, with his eyes widening as he stared at the dish.

Bu Fang nodded and faced everyone, saying, "This dish was made using the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit and it can definitely help Battle-Saints break through to the rank of War-God."

Tsk tsk tsk!

The moment Bu Fang said that, everyone gasped coldly. Even the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit could not guarantee that Battle-Saints would attain a promotion to the rank of War-God, but

Bu Fang actually dared to say that this single dish could help Battle-Saints achieve that breakthrough... To think he had so much confidence.

"Owner Bu must be joking... How is it possible for such an amazing dish to exist?" The old drunkard could not believe it, and the others were also suspicious.

Bu Fang got a chair and sat on it, taking a deep breath. Creating the Dragon Gate Leap had caused him to use a lot of his energy and experience.

"Well, this dish will only be made once, and even if anyone wants it in future, they might not have the opportunity to eat it, therefore this dish is very precious. As for the effectiveness of this dish, you can eat it first, and if it is not a hundred percent effective, you do not have to pay."

Bu Fang's tone was very calm yet confident. But that calmness was filled with confidence in the dish that he had made.

Everyone turned to the Dragon Gate Leap and looked at it seriously, as their attention was pulled toward the dish.

"May I know how much this dish is selling for?" Zhan Kong asked as he frowned.

This was the question that many others were curious about, and they turned to look at Bu Fang for his reply.

Bu Fang touched the corner of his mouth and raised his fair and long fingers, pointing to the menu behind them.

Everyone was stunned and turned toward the back. After taking a careful look, they let out a sound of surprise.

"Five thousand, five hundred and fifty crystals for one dish?!"

"My God, why is this dish so expensive?!"

"Owner Bu, this is simply extortion!"

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Everyone was simply uncomfortable with the high price of Dragon Gate Leap. Five thousand, five hundred and fifty crystals. The price of the dish was comparable to the entire wealth of a Battle-Saint.

However, in the eyes of the strong, like Zhan Kong, this dish was not considered expensive and could be said to be cheap instead. If it could really help a Battle-Saint become a War-God, then it was really cheap.

"There is only one of this dish, whether you choose to buy it or not, you only have one chance to do so, this shop will never make this dish again", Bu Fang said.

"Owner Bu, I am buying this dish", Zhan Kong said unhesitatingly. He had promised Wu Yunbai that he would attain a Path-Understanding Fruit, and since he could not attain the fruit, he had to buy this dish.

"I also want to buy this dish", Bian Changkong said.

Both of them had competed non-stop for the Path-Understanding Fruit, and this time they would compete with the price of the fruit.

"Owner Bu... Xiao Meng would also like to buy the dish!" Xiao Meng said excitedly as he looked at the dish with high emotions.

Bu Fang did not reply him.

There was only one portion, and yet so many people wanted it. The outcome of who would get the dish had to be determined by who was willing to pay the highest price.

They discussed their bids.

The old drunkard gulped a mouthful of wine, laughing heartily as he banged his wine gourd on the table, saying "I will buy this dish for ten thousand crystals!"

Chapter 232: The Downfall of the Ghost Chef

The old drunkard's bold words left Zhan Kong and Bian Changkong at a loss for words. He had made a show of not lacking money earlier when they were fighting over the Path-Understanding Fruit, and thus they were long prepared for such a possibility.

But now, they were beginning to hesitate, unsure whether or not they should continue bidding. None of them knew whether the Path-Understanding Fruit, when made into a dish, would have the same effects as the Five Stripes Path-understanding Fruit, even though Bu Fang had said multiple times that it would definitely allow a Battle-Saint to break through and reach the echelon of a War-God.

As eighth grade War-Gods themselves, they were the definite authorities on what it took to reach that level, and how difficult it was to do so. To claim a mere dish had a hundred percent chance of achieving a breakthrough sounded very much like pure fantasy.

Ten thousand crystals might seem like a lot for a seventh grade Battle-Saint, but for a eighth grade War-God it was still within reasonable limits. However, they just couldn't believe that a mere dish could have such an effect.

When a Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit was cut open, it would mean the dispersion of most of the spiritual energy within. What effect could it still have in such a state?

"Are you going to call a price? If not... this dish here will be mine." The old drunkard placed a hand on his wine gourd, which rested on the table. He looked at Zhan Kong and Bian Changkong, knowing full well that they were the only two people who could actually contest him.

Xiao Meng was greatly conflicted. He really did want to buy that dish, for he was well aware of how effective the Owner Bu's dishes were, but... he didn't have that many crystals to spend—or rather, he didn't dare to spend that much. That was because he did not only have to account for himself, but also for the Xiao family, and the expenses of the daily cultivation of the Xiao family's few hundred guards. All their livelihoods depended on him.

Bu Fang was unconcerned with how much they were bidding. Considering how the system worked, he would only be able to get the fixed sum of 5550 crystals in the end, regardless of how much those people spent.

"The Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit is, more or less, a spirit fruit of the eighth level, so it's quite normal for the price of a dish made from it to cost a bit over five thousand," Bu Fang thought. The Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew was made using three types of seventh grade spirit herbs, in a highly complex process, and yet it still sold for merely five hundred crystals a cup.

The system's pricing would usually not be too much higher than the value of the ingredients used, and that was something Bu Fang knew well. Since the recipes supplied by the system were all made with highly valuable ingredients, it was reasonable for them to be sold at high prices.

Bu Fang sat upon the chair, slowly circulating energy through his energy core, dispersing true energy within throughout his body to recover his physical and spiritual condition. He scanned the crowd, and upon seeing that nobody else seemed to be bidding, he narrowed his eyes.

"Well then... Since you're all not going to name a price, looks like he'll be the one taking this Dragon Gate Leap," Bu Fang spoke those words solemnly, slamming his hands together with a loud sound and quirking his lips slightly as he announced who the valuable elixir cuisine was going to.

The old drunkard stroked his shaggy beard and grinned.

Zhan Kong and the others all sighed, feeling some regret.

At the entrance, a hand suddenly slammed onto the doorframe. The muscles of that hand were twisting strangely and tearing apart, with blood dripping from the skin.

The Ghost Chef jerked his head up, and there was madness in his eyes. The agonizing pain all over his body made him well aware that he didn't have much time left. If he did not eat the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit, his body would be completely crippled and wasted away as a result of the Essence Meat Broth's side effects.

He had been taking a gamble all along, just so that he could drink the soup at the very last moment. It was his final trump card, and the basis of his confidence in being able to obtain the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit.

But he had been mistaken. The two fellows who had rushed out from the little shop had beaten him within an inch of his life, and within an inch of despair.

Sizzling!

The Ghost Chef's skin began to wither and break apart all over his body as if it was being burnt, and blood was seeping out and making his entire appearance terrifying and hideous.

There was only madness in his eyes as he stared at the Dragon Gate Leap which sat upon that table, emitting hot steam and spiritual energy. He could detect the scent of Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit from within that dish...

He craved for that dish, for it was his final hope.

Bang!

The Ghost Chef Wang Ding made a desperate attempt and flew toward the Dragon Gate Leap at such a speed that he appeared like a black shadow.

Everyone was still too stunned to react, as the Ghost Chef's appearance had thrown them all for a loop, including Bu Fang.

"What the hell is this..." Bu Fang said, shocked by the Ghost Chef's visage, which was as terrible as a demon from hell. The stench coming from the Ghost Chef's body brought a frown onto his face.

The old drunkard narrowed his eyes, displeased that the hell-knows-what thing wanted to lay its filthy fingers on the dish he had just spent ten thousand crystals on. With a glare and a shake of his white beard, he let out an angry roar.

It was the first time the old drunkard had made a move to attack.

The wine gourd was picked up, and it rapidly expanded in size to become as large as a person.

There was no curbing the madness in the Ghost Chef's eyes, as all that remained in his mind was the Dragon Gate Leap. It was the only thing that could save him, to prevent him from becoming completely crippled.

Boom!

The wine gourd came crashing down on the Ghost Chef's body, with a frightening wave of true energy pouring out from within it. The Ghost Chef gave a shrill screech while clawing at the gourd with wild eyes.

"You think a piece of trash like you, who only reached the eighth grade with the help of drugs, is worthy of fighting with me?"

The old drunkard gave a scornful laugh and grinned, as the wine gourd began spinning. He placed a palm upon the gourd and an unstoppable force exploded outwards, blasting the Ghost Chef right out of the shop.

Boom!

The Ghost Chef's body rolled in the air and landed on the ground in the alleyway... right behind the butt of the old drunkard's donkey.

The Ghost Chef's whole body had basically been smashed to bits, and his skin began to flake off.

The donkey smelt a great stench coming from behind it, felt a chill, and was greatly startled. It brayed, then lifted its hind legs to give a great kick which landed squarely on the Ghost Chef's raised head.

That was a donkey capable of flight, and its kick very nearly burst the Ghost Chef's head open like a watermelon.

The Ghost Chef lay collapsed on the side, spasming uncontrollably, and with his entire body spewing blood.

The crowd came out of the little shop and stood by its entrance, frowning at the pitiful appearance of the Ghost Chef.

Xiao Meng heaved a sigh upon seeing the miserable end that the Ghost Chef had come to, yet at the same time he also felt a great weight lifted off his chest. The unforgivable evil known as the Ghost Chef had finally been punished for his many sins.

Zhan Kong looked at the breaking skin all over the Ghost Chef's body and the face behind his silver mask became rather grave.

"This damned thing must've taken some drugs, but their side effects... are rather bone-chilling."

"Don't you two think that the side effects it suffers are very similar to the methods used by that faction?" Bian Changkong drew in a deep breath and asked while his expression darkened.

The old drunkard and Zhan Kong paused for a moment, then their expressions changed.

"You mean the medicine taken by this fellow... rather, this damned thing, has something to do with the Shura Sect, which plagued the northern territories a few thousand years ago?" the old drunkard asked darkly.

Shura Sect was a terrible faction which had lain buried for many years.

"I've only read about a type of medicine called the Soul Devouring Pill in the records of the Godly Temple of the Wildlands. They state that it was able to temporarily activate one's potential and give them a great but temporary boost in their abilities. The side effects, however, were brutal. This damned thing we see now must've used some special methods to consume the Soul Devouring Pill."

Bian Changkong hunched his back and, watching as the Ghost Chef's broken skin began to rot, became increasingly disgusted.

Zhan Kong drew in a deep breath with a grave expression. Then, cupping his hands to the old drunkard and Bian Chankong, he spoke, "If this person is really connected to the Shura Sect, then I must take him away. There is some history between Shura Sect and my White Cloud Villa, of which you two are likely aware."

Bian Chankong and the old drunkard both nodded. While they might not be the most powerful ones among their respective factions, they were well informed. Since they knew Zhan Kong's words to be truth, neither made any protest.

Zhan Kong thanked the two of them, and looked at the Ghost Chef with eyes that were steadily growing colder. With a flash of light, a pitch black chain appeared in his hand.

He bound the Ghost Chef with the chain, which glowed with seal symbols, and locked it such that he could not move an inch... even though the Ghost Chef had already fallen into a daze after being kicked by the donkey.

Bu Fang drew his legs up and leaned back in his chair to get more comfortable.

He eyed the old drunkard, who was still squeezed in the doorway with the others, and said, "So are you eating this dish or not? Don't blame me for not reminding you that if it gets cold... the effects might just get weaker.

Chapter 233: A Stirring State of Breakthrough

"Lass Ni, go ahead and eat this dish. You have been saying everyday that you would attain the rank of War-God, but I have not seen you actually achieve it", the old drunkard said to Ni Yan as he drank from his wine gourd.

Ni Yan was stunned. She did not expect that the old drunkard would buy the dish for her. Bu Fang stood at the side, eyebrows raised, but did not say anything.

"Aren't you going to eat it? If not, I will go ahead and do it", the old drunkard said as he laughed. If the Path-Understanding Fruit had not been used to create the dish, perhaps he would not have given the dish to Ni Yan, as he would have needed the fruit to brew wine.

However, the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit was used by Bu Fang to create a dish, therefore the opportunity was lost to use it to brew wine. When the old drunkard bought this dish that could induce a state to attain a breakthrough, he was definitely doing so to give it to Ni Yan.

Ni Yan was touched. Although she and the old drunkard would bicker and squabble daily, and that she would sometimes also steal his Dragon's Breath to drink, their relationship was very good.

Ni Yan did not have to spell out anything unnecessary. She turned and said to Bu Fang, "Owner Bu, please bring a cup of the Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew for him".

Although the Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew was not as expensive as this dish, to the old drunkard, using wine was a better way of expressing one's gratitude.

Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew? The old drunkard was stunned.

Bu Fang glanced at Ni Yan and nodded. He stood up and went into the kitchen.

When Bu Fang came out of the kitchen, he was holding a pale blue jar of the Path-Understanding Brew. The rich fragrance of the wine filled the entire area, causing some to feel a little intoxicated.

"This... this wine fragrance!" The old drunkard just stared as his heart was filled with an inconceivable possibility.

"Lass, you weren't being genuine with me! To think you did not tell me earlier about such good wine!" The old drunkard was obsessed with wine up to the point of craziness. To him, a cup of good wine was more alluring than a beautiful lady.

Ni Yan smiled without saying a word. Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew was a newly introduced wine, and although she had not told the old drunkard, it shouldn't be too late to tell him now.

The old drunkard received the wine that Bu Fang passed over, closed his eyes, and hid in a corner to taste it.

Ni Yan, however, fixed her eyes on Dragon Gate Leap.

The fins of the fat fish gently flapped about on the porcelain plate, as if it had come to life. The mist surrounding it gave off an even more mysterious feeling.

She picked up her chopsticks and sat opposite to Bu Fang. Her alluring appearance when surrounded by the mist looked absolutely stunning.

Bu Fang looked at her through the mist and was shocked by her beauty. This woman really was a little too beautiful.

The smell of Dragon Gate Leap was actually not too strong. When compared to other dishes in Bu Fang's store, it was considered mild. However, the value of this dish surpassed other dishes by far.

The ingredient alone was already worth much more than the other dishes.

She gently prodded at the fish skin, pulling it apart to reveal a layer of succulent white flesh beneath. A small amount of water vapour could be seen coming out from the fresh and tender meat, and it looked like a bright and transparent jewel.

The piping hot fish gave off that faintly sweet fragrance found only in the freshest of fish meats, and after going through Bu Fang's own proprietary techniques, the usual fishiness associated with such a dish was completely removed. The dish now gave off a slightly fruity and meaty smell, as rich as milk and just as refreshing.

As she grabbed a piece of the meat, the juicy piece trembled a little as it left the body of the fish. Cloud-shaped moires surrounded the piece of fish meat, and it looked gorgeous.

It drew all the attention of the people around. Many a stomach rumbled as they voiced their craving for that tantalizing piece of meat.

The fair-skinned Ni Yan blushed a little due to the heat, making her look even better. She opened her red lips, revealing her pure white teeth, painting a picture that was simply irresistible.

As the meat entered her mouth, she was overwhelmed by the taste of the fish. It was as if the fish meat melted in her mouth and as she swallowed it, she could feel the warmth of the meat in her stomach.

The taste of the fish was retained in her mouth and every breath she took was filled with the wonderful smell of the fish.

"Um... hmm..." Ni Yan moaned tenderly. Her face showed that she was still totally immersed in it. She stuck out that small tongue of hers and gently caressed her rosy red lips, savoring every last bit of fish juice left on them. That sight... was simply gorgeous.

The people around stared in awe. It was impossible to tell if they were attracted to the delicious cuisine or the alluring beauty.

Bu Fang could not help but to pinch his own nose. This woman... couldn't she be less charming?

"Delicious!" Ni Yan came back to her senses and gasped. She then placed another piece of fish into her mouth, totally enjoying it.

The taste of Steamed Fish came from its delicate flavor. It did not have the same impact as spicy Boiled Fish, neither did it have that strong alcohol taste of a Lees Fish. It relied on that special taste of the fish fats.

This was also one of the reasons why Bu Fang chose to use this fat fish as ingredient. Although the grade of the Illusory Spirit Swamp Fish was not high, it was still a pretty good ingredient.

Snake-man Yu Feng's jaw dropped as he looked at that delicious fish. He ate that fish for many years and could recognize it straight away. But could it really be so delicious?

Uncontrollably, his throat wavered a little.

Once one started eating Bu Fang's cuisine, he would have a hard time stopping, be it the Egg-Fried Rice or the Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs, and even now the Dragon Gate Leap.

Having grabbed a chopstick full of meat, Ni Yan instinctively reached for a second. Except for the time interval where she was immersed within the fish meat taste, her chopstick was practically always reaching out for the fish meat.

Very soon, the fish meat was almost fully eaten and the target of Ni Yan started to change. She started aiming for the Path-Understanding Fruit inside the fish's mouth.

Everyone's eyes glowed up. They knew it was time for the main act. The reason why they looked forward to this dish was because of the Path-Understanding Fruit. The precious part about this Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit was that it could help a person to achieve a breakthrough.

However, after making it into a dish, no one knew if it would still have that effect.

Kacha!

Ni Yan grabbed a piece of fruit and took a bite. Amazingly, the fruit didn't turn mushy from being cooked but instead retained its crispy texture. The Path-Understanding Fruit had a slight sour and sweet taste, just like a plum, and was oh so mouth-watering.

After swallowing it, Ni Yan went for yet another piece. Her energy core started revolving at a blistering speed. Like a roaring furnace fire, the energies within churned. The true energy in her body operated so fast that her meridians started to feel hot.

She took a breath and finished the last piece of fish meat. At this moment, Ni Yan's face was already red. Biting her lower lips, her eyes looked a little blurry.

She could not hear a word. The Path-Understanding Notes in her ears were like thunder. This sound was like musical notes revolving around her body, forming an image in her mind.

Every tremor she felt signified that she was getting closer to entering the War-God echelon. At the end, she felt that she was just a step away from it.

Bu Fang looked at the overwhelming true energy around Ni Yan and the unique implication to her body, he knew... this woman was experiencing an epiphany. Once she was at that stage, she was very close to achieving a breakthrough.

She was already immersed in epiphany, so how worthless would she have to be to not breakthrough?

Epiphany... it was a state everyone dreamt about yet some would never meet its requirements even with a lifetime of trying.

Xiao Meng looked at Ni Yan with envy as she sat there cross-legged and immersed in an epiphany. He knew that Owner Bu's dish was working effectively, and if possible, he had really wished that it was him who ate that Dragon Gate Leap.

The others may still doubt Bu Fang, but Xiao Meng was one who deeply understood Bu Fang's store. It had many more dishes which were more effective than elixirs.

Zhan Kong's eyes narrowed and his face revealed a look of astonishment.

How could this chopped Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit still be so effective in helping people achieve a breakthrough? Additionally, it looked as if it was even easier to break through. Could what Owner Bu said be really true, that eating this dish would definitely allow one to breakthrough?

Inconceivable! How did Bu Fang do it? When the spirit fruit was chopped, the spirit energy would be lost. Its essence would be very volatile, with its effectiveness being reduced to less than ten percent. This was what Zhan Kong was worried about.

But after Ni Yan had eaten the dish, it proved to be even more effective than eating the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruit. This was clearly a slap on his face.

Zhan Kong now knew that he was wrong. This dish's effectiveness was really outstanding. He let out a long sigh, knowing that it was too late to regret now.

"Fine wine!! This is a really exquisite wine! How is it possible that such fine wine exists, it is even better than my Dragon's Breath! Impossible!"

The old drunkard said in a tone that revealed his surprise and discontent, as everyone's attention was drawn toward Ni Yan, who was focused on achieving her breakthrough.

The old drunkard looked at Bu Fang and said, "One more cup!"

A wine that was even tastier than Dragon's Breath... This made the old drunkard excited to the extent that he was shaking.

Bu Fang calmly looked at the excited old drunkard and said, "We will only sell one cup of Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew today".

The old drunkard's facial expression stiffened, and he seemed to be eager to argue with Bu Fang.

However, before he could even say anything, Ni Yan, who was immersed in that state, looked up. Her whole body exuded true energy that rippled outwards in waves.

The facial expression of the old drunkard, as well as everyone else's, changed.

A majestic pressure was gushing out of Ni Yan's body, and this pressure was far greater than the one from a Battle-Saint...

"This girl is about to reach the rank of War-God!"

Chapter 234: Owner Bu, What Happened to Your Stony Demeanor?

What did a breakthrough to eighth grade War-God look like?

Many folks were extremely curious since this was unknown territories for them.

Zhan Kong, Bian Changkong, as well as other eighth grade War-Gods were certainly not interested. However, Xiao Meng, Wu Yunbai and the other seventh grade Battle-Saints stretched out their necks eagerly to observe, hoping to gain some revelations themselves through carefully studying Ni Yan's breakthrough.

At the end of the day, a breakthrough was a big matter. Though the old drunkard was intoxicated by the Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew, he wasn't careless enough to forget about the real deal. His figure flickered as he arrived near Ni Yan's side.

"Everyone, a breakthrough is such an important event in life, so even the slightest mistake is intolerable. One blunder and one may risk slipping into mental and spiritual distortion. Everyone should be clear on this. This old man asks to have the little store to ourselves for a while so as to

protect this young lady from potential danger." The old drunkard, with his face fully flushed, burped drunkenly and said with a grave tone.

Bu Fang gazed at the old fellow in surprise. So far, he was the first one who hadn't passed out after drinking the Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew.

Everyone present was rather reasonable. Although they wanted to know what a breakthrough to eighth grade War-God looked like, they agreed unanimously that distractions were fatal to the moment of breakthrough. It could easily lead to a disaster of a mental and spiritual distortion.

This was the very reason why many warriors sought a quiet place to break through a rank.

The crowd began to disperse from the store. Their faces were filled with regret and disappointment as they kept on looking back when they stepped out.

"Everyone, please try to understand my difficult situation." The old drunkard remarked as he looked at them.

Bu Fang rubbed his chin, peered at the crowd afar, and opened his mouth: "There is no need to be too disappointed. If anyone can obtain more Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruits, you are welcomed to bring them to the store. I can cook Dragon Gate Leap for you, though it would require extra fees."

Everyone's eyes flickered when they heard Bu Fang's words. Zhan Kong and Bian Changkong both looked at Bu Fang with meaningful glances.

This Dragon Gate Leap could guarantee the seventh grade Battle-Saint's breakthrough to eighth grade War-God, and had much stronger effects than consuming the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruits just on their own. The owner of this little store deserved more attention in the future.

Plus, the trump cards of this little store were simply too frightening. An invincible Supreme Dog, a powerful puppet, and a chef with amazing skills—any single one of these should be taken seriously.

With the crowd leaving the store, it immediately cleared up the space inside.

The old drunkard, with his hands behind his back, came to Bu Fang's side. He grabbed a chair and sat down.

He peered at Ni Yan, who was fully concentrating on her breakthrough, then cast a glance at Bu Fang. He narrowed his eyes and took in a deep breath.

"Owner Bu, the Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew is undoubtedly a top-notch fine wine. However, my own wine is not bad at all. This is my very own Dragon's Breath. Owner Bu, you can give it a try."

The old drunkard raised his hand majestically and focused his mind. After a flash of light, a small purple gourd appeared in his hands.

Bu Fang was baffled, then uttered with bewilderment: "Dragon's Breath?"

This old fellow turned out to have Dragon's Breath on him? Could it be that this old fellow was the same elder who brewed the Dragon's Breath, as mentioned by Ni Yan earlier?

Bu Fang was immediately hooked as he gazed the purple gourd all intrigued. The gourd was not big in size and was glazed with a radiating gleam. With just one look, one could easily tell this was nothing ordinary.

"Yes, this is the Dragon's Breath that I created painstakingly all by myself." The old drunkard laughed as he waved his hand casually, summoning the purple gourd to fly toward Bu Fang.

Bu Fang easily caught the gourd of wine, but then the expression on his face changed. He had to apply some force with his arms to hold it steady.

This delicate gourd appeared light and insubstantial, but turned out to be rather heavy.

Just as he unplugged the purple gourd, a dense aroma of wine wafted out, much like a small serpent twisting around before Bu Fang's nose.

Sensing the rich aroma of wine, he couldn't help but lick his lips.

The corner of Bu Fang's mouth curled with great interest. He raised the gourd toward the old drunkard as a friendly gesture, and then poured the wine into his mouth in a rush.

Gulp gulp!

The wine nectar flooded out of the gourd and filled his mouth. The strong, piquant sensation immediately turned Bu Fang's face red.

One sip down his stomach and he felt like he had burst into flames. Bu Fang felt as if his throat was badly burned by boiling water, opening up every single pore on his body.

As one exhaled, one could practically spew out flames. This prickling, burning sensation could not be easily forgotten.

"Dragon's Breath. One sip and one could practically breathe fire. This strong wine is the finest and most exquisite wine I have ever come across!" A flushed Bu Fang stuck out his tongue as he praised.

After the scorching sensation in his stomach had ebbed, it was as if the spring winds brought everything back to life again. It birthed a faint sweet tint, one that was infinitely intoxicating.

After the numbing sensation on his tongue had faded, Bu Fang couldn't help but lick his lips. He was not yet ready to part with the aftertaste of this wine. The Dragon's Breath was extremely impressive, and it evoked Bu Fang's memory of drinking an exceptionally strong alcohol, the Er-Guo-Tou, in his last lifetime. Only its taste was much more subtle and indescribable than the Er-Guo-Tou.

"Hahaha! This Dragon's Breath is a product of many years of observing other fine wine. What a pity...it is still miles away from Owner Bu's Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew." The old drunkard rubbed the purple gourd as a trace of pride smeared across his face. However, one look at Bu Fang, and that confidence was washed away.

He had been developing this wine for so many years, yet Owner Bu had created a wine as spectacular as Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew, and at such a young age... he felt like he was utterly defeated.

Bu Fang curled his lips as the alcohol rushed to his head. He exhaled a drunken breath, stood up and walked to the kitchen, then came back with a jar of Ice Heart Jade Urn Wine. He placed down two more ceramic cups, one before the old drunkard and one before himself. Then, he filled both cups with wine and remarked: "Even though this wine here cannot compare with Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew or Dragon's Breath, it is still of good quality. Having tasted your Dragon's Breath today, I suddenly felt like a thousand cups are not too many when you drink with a soulmate. Come on, cheers."

Huh? Cheers?

The old drunkard subconsciously mimicked Bu Fang's movement and clinked glasses with him. Then, Bu Fang tossed up his head and drained the cup. He exhaled a breath with the utmost satisfaction.

His eyes also sparkled as he drained down the wine just like Bu Fang. In that instant, he couldn't help but burst into laughter.

A thousand cups were not too many when you drink with a soulmate, excellent!

This elder and young lad, drinking one toast after another, somehow befriended each other.

On the other hand, Ni Yan's breakthrough was reaching a critical point. True energy surged through her body and burst out, enveloping her entire figure.

Creak...

It was as if Ni Yan pushed open a great old gate. Her entire body was engulfed in the energy that could enable her to metamorphosize. Her eyes firmly shut as she sensed the gush of energy alongside her quick pulse.

In her energy core, a valiant and heroic armor, around which mystifying moires were floating, was coming into shape. It beamed radiantly.

On the armor were faint stripes of cloud-shaped moires, both mystifying and beautiful.

Bang!!

Finally, Ni Yan opened her eyes. The spirit energy funnel hovering over her head began to fade away and finally dissipated.

Her breakthrough was completed in this state of tranquility.

Ni Yan's eyes flickered faintly. Her soft mouth slightly opened, letting out a tainted breath that contained all the impurities in her body.

Clang!

The sound of porcelain cups clinking echoed in the air. Ni Yan, who had just finished her breakthrough, raised her head to seek the source of the sound. Absolutely dumbstruck, she witnessed an eye-blinding sight, causing her pupils to shrink.

What she saw was a flush-faced old man wrapping his arms around the neck of a young fellow, with his head pressed against the young lad's face, as he laughed hysterically.

They clinked the glasses in their hands and then tossed up their heads to drain the cups.

"Say, Owner Bu, this old fellow is enraged! I loathe myself for not meeting you earlier. A thousand cups are not too many when you drink with a soulmate. But for us, even ten thousand cups won't ever be enough. Come on, cheers!"

Bu Fang's complexion remained unperturbed, but the corners of his mouths twisted upward. The redness on his face betrayed what he had on his mind.

Ni Yan was completely shocked. Was... Owner Bu smiling?

What the hell!

This was her first time seeing a smile on Owner Bu's face, yet it was freaking directed to another man... Owner Bu, the stony, elegant demeanor you've upheld in my heart had just instantly collapsed!

How could you have so much fun chatting with this old drunkard? Just how bored are you?

"Hey, lassie Ni, you've completed your breakthrough? Come here, let me introduce Owner Bu to you. From this day on he is like a brother to me! When you see Owner Bu in the future, bleugh, don't forget to call him Uncle Bu!" The old drunkard's face flushed red as he informed Ni Yan delightfully.

Bu Fang peeked at Ni Yan and curled the corner of his mouth. His face was also crimson red.

Ni Yan stared at these two fellows blankly. Uncle Bu... what the hell? You old drunkard, your task is to safeguard me, yet you freaking end up getting me a new uncle?

Chapter 235: The Gourmet Map of Another World

In the main halls of the Imperial Palace, Ji Chengxue was dressed in golden imperial robes. With hands held behind his back, he paced around the main halls, with his chest puffed and his face clouded by anxiety.

He slowed his steps once in a while, then lifted his head to peer into the distance. His brows were tightly knitted. It was hard to tell what he had on his mind.

Suddenly, the sharp voice of a young eunuch resounded from outside of the main halls.

"Your Majesty, General Xiao Meng seeks your audience."

This shrill voice reverberated within the main halls. A trace of joy suddenly smeared across Ji Chengxue's face, and he quickly responded: "Please let him in."

Xiao Meng was dressed in full body armor. He stepped in from outside of the main halls with a helpless expression and a bitter smile.

Seeing Ji Chengxue taking big strides to receive him, he quickly erased the bitterness from his face, and bowed deferentially to the sovereign. Though Ji Chengxue was many years his junior, he felt it

important to uphold the ceremonial protocol. After all, Ji Chengxue had assumed the throne and was his emperor.

"General Xiao, with regards to the little store... has everything been adequately resolved?" Ji Chengxue asked in agitation.

This was a matter that demanded his attention, especially since it had occurred within the Imperial City and now even involved eighth grade War-Gods. God forbid any of these warriors from becoming infuriated by a defeat in vying for the treasure, then vent off anger by stirring up a mess in the Imperial City. That would truly bring about a disastrous chaos.

"Rest assured, Your Majesty. Owner Bu has the store's affairs under control. Both his solid background and trump card have been simply beyond my expectations." Xiao Meng drew in a deep breath and explained.

When it came to what Bu Fang had up his sleeves, he still couldn't help but shudder inside. That metallic lump puppet which could only break even with him back then now had the capability of seriously wounding an eighth grade War-God with a slice of the blade... that was plainly frightening.

As for that dog... the fat one lying sluggishly by the door all day long, this was the first time Xiao Meng witnessed this dog making a move. His maneuvers were shockingly menacing, nearly invincible.

He had always wondered whether this dog was a supreme dog. Today, his speculations were finally corroborated. This big black dog was indeed a formidable, majestic supreme beast!

Ji Chengxue's eyes instantly lit up. He was confined within the palace and had no idea what happened in the small alleyway. At this point he was finally able to gather some intelligence from Xiao Meng.

Xiao Meng laughed slightly bitterly and recounted to Ji Chengxue every little detail of the occurrences in the alleyway.

Within the main halls, Ji Chengxue listened to Xiao Meng's description with gaping eyes and a dropped jaw, once in a while drawing in a chilled breath.

...

Strong warriors left the Imperial City one after another. The capital, at one point flooded with War-Gods, had finally restored its peace and tranquility.

Wu Yunbai and Master Ah Wu were taken away by Zhan Kong. Before their departure, Wu Yunbai found serpent-man Ah Ni and reminded him of the promise he made her.

Serpent-man Ah Ni and serpent-man Yu Fu, alongside his daughter, planned to officially bid farewell to Bu Fang before leaving. Because of that, they decided to stay in the Imperial City for a few more days.

Zhao Musheng was badly injured by Zhan Kong's smack and had already fled the Imperial City. His whereabouts nowadays was a mystery. Not getting to participate in the dreadful confrontations within the small alleyway turned out to be a blessing in disguise. If Zhao Musheng was present at the battle of the alleyway, he may have found himself seriously wounded, if not reduced all together to a pond of blood.

After having achieved her breakthrough, Ni Yan dragged the tipsy old drunkard out of Bu Fang's store. Her absolute repugnance at both of them caused even Bu Fang to feel dumbstruck.

The battle at the alleyway of the Imperial City ended in a silent denouement. That clash of forces was incredibly horrendous. Just how many warriors had fallen before the doors of the store? Even the pavement of the small alleyway was stripped an even layer as a consequence of the fierce duels. Now that was simply appalling.

The brothers of the thirteen bandits were lucky survivors of that battle. If they hadn't scurried off fast enough, they would have also been rendered mists of blood by the terrifying black dog's aura.

These thirteen fellows were so traumatized they took flight overnight and returned to their hometown, the Mozhou province.

"The water is too deep in the cities, we'd be better off retreating to the countryside..." these words probably ran through their minds at that moment in time.

The night had fallen. A light breeze brushed by, adding to the chill in the air.

Two crescent moons hang from the sky, radiating magnificently to flaunt their splendiddness.

Surrounding the two full moons was a thick spread of stars twinkling, evoking the image of a vast, boundless sea. Such endless horizons filled one with infinite wonders.

The Imperial City, Fang Fang's Little Store.

Bu Fang shook his head, clearing up the dizziness that had rushed to his head, before pulling together the shutters and closing business for the day.

He directly retired to his room instead of setting foot in the kitchen first. After a hot shower, he had washed off the strong scent of alcohol from his body, and then stepped out of the steaming bathroom with squinted eyes.

Bu Fang draped a robe over his body, with his chest left bare, and walked out of the bathroom. He inhaled deeply and tossed his headful of damp hair, instantly sending splashes of water flying everywhere.

He felt much more clear-headed after the shower. He sat by the window and patted his slightly numb face. As a light breeze brushed past, his moist strands of hair became somewhat chilled as they slapped across his face.

Accompanied by the slightly cool night winds, Bu Fang's eyes became hazy as his mind focused. The solemn voice of the system began ringing within his head.

"Host, the system's reward has been issued, please observe."

The system's temporary tasks were always eccentric and unanticipated, such as using the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Fruits to create a dish this time. It was undoubtedly challenging given Bu Fang's current cooking abilities, and in completing the task his cooking improved a great deal. Every temporary task had proved beneficial to advancing Bu Fang's cooking skills.

Alas, the objective of the system was assisting Bu Fang to stand at the top of the food chain and become the God of Cooking in the Fantasy World.

To become a figure standing at the top of the hierarchical ladder, Bu Fang had to undergo numerous trainings. The system provided Bu Fang with a chance to cultivate different skill sets with each task. As Bu Fang's own rank advanced, the difficulty of these temporary tasks would also increase.

Bu Fang smiled knowingly and continued to keep his mind focused.

Host: Bu Fang

Gender: Male

Age: 21

True Energy Cultivation Level: Sixth Grade (Achieved the state of true energy materialization. As a man committed to becoming the God of Cooking in the Fantasy World, the host will face a difficult road ahead, filled with difficult challenges. Work hard, young man!)

Cooking Talent: Two Stars

Skills: Level Two Meteor Knife Technique (60/100), Level Two Big Dipper Carving Technique (0/100)

Instrument: Golden Dragon Bone Kitchen Knife (God of Cooking Set)

God of Cooking Cumulative Rating: Primary Level Chef (Cooking abilities have finally begun to shine. Talent has also been stimulated. Gaining mastery of Cutting and Carving Techniques. The path to becoming the God of Cooking has opened for you.)

System Level: Six Stars (Conversion ratio is at ninety percent. Host is allowed to capture ingredients. Host is allowed to take in cooking apprentices.)

System reward: recipe for Dragon Liver Popsicle and a fragment of the God of Cooking Set (2/3)

(System's reminder: The Gourmet Map of Another World has been activated. The host must visit a location on the map every week, study the local gourmet dishes of another world, and further complete the system's temporary tasks. Please expose yourself to the various local customs and

practices, grasp the diverse types of gourmet delicacies, and fully experience the culture of fine foods. The doors to becoming the God of Cooking at top of the food chain have opened for you.)

Bu Fang snapped back into reality and instantly wrinkled his eyebrows. Having advanced to sixth level Battle-Emperor, Bu Fang's abilities were truly enhanced. Yet, at the same time, it seemed like the system's demands were also increasing.

"The Gourmet Map of Another World? What is that?" Bu Fang asked in puzzlement.

"The Gourmet Map of Another World is a map the system has created specially for the host outlining the various gourmet delicacies across the realm. On it are also details of the various local customs and practices as well as descriptions of diverse culture of fine foods," the system replied solemnly.

Bu Fang was taken back. A gourmet map. But given the system's account, it sounded like he would need to travel across the entire Hidden Dragon Continent?

"As of now, the host's cultivation level only enables access to the map of the Light Wind Empire. As for that of the larger southern lands, the host must reach another breakthrough to retrieve." The system clarified.

Bu Fang nodded his head. His cultivation level had only reached sixth grade Battle-Emperor. If he were to encounter a fierce warrior, such as an eighth grade War-God, he would have a slim chance at defending himself.

"Alright, system, what did you mean by allowed to take cooking apprentices?" Bu Fang wrinkled his brows again and asked perplexedly.

"After activating the Gourmet Map of Another World, the host will be absent from the Light Wind Empire intermittently for short periods of time. The store will need helpers in the kitchen, and so the host will need to take on cooking apprentices. The host must teach him or her a signature dish of the store within a set amount of time."

Bu Fang tugged the corners of his lips. What the hell, "What is the set amount of time?"

"To be determined by the system's evaluation of the apprentice's talent," the system responded solemnly.

Bu Fang suddenly felt pain shooting up his ass. Take on apprentices... only the system could come up with something like that. But then again, it had its upsides. If he were to take a leave of absence from the Imperial City of the Light Wind Empire, the store didn't have to shut down business. The crystals earned from opening business directly affected his cultivation level, and in this sense it was convenient to have an apprentice.

However, the apprentice selection would be the next big problem.

"Temporary Task: The host must find two cooking apprentices and teach them the signature dishes of the store: Egg-Fried Rice, Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs, and Red Braised Meat. Task Reward: Recipe Journal."

Bu Fang wore a deadpan face. As expected... the system issued yet another temporary task. Couldn't one even catch a breath around here?

Chapter 236: You Are Outstanding, but You Are Too Young

Early morning next day, the sun shone beautifully.

Bu Fang got up, washed up, and stepped into the kitchen to begin his daily carving and cutting training. Both his cutting and carving techniques have reached second level capability and he had got quite proficient at this point.

He was able to twirl the knife in hands, and with a dazzling swirl of the blade, chop up ingredients at the speed of light. However, Bu Fang wasn't on top of his game today, his tightly knitted brows indicated that his mind was preoccupied with something else.

After practicing his cutting and carving techniques, Bu Fang began cooking Blacky's favorite dish, Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs.

Not after long, an intoxicating aroma of the sweet 'n' sour sauce drifted alongside the meaty fragrance, and dissipated from the kitchen into the entire store.

Bu Fang carried the Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs, opened the shutters to the store, and placed the blue and white ceramic bowl before a snoring Blacky. The doggy nose of this fat dog suddenly twitched. It opened its eyes, stared excitedly at the Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs, and couldn't help but stick out its tongue.

Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs, the Lord Dog's favorite.

Watching the tail-wagging Blacky wolf down the contents of the blue and white ceramic bowl, Bu Fang curled his lips. It was hard to imagine how this gluttonous fat dog was a horrific Supreme Beast that scared the wits out of an entire crowd yesterday.

After rubbing Blacky's smooth and immaculate fur, Bu Fang returned to the store. He pulled out a chair, placed it by the entrance, and lay down comfortably. With squinting eyes, he peered toward the sky out of the window.

The small alleyway was already filled with workers Ji Chengxue had sent down to repair the broken walls. The pavement of the alleyway was shattered into pieces, and the walls were also badly tattered.

There weren't too many of these workers, but they speedily fixed up the alleyway.

Fatty Jin and his heavyset troops flooded in with great vigor. They stayed away for the past few days, since Bu Fang's store was too unsafe given the encirclement of strong warriors. It forced Fatty Jin to hold his breath and walk with heavy steps whenever he passed by.

Having heard that the entire affair was officially over, he immediately gathered his friends to head for the store. They were prepared to satisfy their great longing for fine food.

"Morning Owner Bu, long time no see." Fatty Jin greeted Bu Fang warmly. With his eyes squinted, only a thin slit was left.

Bu Fang's body, still resting on the chair, suddenly stirred. He blinked his eyes as he stared at Fatty Jin. He studied him from top to bottom. Such a scrutinizing glance threw Fatty Jin off.

What was up with Owner Bu? Was there something irritating in his eyes? Fatty Jin's face presented an utter bewilderment. Why was Owner Bu behaving in such an odd way.

Bu Fang gaped at Fatty Jin and couldn't help thinking about the system's temporary task.

As for recruiting apprentices, he wondered whether this Fatty Jin might be qualified.

Given Fatty Jin's heavyset physique, he may certainly have great potentials. As a foodie, he might also be interested in cooking? Bu Fang thought to himself, and suddenly an obscure look flashed across his face.

The muscles on Fatty Jin's face trembled. Damn... Owner Bu's expression was terrifying. What the hell did he want? Why was he staring at this young master with such flirtatious eyes?

"What would you like to eat?" Bu Fang dropped his probing glance, stood up from the chair, and asked calmly.

Fatty Jin finally exhaled with relief. Now this was the Owner Bu he was accustomed to. Whatever happened before must be his hallucination.

Bu Fang took down Fatty Jin and his crew's orders, then turned around to head into the kitchen. As he started cooking, rich aroma quickly drifted out of the kitchen and lingered around the noses of his customers. It was absolutely intoxicating.

Bu Fang carried the dishes out of the kitchen and placed the Red Braised Meat that Fatty Jin had ordered in front of him. Then, he pulled over a chair and sat directly across from Fatty Jin.

Fatty Jin was just about to dig in but suddenly froze as he peered at Bu Fang, utterly confused.

"Owner... Owner Bu, do you want something from me?" Fatty Jin asked with a soft voice.

Bu Fang curled his lips and retained his composure as he gazed at Fatty Jin and asked, "Old Jin, how is the taste of this Red Braised Meat?"

"Excellent! Anything made by Owner Bu's hands is beyond delicious!" Fatty Jin smacked his lips and extended a thumbs up as he praised profusely.

Bu Fang's eyes instantly sparkled: "Say, would you like to eat this Red Braised Meat every day?"

Fatty Jin's eyes widened as they stared at Owner Bu excitedly, "What exactly does that mean?"

"Learn cooking from me, then you get to eat this Red Braised Meat every day," Bu Fang replied seriously.

After hearing Bu Fang's words, the thrill on Fatty's Jin face instantly froze, gradually faded, and was then replaced by a helpless look.

"Owner Bu, this can't do. I am a rough fellow. Cooking requires delicate work and attention to details, not something I can accomplish. It'll suffice for me to come in every day and enjoy the dish at ease."

Bu Fang was taken back. He didn't expect Fatty Jin to turn him down so quickly.

Didn't he like eating the Red Braised Meat? Then why not become a chef?

Just as Bu Fang was caught off guard, Ouyang Xiaoyi merrily skipped into the store. She put away the things in her hands and began preparing for today's work. It was all a familiar routine to her now.

Since Fatty Jin wasn't interested in learning how to cook... Bu Fang began diverting his attention elsewhere. His gaze landed on Ouyang Xiaoyi, who had just arrived at the store.

This lassie also had great potential, since she has basically been exposed to the wonderful atmosphere of the store on a daily basis...

"Xiaoyi, come here."

Bu Fang waved his hand at Ouyang Xiaoyi, who lifted up her head, glanced at Bu Fang with confusion, and walked toward him.

"Smelly boss, what do you want from me?" Ouyang Xiaoyi asked.

"Young lassie, would you like to drink Fish Head Tofu Soup every day?" Bu Fang asked with a solemn voice and a grave face.

Hearing Fish Head Tofu Soup, Ouyang Xiaoyi's eyes twinkled. She couldn't help but smack her lips. The delicious fish soup... was her absolute favorite.

"Of course!"

"Then, learn cooking from me, afterwards, you can drink Fish Head Tofu Soup every day," Bu Fang responded seriously.

"Learn cooking?" Ouyang Xiaoyi's eyes lit up even more. Owner Bu wanted to teach her cooking? This... was simply unbelievable.

"Yes, are you in or not?" Bu Fang asked coolly.

"Yes of course, why not?" Ouyang Xiaoyi squinted her eyes and stuck out her tongue. As a little foodie, she considered it a huge satisfaction to make gourmet delicacies with her own hand.

"Friendly notification: The system has evaluated Ouyang Xiaoyi's talent. For the host to teach Ouyang Xiaoyi Egg-Fried Rice, it will require a month's time."

The system's solemn voice rang in Bu Fang's head and offered him the alert.

Swoosh... it felt like an invisible arrow shot through Bu Fang's heart. A month... learning Egg-Fried Rice would require an entire month, and under the conditions that he was teaching her himself. How bad exactly was the cooking talent of this young lady?

Looks like this lassie was not fit to becoming a chef's apprentice... If he really selected her, he would end up exhausted.

"Um... lassie, I gave it a second thought. You are still too young right now and not yet suitable to become a chef. Why don't you continue along the path of a pretty little foodie." Bu Fang coughed lightly and blinked his eyes as he told Ouyang Xiaoyi.

"Smelly boss! Are you messing with me?!" Ouyang Xiaoyi was furious. What was the meaning of this smelly boss? Did he look down on this young lady?

Bu Fang stood up, his lips slightly curled, and patted Ouyang Xiaoyi's head, before explaining: "No, you are outstanding, but you are too young."

"I don't care, you said you would teach me..." Ouyang Xiaoyi pouted her lips angrily. She had high hopes for her cooking down the road and planned on making the Fish Head Tofu Soup herself. For all she cares, she could make two bowls, drink one, and throw the other one away. Since she made it herself, she had all the rights in the world to be unrestrained.

"Um... how about this, why don't you make a portion of Egg-Fried Rice when you go home, then bring it back tomorrow for my examination. If you pass my inspection, I'll take you in as a chef's apprentice, and teach you how to cook."

Ouyang Xiaoyi pinched Ouyang Xiaoyi's nose, causing the latter to humph with discontent.

"Remember what you just said! Don't go back on your promises!" Ouyang Xiaoyi remarked with exhilaration.

"Yes, I'll live up to my words," Bu Fang replied calmly.

He remained unperturbed. Given the system's evaluation of Ouyang Xiaoyi's talent, it would simply be preposterous... for her to present an edible Egg-Fried Rice. With that, his heart was at ease.

A great number of customers began filling the store, so Bu Fang had to return to his kitchen.

The excited Ouyang Xiaoyi could barely contain herself. How she wished badly to go home right now and whip up an Egg-Fried Rice that would shut this smelly boss' mouth and conquer his taste buds.

Bu Fang, on the other end, continued to beat his brains out... Who should he choose as an apprentice?

Chapter 237: Ouyang Xiaoyi's Egg-Fried Rice

The winter had gradually passed, leaving behind a spring breeze to embrace the Imperial City.

Spring rain splashed down ceaselessly, like thin strokes of hair fluttering between heaven and earth, reinvigorating the soils that had hibernated throughout the snow season.

In the small alleyway, both father and daughter serpent-man, alongside Ah Ni wagging his serpent tail, headed toward Bu Fang's store amidst the delightful spring rain. They were instantly hit with the rich aroma of food once stepping into the store, leaving them intoxicated.

Bu Fang's store was always filled with such irresistible fragrance and Owner Bu's dishes were so exquisite that they captivated their consumers.

However, the object of their visit today was to bid farewell to Bu Fang. Yu Feng originally had plans to become the guardian of the store, but after having experienced the horrifying events of yesterday, he quickly grasped just how ludicrous was this notion.

Bu Fang didn't need his protection at all. Or, in other words, what he could offer as defense couldn't possibly reach Bu Fang's level.

No matter that mysterious metallic lump of a puppet, or the black Supreme Dog scaring people out of their wits, none could serpent-man Yu Feng consider a possible match.

Therefore, simply put, his proposal of guardianship was delusional and impractical.

Since the store didn't need his protection, they had no reasons to stay any longer in the Imperial City. The Imperial City was foreign lands to them, and what they longed was to return home to the Serpent-Men Tribes.

Bu Fang walked out of the kitchen and instantly caught sight of the three serpent-men standing in his store. The father and daughter, as well as Ah Ni, expressed their sincere gratitude toward Bu Fang. If it weren't for Bu Fang this time, the serpent-man Yu Feng would probably never wake up.

Yet Bu Fang merely waved his hand. Rescuing the serpent-man Yu Feng was something Bu Fang had promised the Great Elder. A deal was a deal, so he didn't think too much about it.

He squinted his eyes and scanned the three serpent-men. Bu Fang directly skipped past the blockhead serpent Ah Ni, who had well developed limbs, albeit three instead of four, but the head of a moron. His gaze rested on the father and daughter combination, more precisely, serpent-woman Yu Fu.

Bu Fang's scrutiny made all three serpent-men feel restless. Yu Fu, in particular, sank into deep puzzlement. She had no idea why Bu Fang was looking at her this way.

"Owner Bu, is there something stuck to my body?" Yu Fu peered down at herself in bewilderment. Everything seemed normal enough.

Bu Fang twitched his mouth and met Yu Fu's glance with his eyes.

"System, how is the cooking talent of this serpent-woman?" Bu Fang asked the system in his mind.

The system remained silent for a while, and then responded: "Given the system's evaluation, serpent-woman Yu Fu's cooking talent is up to standard. Teaching her Egg-Fried Rice will require the host one and a half days."

One and a half days! Bu Fang's eyes lit up. It seemed like this serpent-woman Yu Fu was rather qualified. She could definitely live up to the role of the store's apprentice.

"Ahem... Yu Fu, I'm wondering if you are interested in learning cooking at all?" Bu Fang asked.

Once Bu Fang uttered these words, all these serpent-men were dumbstruck. What did Owner Bu mean by this?

Bu Fang didn't want to give any further explanations and simply looked at the three in a calm manner. Of course, his gaze mainly focused on Yu Fu.

Yu Fu suddenly became agitated, and her beautiful face turned rather red. She felt very much uneasy under Bu Fang's fixated scrutiny.

"I... could I do that?" Yu Fu felt all jumpy and jittery inside.

Reminded of the gourmet delicacies in Bu Fang's store, each so exquisite in taste and enchanting in smell, the serpent-woman Yu Fu couldn't help but pucker her ruby red lips.

"Um, yes you can. But to become my chef's apprentice you'll need to pass a test. Tomorrow noon, make a portion of Egg-Fried Rice and bring it to me for taste testing. If it reaches the standards in my heart, I will teach you cooking and allow you to become the store's apprentice," Bu Fang replied solemnly.

Yu Fu sensed Bu Fang's seriousness. Her petite face instantly froze, then she shook her serpent tail and gravely nodded her head.

Ah Ni widened his eyes. What was going on, did Yu Fu just become the chef's apprentice of this store? Did this mean that in the future Yu Fu would be able to cook gourmet delicacies as delicious as those offered by the store?

Just thinking about this caused Ah Ni to drool.

"Owner Bu, how about me? Can I learn cooking from you?" Ah Ni patted his muscular chest and shouted.

Bu Fang flicked a glance at him as the system's voice rang in his mind. Ah Ni's talent couldn't even compare with Ouyang Xiaoyi's... this big bloke should stick with eating gourmet delicacies.

Yu Feng never thought Yu Fu could encounter such good fortunes. He ran this through his mind quickly. There was a Supreme Beast and a mysterious puppet in the store, therefore her safety was definitely guaranteed. Once back to the Serpent-Men Tribes, he had plans to start avenging himself. By then, the Serpent-Men Tribes would fall into chaos, and leaving Yu Fu here instead could serve as a kind of protection for her.

Yu Feng squinted his eyes, but he already had a clear answer in his heart.

The serpent-men left and returned to their inn.

"Father, should I stay?" Yu Feng widened her eyes and looked toward Yu Feng. She understood clearly that if she stayed, she would have to part ways with Yu Feng and Ah Ni.

There weren't too many strong warriors in the Serpent-Men Tribes, and so Yu Feng and Ah Ni couldn't be absent for too long.

"My child, this are your good fortunes. Owner Bu is no ordinary person. To learn cooking from him is truly a blessing for you." Yu Feng smiled and patted Yu Feng's head.

"Yeah, Yu Fu, if it weren't for Owner Bu giving me the cold shoulders, I would follow him till the end of the world. With Owner Bu... there'll always be meat to feast on!" Ah Ni scratched the back of his head and chuckled.

Yu Fu suddenly didn't know whether to cry or laugh.

Yu Feng became more serious as he glanced at Yu Fu and said: "So, my lassie, you should diligently learn cooking from Owner Bu. Perhaps you may become the first grand chef of the serpent-people."

Having gained father's encouragement, Yu Fu instantly nodded her head with a serious expression across her face.

Therefore, under Yu Feng's supervision, they borrowed the kitchen from the inn owner and got ready to make Egg-Fried Rice. Since this was to be tested by Owner Bu, Yu Fu took this task very seriously.

In terms of other selections for the apprentice, Bu Fang had more names in his mind. This included Juan'Er, who loved making egg tarts, Ni Yan, who often made dishes for his evaluation, the gentle and refined Xiao Yanyu, as well as the foodie Xiao Xiaolong. These were all possible choices.

It was a pity that business was about to close for the day, yet none of them had visited the store today.

After bidding farewell to Bu Fang, the loli Ouyang Xiaoyi dashed out of the store like the wind. She blew past the alleyway and rushed toward the Ouyang Quarters.

She couldn't wait to cook up a delicious plate of Egg-Fried Rice and prove Owner Bu wrong.

Bu Fang watched as Ouyang Xiaoyi left in a hurry, and curled his lips with a knowing look. He closed the shutters of the store, returned to his kitchen, and took out some ingredients. It was time to start practicing his cooking.

...

Ouyang Quarters.

Tonight, the Ouyang family shall not sleep.

Outside of the kitchen, everyone from the Ouyang family paced around in anxiety. Grandpa Ouyang brushed his long white beard, with his eyes peering at the well-lit kitchen from time to time. He sighed, shook his head, and continued with his heavy treads.

Great General Ouyang Zongheng also emitted a long breath, imitating Grandpa Ouyang's sigh as he paced on.

The Three Ouyang Barbarians stood by like frozen sculptures as they stared straight into the kitchen.

"My lord, do you think Xiaoyi will succeed?" Ouyang Xiaoyi's mother asked Ouyang Zongheng as she clutched her handkerchief and peered into the busy shadow within the kitchen worriedly.

"This is Xiaoyi's first time at cooking. But that lassie has inherited this general's cooking talent. She will definitely make an Egg-Fried Rice so incredible that it will startle the universe and move the gods!" Ouyang Zongheng consoled Xiaoyi's mother, and then patted his own chest confidently.

Grandpa Ouyang flicked him a glance and laughed coldly: "What do you mean by inherited your cooking talent. She clearly got it from this old man. I remember the days this old man accompanied Emperor Changfeng on an expedition to the Yellow Celestial Sect. In that battle, we ended up short of food. His Majesty was left empty-stomached all day, causing this old man to worry about his Majesty's health. And so I went into dangerous territories with a spear to butcher a fifth grade spirit beast. I cooked that spirit beast on the spot, that taste... tsk tsk, I still feel intoxicated just thinking about it.

"Not that I talk big, but that grilled meat was simply delicious. It is only... ahem still inches away... from Owner Bu's Red Braised Meat." Grandpa Oyang sank into contemplation.

The old man rubbed his beard as he recounted. When he got to the best parts of the story, he even waved his hand around in excitement.

Suddenly, a tremendous boom caused everyone standing outside of the kitchen to jump up in surprise.

The lights within the kitchen flickered, after which an odd fragrance drifted outwards.

All members of the Ouyang family felt their eyes darken.

Creak.

The doors to the kitchen finally opened. Ouyang Xiaoyi's pale face was covered with streaks of black marks. She scuttled out of the kitchen like a tiny black cat, carrying a ceramic bowl in her hands and a face full of excitement.

"Grandpa, father, mother... come give it a taste. This is my first time making Egg-Fried Rice!"

Chapter 238: That Bowl of Egg-Fried Charcoal

A weird odor drifted out of the kitchen, smelling like something half-burnt and faintly bitter. It was a scent that put a frown on everyone's face.

"Ah, my lassie, why are you in such a sorry state?" Grandpa Ouyang felt his heart ache when he saw Ouyang Xiaoyi charging out of the kitchen covered in ashes.

But Ouyang Xiaoyi's eyes were sparkling. They shone brightly as excitement flickered across her eyes.

She wiped off the ashen marks from her face, chuckled, and then raised the porcelain plate in her hands up to Grandpa Ouyang's nose. "Grandpa, come here and have a taste. This is my first time cooking Egg-Fried Rice!" She said excitedly.

"Ah, sure thing, let your grandpa give it a try." Grandpa Ouyang patted Ouyang Xiaoyi's head fondly with loving eyes. He took over the porcelain spoon handed to him by a nearby maid and glanced at the porcelain plate that Ouyang Xiaoyi shoved before his eyes with hesitation.

"This..."

On the porcelain plate sat a lump of steaming... um, oddly colored... rice. The grains of rice gave off a blackish hue, and somewhere amidst that were also traces of red. A huge slab of over-cooked egg was mixed within the rice, coming off as rather eye-catching.

What was this? Grandpa Ouyang was baffled. The hand holding his porcelain spoon quivered slightly.

"A typical Egg-Fried Rice demands that every grain of rice comes with a certain amount of egg. You have chosen a convenient path here, an entire slab of egg with a huge lump of rice. More importantly...why was the color of this rice so peculiar?"

Gulp.

Grandpa's long beard shook a little as he swallowed a mouthful of saliva.

"Grandpa... have a taste! Go on!" Ouyang Xiaoyi was somehow very much confident in herself as she egged him on.

"Of course. Since this is the first time my little lassie has cooked a dish, then... grandpa shall have a bite. Just one though." Grandpa Ouyang's heart even trembled as he dug up a spoonful of rice. With a stealthy shake of the hand, nearly a third of the content fell out of the spoon. That move, alas, went unnoticed.

He brought the spoon before his nose and gave it a sniff. In that very instant, a burnt, pungent smell gushed forward. Grandpa Ouyang's lips trembled, he felt a dreadful sensation inside. "Lassie... Grandpa is really going to eat it now." Grandpa Ouyang flared his nostril and announced.

"Grandpa! I'm waiting to win Owner Bu over with this Egg-Fried Rice!" Ouyang Xiaoyi wiped her face again and declared with the utmost confidence.

Grandpa Ouyang could only force a smile. Win him over? Murdering Owner Bu was more like it...

How satirical would it be if Owner Bu, having survived an eighth grade War-God, ended up poisoned to death by her bowl of Egg-Fried Rice.

"Eat!" Ouyang Xiaoyi glared.

Grandpa Ouyang immediately poured the entire spoon of Egg-Fried Rice into his mouth.

All of a sudden, the colors from Grandpa Ouyang's face drained. His complexion changed three times in a single breath, turning from white to red, and then from red to purple, and finally from purple to black.

Creak, creak...

Grandpa Ouyang, with watered eyes, summoned up great courage and chewed the food ferociously. Loud crispy sounds echoed from his mouth, much like the noise of hard rocks colliding into each other.

In this very moment, Grandpa Ouyang's heart was filled with all sorts of mixed feelings. It was much like an assortment of sauces getting knocked over and spilling everywhere. He could taste astringency, bitterness, numbness, and even a reeking stink...

The only one missing was savoriness!

There was simply nobody else who could cook up an Egg-Fried Rice like this! You are the one and only... my lassie!

Grandpa Ouyang's entire body trembled. He took several steps back, took a deep breath, and finally forced himself to swallow the Egg-Fried Rice in his mouth.

"How is it? How is the taste?" Ouyang Xiaoyi asked curiously.

"Oh, a simply electrifying experience. It is like burning flames once down your stomach. After swallowing, I felt as if I have risen from the ashes. You have fully inherited this gift of cooking from your father." Grandpa Ouyang gave his critique with a blank face.

Ouyang Zongheng was dumbstruck, very much puzzled at what his father just said.

"My lassie, grandpa is tired. I'm afraid I'll have to go get some rest. Let your father and brothers have a taste and ask for their feedback." Grandpa Ouyang wrinkled his face and suggested with an almost weeping tone.

Ouyang Xiaoyi felt more excited than ever. It seemed like her Egg-Fried Rice turned out pretty great. Grandpa's review was uplifting! Who would have thought he could feel completely revived after eating her food.

Grandpa Ouyang was already nowhere to be seen when she looked up again. Xiaoyi was baffled, but instantly turned her attention towards Ouyang Zongheng and the three Ouyang barbarians.

This was meant to be a sleepless night. The Ouyang Quarter stayed brightly lit as people ran back and forth between the bedroom and bathroom all night long...

A couple more small explosions erupted in the kitchen. Smoke lingered about as weird scents drifted out.

...

The morning sun had finally shot across the horizon, exuding warm rays of light. It appeared to have resurrected the entire earth, as green grass sprouted from the fields right outside of the Imperial City. After a long winter's sleep, they had finally grown with great vitality, embracing the cool spring breeze.

The streets of the Imperial City were bustling with pedestrians as street vendors peddled their goods with loud hollers.

In the small alleyway, rested Fang Fang's Little Store.

Bu Fang pulled open his doors and enjoyed the cool, comforting morning air. He couldn't help but draw in a deep breath, and then stretched out his body.

"Blacky, time for breakfast." Bu Fang returned to the kitchen and then came out with a plate of Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs, placing it in front of Blacky.

He pulled over a chair for himself and sat by the door, gazing at the floating clouds in the sky with great leisure.

Time was seemingly frozen at this moment. Bu Fang could only hear the faint chewing sounds of that lazy Blacky wolfing down its Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs.

Leisure moments like these were always so short-lived. Once the first customer stepped in, the store began its day of busy business.

An aromatic, steaming hot Golden Shumai was carried out. Sauce trickled down the pieces of shumai, causing one to salivate.

Lees Fish, drenched with the fragrance of brewed wine, was also carried out by Bu Fang and placed on the table. This was a dish that easily stirred everyone's appetite.

The fame of Fang Fang's Little Store had spread throughout the entire Imperial City. Many people knew of this mystical store. Not only did it have tasty gourmet delicacies and spectacular fine wine, it also had impressive strength.

Cheerful footsteps echoed in the alleyway, tap tap tap.

Today, Ouyang Xiaoyi was dressed in a pink silk dress that made her look like she floated in the air while running. Her delicate face was flushing as she blinked her beautiful eyes. One could tell she was brimming with excitement.

In her arms was a red wood food container. Ouyang Xiaoyi treated it like a precious treasure. Her gaze landed on the container from time to time in the most adorable manner.

"Smelly boss, I'm here!" Ouyang Xiaoyi shouted loudly the moment she stepped into the store.

The customers of the store were already familiar with Xiaoyi and all greeted her with friendly smiles. Ouyang Xiaoyi also beamed back at them. When someone asked about her food container out of curiosity, she merely tilted her nose and wagged her fingers mysteriously.

"This is a secret."

Bu Fang walked out of the kitchen and cast a puzzled look at Ouyang Xiaoyi. When he caught sight of the food container in her hands, his face instantly froze.

"Surely this lassie didn't actually go back and cook up an Egg-Fried Rice..." Bu Fang had on a poker face. However, reminded of the system's evaluation of Ouyang Xiaoyi's cooking talent, he suddenly had a very bad feeling.

"Smelly boss! You said if my Egg-Fried Rice could conquer your taste buds, you will take me as a chef's apprentice!" Ouyang Xiaoyi squinted her eyes and giggled delightfully.

This was something that needed much more deliberation... Bu Fang wanted to tell her this. However, he tilted his head, gave it another thought, and nodded.

"My Egg-Fried Rice is in this very food container! Smelly boss, don't you want to have a bite?" Ouyang Xiaoyi patted the red wood food container in her hands, then crooked her finger at Bu Fang with a smile.

The customers nearby became instantly intrigued. Was this Ouyang lassie trying to challenge Owner Bu's cooking?

"Owner Bu, our orders can wait. Let's have a taste of Xiaoyi's food first." Someone proposed.

Bu Fang, who was just looking for an excuse to turn her down, rolled his eyes at that customer.

Alas, Bu Fang had to comply with her request.

Ouyang Xiaoyi's eyes sparked and as she placed the food container on the table. She uncovered the lid under numerous pairs of curious eyes.

In that very moment, an awful pungent odor drifted out of the box.

The scent was extremely strong, so pervasive that even the fragrance of countless gourmet dishes in the store couldn't overpower this unparalleled smell. Now that was frightening.

The customers' eyes widened. What the hell was this? Why could there be such an awful smell in the world?

The faces of many customers darkened. They all stepped back and took deep breaths.

Bu Fang's face froze. There was definitely an ugly shade spread across his complexion.

However, Ouyang Xiaoyi didn't seem to notice the bewildered facial expressions of those around her. She carefully took out the plate of Egg-Fried Charcoal from the food container...

Bu Fang's eyes narrowed. His heart shuddered as he gulped down a mouthful of saliva.

Lassie... judging by the looks of this dish, you are already a rising star in the field of dark cuisine—or in other words, terrible food. Can we stop... with this nonsense?

Chapter 239: A Chef's Confidence

Serpent-woman Yu Fu wagged her tail as she made her way to Fang Fang's Little Store. She also held a food container in her hands though she wore an uneasy expression on her face.

In the food container was the Egg-Fried Rice she had cooked. Bu Fang had said the Egg-Fried Rice must meet his expectations before he would take her as his apprentice. Although Yu Fu cooked from time to time back in the Serpent-Men Tribes, she had never been officially trained in cooking. Hence, she had no idea whether this Egg-Fried Rice could pass the test.

Upon entering the store, Yu Fu sensed an eerie atmosphere.

The customers of the store were all trying to conceal the snickers on their faces. That miserable expression between a laugh and a cry made them look like they were constipated.

Ouyang Xiaoyi sat on a seat nearby in anger. Her cheek bulged into a pout, clearly displaying her discontent.

Bu Fang, on the other end, calmly walked out of the kitchen, placed a plate of aromatic Egg-Fried Rice before Ouyang Xiaoyi, and lightly patted the latter's head.

Ouyang Xiaoyi couldn't be easily appeased as she continued to ignore Bu Fang out of anger. She simply grabbed a porcelain spoon and wolfed down the Egg-Fried Rice. That wrath made it seem like Bu Fang had just become her archenemy. Such a scene made it all the more difficult for the customers around her to hide their true emotions.

"Owner... Owner Bu," Yu Fu called out to him self-consciously.

Bu Fang turned around. Seeing serpent-woman Yu Fu, his eyes instantly sparkled, "Hey, there you are. Did you bring the Egg-Fried Rice? If so, I can give it a taste."

Yu Fu's cooking talents were yards ahead of Ouyang Xiaoyi's. That was why Bu Fang actually looked forward to Yu Fu's Egg-Fried Rice.

As for Ouyang Xiaoyi's Egg-Fried Rice... a lingering fear remained in Bu Fang's heart. That incredibly scary appearance and violently atrocious smell plunged one into a kind of ineffable... sorrow.

It had never occurred to Bu Fang that someone could make such a terrible Egg-Fried Rice... In fact one could say it was a rather formidable yet incredible talent. Truly a rising star in the field of dark cuisine.

Bu Fang naturally hoped Yu Fu's Egg-Fried Rice wouldn't be as horrifying as Ouyang Xiaoyi's Egg-Fried Charcoal, a dark cuisine dish that made one lose the will to live.

Hearing Bu Fang's inquiry, Yu Fu nodded her head, found an empty spot, and put down the food container in her hands.

The surrounding customers lit their eyes again. What was going on with Owner Bu? Why was there yet another Egg-Fried Rice in the house...

Bu Fang pulled over a chair and sat down. He peered at Yu Fu, who nervously removed the lid from her food container. Once uncovered, the fragrance of egg mixing with rice instantly burst forth from the container.

The customers immediately broke into a commotion. Simply the scent was much better than that of Ouyang Xiaoyi's masterpiece—at least this one smelled like a normal Egg-Fried Rice.

A typical Egg-Fried Rice was supposed to emit such a strong fragrance once it was done.

To be able to make a dish so bizarre, it could be said that Ouyang Xiaoyi was somewhat "gifted".

On the white porcelain plate was a portion of Egg-Fried Rice. The color itself wasn't that appealing and instead gave off a darken hue. It certainly couldn't compare with Bu Fang's almost radiating Egg-Fried Rice, but since this was the work of Yu Fu, it could be excusable.

Bu Fang's face didn't change much. He merely nodded lightly, grabbed a porcelain spoon, and dug up some Egg-Fried Rice. He brought the spoon close to his nose for a sniff. Sensing that rich aroma, he approved it quietly in his heart.

Ouyang Xiaoyi, holding the Egg-Fried Rice made by Bu Fang, also turned to the scene, eating the food without being convinced.

Bu Fang ate a spoonful of Egg-Fried Rice. As he chewed it carefully, the wonderful aroma of egg lingered in his mouth. The taste was just right, neither too salty nor too bland. Though the quality of the rice was lacking, it was cooked to perfection. The grains of rice bounced between his teeth once they entered his lips.

"Although the ingredients selected are simply awful, your grasp of flavor and degree of heating are on point. Both the fragrance of egg and rice were fully delivered. Although not every grain of rice was meticulously cloaked by eggs, what you have achieved is still acceptable given your current capabilities..."

Bu Fang always rambled on when it came to food critiquing. He had a lot to say and would become wordy as he went on and on. He also showed no mercy as he ruthlessly pointed out every shortcoming.

Yu Fu nodded along. The expression on her face switched from anxiety to placidity, and finally to disappointment.

Her Egg-Fried Rice had just been destroyed by Bu Fang's words. Seeing it had so many flaws, there was a slim chance she could become Bu Fang's apprentice... She had failed, no big surprise there.

"Be confident. As a chef, you must feel self-assured and have faith in your dishes. Perhaps your food is not the most delicious, but you have given it your all. Your devotion, concentration, and confidence will influence your dishes and give them an extra touch of flavors."

Hearing Bu Fang's words, Ouyang Xiaoyi immediately became indignant. She stuffed her mouth with Bu Fang's Egg-Fried Rice and widened her eyes before shouting: "I have enough confidence! I think my Egg-Fried Rice tastes..."

"You are blindly overconfident..." Bu Fang flicked a glance at an argumentative Ouyang Xiaoyi and interrupted her.

You turned a dish of Egg-Fried Rice into Egg-Fried Charcoal... Where the hell did you even get your self-assurance?

Ouyang Xiaoyi was taken back. She humphed and went back to chewing the Egg-Fried Rice in her mouth. She had to admit that compared with the smelly boss's Egg-Fried Rice, hers still had some room for improvement... um, a lot of room for improvement.

"Though there are many flaws in this Egg-Fried Rice, it is still satisfactory and just managed to meet my expectations. Come back to the store tomorrow. I will start teaching you how to make Egg-Fried Rice," Bu Fang announced.

Yu Fu lifted up her head in surprise and peered toward Bu Fang. Did this mean she could become Owner Bu's apprentice?

"I feel mistreated!" Ouyang Xiaoyi was furious. She glared at Bu Fang in fury.

Bu Fang merely patted her on the head, then stood up and headed back to the kitchen.

"It doesn't matter whether you find that unacceptable. When it comes to cooking, innate talent plays a big role." Bu Fang left for the kitchen and waved his hands as he replied her.

Ouyang Xiaoyi stamped her feet angrily as she stared at Bu Fang's back. She grunted and stuffed another spoonful of Egg-Fried Rice into her mouth.

Yu Fu, on the other hand, covered her mouth as she couldn't help smiling.

She was suddenly a little curious about Xiaoyi's Egg-Fried Rice. Why did it get such a cold-shoulder from Owner Bu?

...

Imperial Palace, the main halls.

Eunuch Lian Fu stood within the main halls, with his middle finger and thumb pinched together. Beside him stood numerous figures, including Xiao Meng, Yang Mo, Ouyang Zongheng, and many other fierce warriors of the empire.

Ji Chengxue sat upon his throne, chin in his hands and eyebrows firmly knitted.

"You Majesty, King Yu has fled from the imperial mausoleum and is nowhere to be found. Given the intelligence, he has been snatched by forces from the Mahayana Island." Xiao Meng cupped his hands in deference toward Ji Chengxue and reported with a solemn face.

Ji Chengyu's escape from the imperial mausoleum was no trivial matter. Back when the Imperial City was flooded with seventh grade warriors, Ji Chengxue found himself preoccupied with that dangerous situation and had to neglect this incident. Now that it was over, he finally had the energy to take care of Ji Chengyu.

"The sect of Mahayana Island is a real pain in the neck. At the beginning there's that mischievous Zhao Musheng, and now they have also taken King Yu. Are they seeking the aid of King Yu to challenge the Light Wind Empire? That is simply foolish nonsense," Ji Chengxue asserted coldly.

"Your Majesty, your old servant sees it this way. Ji Chengyu was sentenced by the late emperor to confinement at the imperial mausoleum. His escape is equivalent to a prison break, and hence a blatant violation of the royal order. That is a serious felony and so he must be captured and punished severely."

Numerous court ministers seconded this motion, deepening the frown between Ji Chengxue's brows.

The Mahayana Island belonged to one of the ten oldest sects. Ruling out the Celestial Arcanum Sect, this Mahayana Island was the next most powerful force in town. If the Imperial City wanted to get rid of this Mahayana Island, it would need to pay a price Ji Chengxue wasn't willing to bear.

He had just inaugurated the throne and there were still hundreds of things to do before the empire fully recovered from the devastation. His reputation amongst the people had yet to peak. In fact, he hadn't even obtained half of the support Emperor Changfeng was able to garner.

He dared not mobilize an army carelessly, all for a single Ji Chengyu.

Yet, as long as he was out there somewhere, Ji Chengyu would prove to be an unpredictable and unsettling existence. Once his cultivation was restored, and given his talent as well as reputation, he could easily summon soldiers to form an army. At that time, he would become a huge prick in the flesh.

However, Ji Chengxue wasn't too bothered. No matter how strong Ji Chengyu could become, he remained too inferior to truly threaten the entire Light Wind Empire. Without first-rated power projection, he could not harm the empire.

"Your Majesty, King Yu got away all because of this old servant. I am to be blamed to a certain extent, and so I ask for your permission to go capture King Yu myself." Lian Fu suddenly opened his mouth, shocking everyone nearby.

Ji Chengxue was astonished as well, as he had never expected Lian Fu to step out.

"Your Majesty, please grant me permission to capture King Yu. In disobeying the late emperor's ruling, he has also insulted and disrespected the late emperor. This old servant must step forward and make him understand that the dignity of the late emperor brooks no offense." Liam Fu's piercing voice resounded in the halls. He pinched his thumb and middle finger together as he declared this gravely.

Chapter 240: Owner Bu's Kitchen

In the main halls, everyone held their breath and peered toward Ji Chengxue, who sat on the throne. They all wanted to know how he would respond to Lian Fu's proposal. If he really allowed Lian Fu to go capture Ji Chengyu, this could constitute on some level as fratricide.

Ji Chengxue fell into deep contemplation. He wavered, unable to make a final decision. They were brothers, after all. Making such a choice was tortuous for him.

But if they left Ji Chengyu out there, he would become an evil foe sooner or later. Once he acquired enough strength and accumulated enough power, he would surely make a comeback. He definitely wouldn't allow Ji Chengxue to sit comfortably on the throne and continue his reign.

"I approve."

After a long time, Ji Chengxue finally muttered these words. Then, he closed his eyes and said no more. Everyone else in the halls kept their silence.

The meeting at the main halls had officially ended. As the top ministers of the empire emptied out of the court, Ji Chengxue suddenly stopped Xiao Meng, leaving the general rather confused.

Ji Chengxue's body stirred. He stood up and paced around the halls. A dark trace of gloominess flickered in his eyes.

...

The spring rain washed the earth again, leaving the sky rather dull due to the lack of sunshine.

Outside the walls of the Imperial City, Ji Chengxue and Xiao Meng, both dressed in casual clothing, sending Lian Fu on his way. Watching as Lian Fu's figure faded away, they emitted a long sigh.

Within the imperial household, fratricidal killings were not unusual. Only this was a case where the atrocity would not cease even after Ji Chengxue had assumed the throne.

Ji Chengxue turned around with hands behind his back and walked on the long streets of the Imperial City. The streets were bustling with people, all busy as bees. Now that the Spring Festival was officially over, the residents of the Imperial City resumed their daily lives, working from sunrise to sunset.

Although Ji Chengxue was the emperor, not everybody could recognize him. In fact, he was much like an average pedestrian roaming through the streets, passing by civilians who were swamped with work.

The Carefree Mansion was located in a remote corner of the Imperial City.

Ji Chengxue arrived before the building but stood there motionlessly for a while. Behind him, Xiao Meng traced Ji Chengxue's glance and also peered at the Carefree Mansion. He sighed quietly in his heart.

"General Xiao, let's go take a look inside." After proposing this, Ji Chengxue walked toward the mansion with his hands behind his back.

A piece of royal token was displayed, shooing away the guards who were ready to intercept their entrance. The two of them then stepped into the mansion smoothly.

The mansion was delicately decorated, further embellished by the jingling giggles of young women that drifted out of the courtyard. Amidst this circle of beautiful women was a burly figure enjoying his time.

"My king, there's someone here." Suddenly, a slim beauty glanced at the faraway Ji Chengxue and Xiao Meng in confusion and informed a Ji Chengan still immersed in frolics.

Ji Chengan, taken back, twisted his head around to inspect, only to see Ji Chengxue standing as straight as a longsword. He narrowed his eyes and smiled knowingly.

"Just ignore them, let's continue." Ji Chengan merely smiled lightly. He turned around and pulled a beauty with curvy figures into his arms as he burst out into a cheerful laughter. That cackle continued to reverberate within the entire Carefree Mansion.

You wanted my life to be all about leisure and fun, right? Then I'll do just that.

Xiao Meng sighed softly. Ji Chengxue's eyes darkened, but his face remained deadpan.

"Let's go." Ji Chengxue shot a cold glance at Ji Chengan, who continued to dance among his swarm of ladies, and turned around to leave.

Actually, becoming a carefree king wasn't half bad for a former crown prince all high and mighty... At least, he didn't need to face the cruel bloodshed amongst brothers.

...

The next day, serpent-woman Yu Fu woke up extra early. Her father and Ah Ni had both left the Imperial City for the Serpent-Men Tribes already. She was now alone in the Imperial City, yet instead of fear, she was filled with excitement.

This was because she was about to learn cooking from Owner Bu.

Yu Fu carefully dolled herself up before the mirror, hoping to display her most beautiful self. She was already an outstanding beauty back in the Serpent-Men Tribes. Putting in a bit more effort made her so attractive she could take someone's breath away.

She didn't put on too much make-up since she knew Owner Bu would disapprove it, arguing that it would ruin one's sensitivity to the natural scent of food.

She came out of the inn, unfurled her oil-paper umbrella, and wriggled her green scaled tail all the way to the small alleyway.

The Imperial City was much more prosperous and lively than the Serpent-Men Tribes. However, the human residents here rushed through the streets in a hurry, none offering friendly greetings like warmhearted neighbors as was the case back in the Serpent-Men Tribes. This, in particular, made her feel a little alienated.

Holding on to her oil-paper umbrella, she strolled through the crowded streets of the Imperial City all alone.

Spring showers sent droplets of rain down to the earth and occasionally down one's neck. It brought a refreshing coolness that made one invigorated.

Making her way down the alleyway, Yu Fu finally reached the entrance to the store. The big black dog before the door was stuffing his face with the Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs in a porcelain bowl. Yu Fu smiled to herself and entered the store with her swaying tail.

Ouyang Xiaoyi, who was taking down the orders of a customer, caught sight of her and immediately twisted her head away with a snort.

Bu Fang walked out of the kitchen. He dried his hands and nodded at Yu Fu.

"You'll have to wait for a bit. Once the store is closed for business today, I can teach you cooking. In the meantime, please help Xiaoyi with the customers' orders." Bu Fang informed her.

Yu Fu nodded obediently, wagged her tail, and appeared by Ouyang Xiaoyi's side.

Ouyang Xiaoyi turned her head away in discontent. This was obvious jealousy. She was still fuming about the smelly boss choosing Yu Fu over her.

Yu Fu didn't mind this at all. She had been to the store many times and was familiar with Ouyang Xiaoyi's temper. Knowing this girl's nature, a smile would reappear on her face in no time.

Bu Fang glanced at them, curling the corners of his mouth, and retreated to the kitchen.

"Owner Bu, Red Braised Meat, Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs and Fish Head Tofu Soup, an order of each." Yu Fu's soft, comforting voice hit Bu Fang's ears.

Bu Fang was suddenly at loss and couldn't easily adjust to this change. He was used to Ouyang Xiaoyi's reckless shouting all day long. Now this was a change of water.

It was no big matter. After a momentarily relapse, Bu Fang began focusing on his cooking again.

Rich aroma wafted out. It added to the atmosphere of the store.

As the sun set, the busy store was finally closed for business. Bu Fang pulled over a chair, sat by the entrance, and enjoyed a short break. He watched the sunset and sighed comfortably.

Inside the store, Yu Fu and Xiaoyi sat side by side with their heads pressed together, giggling occasionally. Ouyang Xiaoyi's big eyes had narrowed into slits as she laughed merrily.

After resting for a while, Ouyang Xiaoyi waved goodbye to Bu Fang and Yu Fu. She left the store and skipped back to the Ouyang's Quarter.

Only Bu Fang and Yu Fu, who had become anxious and reserved again, were left in the store.

"Don't be nervous, take it easy. Your mood can have tremendous effects on your cooking." Bu Fang glanced at the agitated Yu Fu and uttered calmly.

Yu Fu's body instantly stiffened. She bowed to Bu Fang and answered him solemnly.

Bu Fang curled his lips, this girl...

"I will teach you what you practiced yesterday, Egg-Fried Rice. Only my Egg-Fried Rice is very different from what you've taught yourself yesterday. Hopefully you'll get the hang of this quickly." Bu Fang stood up, stretched his body, and announced.

Yu Fu's body froze again. She bowed to Bu Fang once more and answered him with a "yes" in a serious voice.

"Chill out, I won't bite you." Bu Fang was a little speechless as he responded calmly. Then, he closed the shutters of the store.

Bu Fang walked to the entrance of the kitchen, stopped, and crooked his finger at Yu Fu, who stood from afar. He instructed: "Follow me to the kitchen.

"This is the first time I've ever let anyone into my kitchen."