

Culinary 291

Chapter 291: Mastering the Flower Knife Technique! Good heavens, Boss Lin is going after the sculptors' livelihoods!

At the judges' table.

A judge invited by the China Travel Service smiled and said to the head judge, Liu Zhengyu, "Just now, when Huo Yifan saw Lin Xu choose Lactone Tofu, he immediately swapped his carrots for Lactone Tofu as well. It seems he's determined to put Lin Xu in his place no matter what."

Liu Zhengyu sighed. "He's still too young and doesn't understand Chef Gao's status in the industry. Honestly, Chef Gao too... to think he'd send such a message in a group chat with so many people. If Zhen Wensheng hadn't quickly sent several red packets, it really would have been quite embarrassing for everyone."

Beneath the stage.

Huo Yifan soaked the Lactone Tofu he planned to use in water, then went to the storage rack to choose an engraving knife. The so-called engraving knife was a type of slender, pointed knife with a slightly curved blade, designed to facilitate carving designs into food items.

There were still two engraving knives left on the rack. Huo Yifan compared them; one was new, while the other had a small nick on its edge. He placed the new knife back on the rack and took the nicked one.

Fair competition. I won't take the slightest advantage of you. That way, when I win later, those fans below won't have anything to complain about... Huo Yifan walked back to his station.

He turned his head to glance at Lin Xu, and his expression immediately registered surprise.

Lin Xu wasn't using an engraving knife. Instead, he gripped a kitchen knife with a slightly pointed tip and directly submerged it in the water, beginning to carve the tofu.

This... Not even using an engraving knife? Is he that confident?

At the consultants' table.

Dai Jianli, who had just been grandstanding, leaned forward, resting a hand on the shoulder of Xie Baomin who sat in front of him, and said, "Old Xie, isn't our junior brother being a bit too presumptuous? Carving Lactone Tofu without an engraving knife—that increases the difficulty exponentially."

Song Dahai, sitting beside him, exclaimed with admiration, "Our predecessors always spoke of 'conquering the world with a single kitchen knife'—one knife that could cut, chop, mince, pound, smash, slice, and even carve. In today's world, with an ever-increasing variety of knives, it's truly rare to find someone still adhering to the old ways."

He already had a good impression of Lin Xu. Now that Lin Xu was bringing honor to Fishing Platform, he liked this young man even more. It was a pity all his sugarcane had been swiped; otherwise, he would have definitely given Lin Xu a few stalks, no matter what.

The thought of his sugarcane made him glare at Dai Jianli and Guo Weidong again.

You scoundrels! Just you wait until I get a chance to deal with you!

Qiu Zhenhua, to Xie Baomin's right, said, "It's fine to talk about conquering the world with one knife, but this is a competition, and it concerns the reputation of Fishing Platform. Lin Xu is being a bit too overconfident, don't you think, Old Guo?"

Just as Guo Weidong was about to speak, Xie Baomin, who had been intently watching Lin Xu, suddenly said, "The knife in his hand belonged to my master, who used it for half his life. Using this knife for carving was clearly his way of letting Master witness his growth... This young man has always been very considerate."

Hearing this, the others fell silent. Their gazes toward Lin Xu now held a greater degree of admiration. To use his master's kitchen knife for carving on such an important occasion—it was truly heartwarming.

Far away, in the Daocheng Yading scenic area of the Southwest Region, Gao Peisheng, a tall old man in a Tibetan robe and cowboy hat, sat cross-legged on the grass. He was watching the live stream on his phone, his eyes growing somewhat moist as he saw Lin Xu using the kitchen knife to carve. "What a good kid, truly a good kid. What great virtue must I, Gao Peisheng, have accumulated in my past life to have accepted such a fine disciple..."

He wasn't at the competition venue. Yet, his disciple was showcasing his culinary skills using his own knife. Who wouldn't love a disciple like that?

Without a second thought, he tipped thirty-three Carnivals in the live stream.

Wu Kexin's live stream channel instantly soared to the top of the site-wide tipping leaderboard.

The streamer who had been at the top of the leaderboard saw this. Just as he was about to rally his fans for another round to reclaim the first-place position, countless Carnival effects suddenly floated across his screen.

The legendary big-spending patron, Die Lianhua, who threw money around like it was water, suddenly made a move, tipping 333 Carnivals in Wu Kexin's live stream channel.

After a cool million in actual cash was dropped, the streamer who had been rallying his fans suddenly felt that second place wasn't so bad after all. It's only one spot, he thought. Nothing worth fighting over. Live streaming, after all, should champion harmony.

To show his goodwill, he even used his main account to tip Wu Kexin a Carnival and announced, "Whoever dares to compete with my sister Xin on the leaderboard is picking a fight with me, 'Women Aren't as Fun as Games.' My Fragrance's Mighty Army is no pushover, so don't say I didn't warn you!"

Well, if you can't beat them, join them. A timeless classic.

"Ah! The White-haired Youngster and Die Lianhua have tipped in Wu Kexin's live stream channel!"

While watching the competition, Chen Yan received a message from her company and was immediately stunned. One million one hundred thousand, just like that, dropped without batting an eye.

"The White-haired Youngster? Isn't that Master's account? And Die Lianhua is Leopard-Print Auntie's account. I just saw Master posting pictures of himself horse riding on his Moments feed. Why did they suddenly tip?" Shen Baobao was a bit curious.

She looked up at the competition scene, then at the bustling live stream room. She didn't understand what those two, enjoying their late-life romance on their honeymoon, were up to.

"Hey, that 'Women Aren't as Fun as Games' guy also tipped a Carnival! That scoundrel was just having his fans cause trouble in Yue Liyue's stream a few days ago. The moderators banned over a hundred of their accounts," Chen Yan said, somewhat puzzled.

But since people were tipping, they couldn't just refuse it. She said to Shen Baobao, "Just now, Wu Kexin said that the tips from Elder Gao and Die Lianhua were meant for your Xubao. She doesn't want the money. When the revenue share comes through, it will all go to your Xubao."

Chapter 292: Mastering the Flower Knife Technique! Good heavens, Boss Lin is going after the sculptors' livelihoods!

"Alright!"

At the competition site, Lin Xu still didn't know that the live-streaming room was already boiling with excitement. He was still holding a chef's knife, focused intently as he gently drew the tip of the knife across the tofu submerged in water. After carving out the shapes, he carefully pricked away the excess tofu with a slightly longer bamboo skewer, then continued to carve. This process tested one's patience and the steadiness of the wrist; the slightest carelessness could lead to a defect, so Lin Xu could only concentrate and handle it carefully.

Meanwhile, the other competitors were immersed in their own creations. Everyone was among the best from various international hotels, and some might be the pillar of a hotel restaurant in the future. They were all familiar with the technique of carving. They could not only carve common ornate patterns but also create new ideas based on the variability of the ingredients. For instance, right now, Guo Xinghai used the green skin on the top of a radish to carve a beautiful Jade Cabbage, preparing to use it as a garnish on the plate. Zhuang Yizhou, who was ranked third in the last round, utilized the curved part of a

pumpkin to carve out a shape resembling a black-canopied boat. Everyone was carving with dedication, striving to prove their strength.

Since Lin Xu was carving in water and the chef's knife in his hand was too large, it was impossible to capture the details from a distance. Thus, Wu Kexin approached with a cameraman from the TV station for a closer shot. From afar, when they only saw Lin Xu occasionally move the tip of the knife on the tofu, they had no idea what he was carving, but now that they were closer, the online viewers could see. Lin Xu was actually carving two fish on the Lactone Tofu. The two fish were connected head to tail, looking somewhat like a pair of fish-shaped jade pendants. But these two fish were carved in a long shape from the Lactone Tofu, not only plump and lively in appearance but even the fins and Fish Scales were meticulously detailed.

The moment the fans in the live-streaming room saw this, they immediately exploded with excitement:

"Holy shit, the Jade Carving community is gonna blow up!"

"Not just the Jade Carving community, big bro. Stone, wood, and clay carving communities will blow up too when they see Boss Lin's skills."

"Who would have thought that Boss Lin would once again kick the Sculptor's rice bowl."

"Not only did he kick it, but he also disdainfully said with a block of tofu and a chef's knife, 'Is that all?'"

"Seeing the dozens of carving knives on my rack, I feel the urge to throw them all away and switch to a chef's knife."

"Me too. My carving knives worth thousands can't compare to Boss Lin's chef's knife; it's so heartbreaking."

"These two fish are so beautiful; how much would it cost to buy them?"

"Upstairs, don't bother asking. Die Lianhua, the big shot, already smashed a million on it. You're gonna have to wait your turn."

Because the live-streaming camera moved in closer, the on-site spectators, who previously could not see the carving details, also took out their phones to enter the live-streaming room to watch. When Lin Xu's family saw the two lifelike, plump fish in the water basin, they were also astonished.

"Good heavens! My brother-in-law's skills are incredible!"

"When did Xiao Xu learn to carve like this? The shapes are incredible."

"No way, I have to show Old Tan and the others. The kid is making me so proud!"

"Old Lin, take a look at our son's skill. Isn't our family's old grandma having her seventieth birthday in a few days? When Xiao Xu comes home, let's have him show off his talent to her."

"Definitely, the old lady has been looking forward to him coming home."

"Mom, don't forget I'll be going too; Dundun and I will both be back!"

"I won't forget. With such a good daughter-in-law, how can I not show you off to our relatives and friends?"

At the consultant seats, Xie Baomin looked at the scene on his phone, filled with emotion, saying, "My master must be thrilled. My junior brother is really impressive. It's a pity there isn't a middle-aged group competition; otherwise, I'd show off my cooking skills as well."

Everyone was amazed by this extraordinary technique. Carving double fish on a hard material was already challenging, and without sufficient experience, no one dared to take it on. Yet, Lin Xu dared to carve on Lactone Tofu, which would crumble at the slightest touch. This skill was truly admirable!

Finally, when Lin Xu finished carving the two fish and added some decorative waves around, the double fish carving symbolizing abundance year after year was complete. At the moment he put down the knife, his wrist, arm, shoulder, neck, and even his back and legs began to ache. He had been too engrossed; his

body hadn't been active or relaxed. Now that he abruptly put down the knife, all sorts of discomfort swept over him.

Wei Qian, who had just finished carving a Prosperity Peony, quickly supported his arm. "Take a few steps to move around first. You stood in the same position for too long, and your blood circulation has been impaired." As he spoke, he glanced at the 'Abundance Year After Year' in the basin and immediately smiled broadly. This round is in the bag!

Lin Xu moved to the side, limbered up his body, took a couple of sips of water, and just as he sat down, the system's prompt rang out in his mind:

"Host has received praise from over a thousand people within the set time limit, officially earning the Superior Carving Technique. Congratulations to the Host."

"Host has used the Superior Carving Technique to create a Perfect Level Carving, completing the Hidden task 'Over-level Challenge,' and has earned a Perfect Level General Cooking Technique—Fried Crispy. Congratulations to the Host."

Phew...

Didn't expect there to be this kind of reward.

The effort just now was not in vain.

Soon, the other contestants had also completed their own carving presentations. The judges filed down from their seats and began scoring. In this round of competition, several contestants chose Lactone Tofu. However, their carvings, either a little white rabbit or a white salamander, were all quite aesthetically pleasing but seemed a bit abstract and stiff compared to Lin Xu's. The two fish carved by Lin Xu looked as alive as real fish. When you looked close, you might even worry the fish would suddenly flick their tails and splash you. Such lifelike carvings, even in the Sculptors' circle, deserved to be respectfully addressed as master.

Circling the two fish was Huo Yifan, who had also chosen Lactone Tofu. He had watched the replay of Fishing Platform's live stream and felt that defeating Lin Xu would not be a big problem. So, seeing Lin

Xu choose Lactone Tofu this time, he swapped his radish for tofu, planning to have a good contest with Lin Xu. He carved a layered rose out of the Lactone Tofu. The petals were very thin; in the water, they even seemed to drift slightly.

But compared to Lin Xu's twin fish, there is still a certain gap.

Sigh...

Can't compete!

Soon, the scores were out. Lin Xu secured first place with a perfect score of 10. Huo Yifan's white rose, because of its beautiful shape, scored a high 9.9, coming in second. Guo Xinghai got 9.7 points, tying for third place with Zhuang Yizhou. As for Wei Qian, his carving of a Prosperity Peony, which was too similar to another contestant's work, only received 9.1 points, ranking seventh. After a contest of skill, everyone's scores were quite close. It wasn't easy to pull ahead.

"Host has successfully attained first place in this round of competition, completing the multi-stage task 'Overcoming Challenges' second stage, earning an Excellent Level Pickled Vegetable Dish Technique— Pickled Cucumbers."

Pickled cucumbers?

At least it's better than the last round's reward.

But the thought of the high-interest debt owed to the system made Lin Xu feel a sense of urgency, always wanting to open for business to fill the points deficit as soon as possible.

Is the system using this as a way to urge me to work hard and make money?

As he was thinking, Liu Zhengyu, holding the basin with the twin fish, commented, "Borrowing what Mr. Lishan said about Lin Xu in the last competition: some people earn ten points because their craft is worth ten points, while others earn ten points because the full score is only ten. Thank you, Lin Xu, for

showing me the spectacular brilliance of traditional Chinese carving techniques, and for giving me hope for Chinese cuisine!"

After this round of competition, more contestants were eliminated. Now only fifteen contestants remained on the field. After a short break, the staff again brought in a new rack, filled with wet noodles, Sliced Noodles, shredded pancakes, rice noodles, Ho Fun, Ersi, rice, bread pieces, and other ingredients, as well as a full range of condiments like Scallion and Ginger, Eggs, Shrimp, and greens.

Liu Zhengyu, taking the microphone in hand, stood up and said, "The essence of food is to satisfy hunger, and no matter how good-looking a dish is, it's no good if it doesn't fill you up. Therefore, the content of this round is—using your respective skills, make a main dish, including but not limited to various stir-fried noodles, fried rice, stir-fried flour noodles, stir-fried shredded pancakes, and so on." After saying that, he clapped his hands. "The time for this round is half an hour. Start now, lads, and show me your ability to work the wok!"

Staple food?

Lin Xu, who had already recovered, heard the requirement, and a slight smile formed at the corner of his mouth.

The Perfect Level Yangzhou Fried Rice that my son helped me draw the other day finally has a chance to shine.

So what are we waiting for?

Let's go!

Chapter 293: The Cost Explosion of Yangzhou Fried Rice! A Good Chef Understands How to Tailor Dishes to the Customer!

While the competition was in full swing, countless netizens following the Lin Ji's Food topic were also paying close attention to the event. Those who couldn't watch the live broadcast even asked their friends on the scene for a live play-by-play with text and photos.

When they learned that the third round of the competition was about staple foods, the netizens went wild.

Human High-Quality Waste: "Damn, they're actually competing with staple foods!"

Mulan Bro Request for Website: "This cooking competition really doesn't take the usual route."

White Ram Shouting: "Yeah, while others compete with Basic Knife Skills, they're going straight to fancy knife work here. Other competitions avoid staple foods, but this one features them as a main event."

Extravagant Pecs Gentleman: "They're deliberately going against the grain of regular food competitions."

Spring Breeze Cannot Blow You: "Last round, the carving community exploded. Which industry will Boss Lin cross into this time?"

Invisible Chicken Wings: "Anyway, it won't affect our Voiceover circle, no matter how much it blows up."

Nine Billion Girls' Nightmare: "Miss above, don't jinx it just yet. Who can guarantee that Boss Lin won't cross into the Voiceover circle?"

...

「Back door of Building One.」

On Yanjing TV Station's high-definition video relay truck, Zhen Wensheng watched the live broadcast screen and spoke into the walkie-talkie, "Camera Five, give us another close-up of the double fish Lin Xu made. Other cameras, move closer to the stoves to capture as many details of the contestants' preparations as possible."

After speaking, he asked Zeng Xiaoqi, who was sitting beside him, "How are the ratings now?"

"Since Lin Xu's double fish appeared on camera, the ratings have been rising. Now, we're only two percentage points behind 'Lively News Tracking' on the People's Livelihood Channel."

Hearing this, Zhen Wensheng immediately pumped his fist.

He had staked almost his entire career on this gourmet competition.

Now, at last, it was paying off.

'Lively News Tracking' was a ratings backbone for Yanjing TV Station. In the past, the travel channel's ratings would be left far behind by it. He never thought that today's live broadcast could actually keep pace.

After the excitement subsided, he picked up the walkie-talkie and said, "Give Lin Xu as much screen time as possible. He's our ratings guarantee!"

After putting down the walkie-talkie, Zhen Wensheng took a cigar from his pocket and held it under his nose, sniffing it, but didn't light it because smoking and open flames were strictly prohibited inside the broadcast truck.

"Xiaoqi, when you have a chance, revise the proposal for that food program. Flesh out the details. Once this event is over, I'll submit it to the station. If it's approved, we'll get it started immediately."

If Lin Xu can bring in the ratings, then a food program about him should strike while the iron is hot.

The goal was to make this handsome chef a flagship figure for the travel channel.

Of course, the travel channel wouldn't shortchange him.

Once Lin Ji's Food opens, there will be extensive coverage. As a channel related to tourism, it's perfectly normal to report on a restaurant that has close ties to tourism.

Zeng Xiaoqi hadn't expected things to go so smoothly.

She nodded and agreed, "Understood, Director Zhen! I'll start preparing as soon as today's live broadcast ends."

After finishing her words, she tentatively suggested, "Director Zhen, Lin Xu's family owns a scenic area. It's not large, but it's quite beautiful, complete with viral attractions and natural wonders. There's even a campsite suitable for stargazing. Shouldn't we take the chance to promote it a bit?"

Zhen Wensheng hadn't expected Lin Xu to have such a strong connection with his channel.

His family even ran a scenic area!

So he said with a smile, "Sure, let's make a trip there when we have time. If the scenery is really good, we'll shoot a special feature. You can do the Voiceover, and we'll air it during an off-peak slot."

"Yes, Director Zhen!"

If you want someone to help out, you have to offer something in return.

That's how a cooperative relationship could last.

「At the competition scene.」

The contestants had already begun to select their ingredients.

As a Cantonese cuisine heir, Guo Xinghai naturally picked rice noodles and beef, clearly planning to make stir-fried beef with rice noodles.

Wei Qian chose fresh noodles, pork belly, and long beans, looking like he was going to make a common North China dish: long beans braised with noodles.

Huo Yifan didn't try to compete with Lin Xu this time. Instead, he picked Tomato, Egg, and Sliced Noodles, probably planning to make a tomato sauce noodle dish.

Zhuang Yizhou, who had been hovering in third place, chose eggs and rice vermicelli, possibly aiming to make egg-fried rice vermicelli.

Everyone chose ingredients they excelled at preparing.

Lin Xu mingled in the crowd and first checked the prepared rice. It indeed turned out to be somewhat hard and cold leftover rice.

As expected of a high-end event.

The ingredients were prepared with such care.

Taking a portion of rice, he then selected a small handful of green peas, a small piece of premium Jinhua Ham, a few scallions, six eggs, a piece of Chicken Thigh meat, a Water-soaked Sea Cucumber, a small handful of plump Sea Scallops, another piece of Chicken Thigh meat, a piece of duck gizzard, several Large Shrimp, a couple of rehydrated mushrooms, a few slices of fresh bamboo shoots, as well as lard, cornstarch, and condensed chicken broth, among other ingredients.

"What is Boss Lin planning to make?"

"It's so complex; it must be Yangzhou Fried Rice."

"That's right, it's definitely Yangzhou Fried Rice."

"How come the one I eat isn't this complex? It's just egg and diced ham sausage, without so many ingredients."

"You had the cheap kind. The one Boss Lin is making usually sells for over a hundred yuan a serving, and only that type of fried rice truly deserves to be called Yangzhou Fried Rice."

"Does it taste good?"

"It's beyond just 'good.' Honestly, thank goodness the plate isn't edible, or I'd devour that too!"

"Damn! I've never experienced anything like it. I've got to learn how to make this later!"

In the live broadcast room, upon seeing the ingredients Lin Xu chose, some netizens started sharing their knowledge.

Chapter 294: The Cost Explosion of Yangzhou Fried Rice! A Good Chef Understands How to Tailor Dishes to the Customer!

Fried rice dishes priced below sixty yuan were typically just Egg Fried Rice or Mixed Fried Rice. Only those priced above sixty yuan, featuring ingredients like Shrimp, Ham, and Sea Scallop, could truly be called Yangzhou Fried Rice.

A standard Yangzhou Fried Rice uses two whole Eggs and four additional yolks, creating delicate egg threads. This particular requirement alone was enough to set many netizens' imaginations racing.

With such rich ingredients, how delicious would this fried rice be?

"Lin Xu is going to make Yangzhou Fried Rice."

From the audience, Shen Guofu, the 'Gourmet Prince,' recognized it immediately. This dish was his favorite. He had visited several famous Huaiyang cuisine restaurants in Yanjing.

Savoring a serving of Yangzhou Fried Rice, even one costing several hundred yuan, made life feel complete.

Now, seeing his son-in-law prepare this very dish filled him with anticipation.

Whenever my son-in-law cooks, the results are always spectacular. Now that he has chosen to make Yangzhou Fried Rice, it's bound to be exceptionally delicious, isn't it?

In front of the stove, Lin Xu set down the ingredients he had gathered, poured the chicken stock into the wok, and cranked up the heat.

All the supplementary ingredients for Yangzhou Fried Rice had to be blanched and cooked beforehand. This crucial step enhanced the overall flavor of the fried rice and prevented any rawness or off-putting tastes from the individual components.

Ordinarily, plain water would suffice for this step. But Lin Xu opted for a rich chicken stock.

From the consultant seats, Qiu Zhenhua, the foremost authority on this particular dish, adjusted his gold-rimmed glasses on his nose and stated earnestly, "Blanching ingredients in chicken stock, especially a rich one, can make them overly greasy. Lin Xu's choice could easily backfire."

Everyone on the panel, all seasoned experts, recognized this potential issue.

Dai Jianli plucked a cookie from the nearby snack table and, munching on it, remarked, "Too much of a good thing, no need for that... Hey, Boss, these cookies here are pretty good! How about you get me twenty or thirty kilograms of these to take with me when I leave?"

The 'Boss' he referred to was He Baoqing, the executive chef of Building One. Since the buildings were numbered starting with Building One, everyone called him 'Boss.'

By that logic, Xie Baomin from Building Two should have been called 'Number Two.' However, no one in the entire Fishing Platform dared to call him that.

"Asking for twenty or thirty kilograms right off the bat, Dai, are you some kind of bandit? I also think he shouldn't use chicken stock. Fried rice can be greasy enough as it is; blanching with chicken stock will only make it more so."

Song Dahai chimed in, "And don't forget he also picked lard... Old Xie, isn't your junior brother's choice a bit ill-advised here?"

Xie Baomin chuckled. "What do you lot know? My junior brother is tailoring the dish to the diners!"

Tailoring the dish to the diners?

Dai Jianli popped another cookie into his mouth. "Isn't that usually a derogatory term? Old Xie, you really should try to curb that habit of badmouthing people behind their backs."

Xie Baomin jutted his chin towards the judges' panel. "What's your first impression of these judges?"

Why suddenly ask this?

Everyone unanimously turned towards the judges' seats. Looking them over, not a single judge was particularly thin; in fact, several were clearly overweight.

"Plump!"

"They look like they enjoy their food."

"I bet their 'three highs' are all up there."

"Probably all have fatty liver disease."

The executive chefs chimed in one after another.

Xie Baomin explained, "It's almost eleven o'clock, peak time to feel hungry. And these judges, they all look like they appreciate richer, oilier foods. That's why my junior brother chose the rich chicken stock and lard."

The judges' table was in a prominent position. Plus, with today's dual live broadcast, they couldn't very well be seen snacking to tide themselves over for appearance's sake, so they had to endure their hunger.

Imagine, at a time like this, a wonderfully aromatic Yangzhou Fried Rice is placed before them... It's bound to get high scores.

Hearing his explanation, everyone else understood. A true chef, after all, must be flexible, adjusting the flavor and ingredients of a dish according to the diners' specific needs and preferences.

Guo Weidong, who had been quiet until then, remarked somewhat pensively, "And yet, some chefs out there seem to take pride in defying their customers' wishes. Particularly in those high-end private kitchens where you can't make requests or choose your dishes—you eat what they decide to cook. The reputation of genuine chefs is ruined by people like that."

Dai Jianli countered, "I wouldn't say ruined. They're just fleecing the rich, not scamming the poor."

He Baoqing listened to their banter, then turned to Xie Baomin. "Your junior brother's new restaurant won't be like that, will it?" he asked.

Xie Baomin scoffed. "My junior brother's restaurant won't have such poor business. Once it opens, it'll be absolutely packed every single day, with queues for both lunch and dinner. His customers wouldn't even give him the chance to pull such pretentious stunts or gimmicks."

In front of the stove, Lin Xu deftly shelled the Large Shrimp, deveined them, and then minced the shrimp meat into roughly five-millimeter pieces. He placed these in a bowl, added a pinch of dry starch, and mixed it through.

The Shrimp needed to be quickly blanched in the chicken stock to remove any seafood odor. To prevent the Shrimp from losing moisture during this quick blanching, they were first coated with a thin layer of dry starch.

Soon, the chicken stock in the wok came to a boil.

Lin Xu added the Jinhua Ham to the wok to begin the blanching process. This was a prime cut of the ham, considered its essence, and so flavorful it could even be eaten raw.

The Ham naturally contained salt. As it cooked, this salt would infuse the chicken stock, eliminating the need to add extra salt when blanching the subsequent ingredients.

After poaching the Ham for a short while, he removed it. The heat served to awaken the umami compounds within, so it was ready to be taken out.

Next, he added the sea cucumber. The rehydrated sea cucumber shouldn't be blanched for long—a few seconds was all it needed. Any longer, and the collagen would start to break down, compromising its texture.

After removing the sea cucumber, he proceeded to blanch the other ingredients in sequence: shiitake mushrooms, Fresh Bamboo Shoot slices, Sea Scallops, green peas, diced Chicken Thigh, and finally, the Shrimp.

Chapter 295: The Cost Explosion of Yangzhou Fried Rice! A Good Chef Understands How to Tailor Dishes to the Customer!

All the ingredients were blanched, and then the duck gizzards were added. Duck gizzards have a distinct gamey smell, so they were added last.

After all the ingredients were blanched, Lin Xu began to prepare them. Sea cucumbers were cut into vertical strips, then into small cubes about four to five millimeters square. Sea Scallops needed to be hand-torn into fine threads; this allowed the flavorful compounds inside to fully release into the rice.

The so-called Sea Scallops are actually dried products made from the firmer, fleshy parts of various shellfish. They have a delicious taste and a dense texture, making them a well-known dried seafood product. For Yangzhou Fried Rice, it's essential to choose high-quality Sea Scallops larger than eight millimeters. This ensures a richer umami flavor and a denser texture when mixed with the rice.

Next, besides the green peas, other ingredients such as shiitake mushrooms, fresh bamboo shoots, Jinhua Ham, Chicken Thigh, and duck gizzards were all diced into small cubes about four to five millimeters. Green onions were also chopped and set aside.

After preparing these ingredients, Lin Xu cracked two whole Eggs into a bowl, then added four more egg yolks. Only with an abundance of egg yolks could the Eggs produce delicious, silky threads, and the umami flavor would also be richer. He used chopsticks to thoroughly whisk the two whole Eggs and four yolks together. After that, he strained the mixture through a fine sieve to filter out any chalaza or membrane-like substances, ensuring the Egg wouldn't clump during frying.

Having strained the egg liquid, Lin Xu set his wok on the heat. He added a spoonful of cold oil, swirled it to coat the wok, then poured it out. He then refilled the wok with about half a small pot's worth of cooking oil. He turned the heat to high to get the oil hot. When the oil reached a temperature of around ninety degrees Celsius, he turned the heat to its lowest setting.

Then, the most critical step in making Yangzhou Fried Rice commenced—frying the egg threads. Egg threads are a crucial feature distinguishing Yangzhou Fried Rice from ordinary egg fried rice. A delicious portion of Yangzhou Fried Rice must be made with these egg threads.

Lin Xu held the strained egg liquid in his left hand and a ladle in his right, stirring the oil in the wok. He raised the bowl high, like the legendary oil vendor, slightly tilting its rim to let the egg liquid fall into the hot oil in fine threads. As soon as the egg liquid hit the oil, it rapidly formed into fine threads with the help of his stirring. Then, under the heat of the oil, their surface moisture evaporated, and the egg threads set into shape.

"Damn! I had no idea Yangzhou Fried Rice was this complicated."

"I've learned it, and I'm already giving up! I'm giving up!"

"I'll just stick to simple egg fried rice. This is way beyond my cooking level."

"I wonder if Lin Ji's restaurant will serve Yangzhou Fried Rice when it opens. If they do, I definitely have to go try it and see just how delicious it is."

"Just have your money ready. Manager Lin won't disappoint his customers."

"Right, when it comes to business, Manager Lin is truly impeccable."

The fans in the live stream chat had originally wanted to learn how to make Yangzhou Fried Rice from Lin Xu, so they could show off their cooking skills during holidays. The earlier steps had seemed manageable. But after seeing the step for frying the egg threads, they immediately lost all interest in showing off. Given this level of difficulty, it was probably better to just spend money and eat at Lin Ji's restaurant.

As the egg liquid in the bowl diminished, the egg threads in the wok increased, resembling a ball of golden yarn. Finally, when all the egg liquid had been poured out, Lin Xu continued to stir. He then placed a large spider strainer over an oil pot and poured all the oil and egg threads from the wok into it. After the egg threads were in the strainer, he pressed down on them with the back of his ladle a few times to squeeze out the excess oil, making the egg threads drier and more delicious.

Once the egg threads were done, he moved on to the fried rice itself. Indeed, all the previous steps had just been preparation.

He placed the wok on the stove and added a bit of vegetable oil and a little pork lard. Not too much oil was necessary, just enough to prevent the dish from being greasy. A perfect Yangzhou Fried Rice should have a texture that is dry yet fluffy and distinct. If a layer of oil settled on the plate after eating, it would definitely be substandard.

Once the oil was hot, Lin Xu tossed in the Jinhua Ham, sea cucumbers, Sea Scallops, shiitake mushrooms, fresh bamboo shoots, Chicken Thigh, and duck gizzards. He stir-fried them until they became aromatic, then added the leftover rice and began to stir-fry.

Leftover rice tended to clump, so he had to use his ladle to pat it down while stir-frying. Patting the rice grains in this way helped to separate them, making them more springy and the dish tastier.

After the rice was fully separated, he added a handful of chopped green onions, then poured in the egg threads. He continued to stir-fry, breaking up the egg threads and mixing them evenly with the rice. At this stage, he began seasoning.

He added a small spoonful of salt to the wok and, along the edge, drizzled in some Light Soy Sauce to add a hint of savory soy sauce flavor to the fried rice. After seasoning, he added another handful of green onions, along with the green peas. He continued to stir-fry until the flavors of salt and Light Soy Sauce had fully penetrated the rice. Once the dish was fragrant, the remaining green onions were added. After stir-frying until the green onions were just cooked through, it was time to plate and serve.

The entire stir-frying process was not long, but many details required attention. For instance, after stir-frying the aromatics, the rice was added and patted down to quickly separate the grains before the egg threads were mixed in. Also, blanched green peas weren't suitable for prolonged stir-frying and needed to be added after seasoning. Additionally, the chopped green onions had to be added in three stages to ensure a strong onion fragrance and a delicious texture for the onions themselves.

Once the stir-frying was complete, Lin Xu plated it. And thus, the Yangzhou Fried Rice was a grand success.

Just then, the competition time also came to an end; his timing was perfect.

Guo Weidong praised, "Contests like this might seem casual, but there's a lot of technique involved. Thirty minutes—if the rice is cooked too early, it will lose its wok hei by the time the judges taste it, and the texture and flavor will be greatly diminished."

Cantonese cuisine places particular emphasis on wok hei. A well-made dish must possess wok hei to be considered perfect.

Clearly, Lin Xu had a precise grasp of this. Calm and unhurried, he finished stir-frying and plating the dish within the last ten seconds of the competition. The fried rice still possessed its wok hei, which was definitely a plus in the judges' eyes.

As expected, when the judges stepped down from their platform to start tasting, the first thing they tried was Lin Xu's Yangzhou Fried Rice.

"Oh my, this fried rice is so delicious; one bite is enough to send you to heaven!"

"Indeed, absolutely perfect!"

"The egg threads are just right, exceptionally flavorful—incredible!"

"Even if you went to Yangzhou itself, you might not find Yangzhou Fried Rice as tasty as this."

"This contestant is truly skilled!"

"..."

Listening to the judges' exclamations, Shen Guofu, sitting in the audience, involuntarily gulped. He was hungry. Unfortunately, he had no snacks with him at that moment.

Remembering that his daughter seemed to have a plate of Horse Hoof Cake before the competition started, he whispered, "Yueyue, got anything to eat? I'm suddenly starving."

"I do!" Shen Jiayue, seated in the front row, pulled out two packs of Snacks from her bag. One had been delivered by the front desk of Building One at Wei Qian's request, and the other had been sent over by Shu Yun. Yes, the competition among the front desks of the various Fishing Platform buildings was fierce.

Shen Baobao passed the Snacks back, but not to Shen Guofu. Instead, she handed them to Lin Hongqi, saying, "Dad, you must be hungry too. Have some Snacks."

Shen Guofu: "..."

Daughter, you're not even pretending anymore, are you!

Lin Hongqi smiled and took them, opening one pack and sharing the Snacks with Shen Guofu. Meanwhile, Chen Meijuan and Han Shuzhen shared the other pack.

On stage, after the judges had tasted the main dishes prepared by all the contestants, they moved on to the scoring phase.

Lin Xu took the opportunity to try Guo Xinghai's Dry Fried Beef Ho Fun. Hmm, savory and delicious, with an authentic, robust wok flavor. This Ho Fun is truly genuine.

Guo Xinghai had originally wanted to try Lin Xu's Yangzhou Fried Rice, but when he went over with a spoon, he found the judges had already eaten it all.

Tsk... First place is his again, no doubt!

Sure enough, when the scores came in, Lin Xu once again ranked first with 9.9 points. Huo Yifan's Tomato Noodles and Guo Xinghai's Dry Fried Beef Ho Fun both received 9.8 points, tying for second place. Zhuang Yizhou's Egg Fried Rice scored 9.7 points, ranking third. Wei Qian's Braised Green Beans with Noodles also scored 9.5 points, ranking sixth.

After the rankings were announced, a system prompt sounded again in Lin Xu's mind: "Host has secured first place in this round of competition, completing the third round of the chain task [Overcoming the Challengers], and has received the Excellent Level Basic Cooking Technique—Stuffed Vinegar. Congratulations to the Host."

WTF? Stuffed Vinegar? Are you joking with me?

Chapter 296: Sweet and Sour Eggplant + Dry-Fried Eggplant = Flavored Eggplant!

Back at the judges' table, Liu Zhengyu was still savoring the Yangzhou Fried Rice prepared by Lin Xu. It wasn't that the main dishes made by the other competitors weren't delicious; it was just that this particular Yangzhou Fried Rice was exactly to his taste. All the ingredients carried a rich umami flavor, and the dry, fragrant rice grains, further enhanced by the aroma of lard, were simply irresistible. As the president of the National Tourism Association, Liu Zhengyu had visited almost every restaurant in five-star hotels across the country and tasted countless delicacies. But he had never been so obsessed with a serving of fried rice as he was today. Unfortunately, Lin Xu had made only one portion. With around ten judges present, everyone got just one or two bites, which was far from satisfying.

On the consultants' bench not far away, Dai Jianli, holding a plate of biscuits, offered them to Xie Baomin. "You really guessed it! Our little brother's fried rice went straight to the judges' hearts. He absolutely deserves first place!"

At that moment, Xie Baomin was actually feeling a bit hungry. He took two biscuits to try, then turned to He Baoqing and said, "Boss, can you swap some chefs from the Snacks section with mine?"

Upon hearing this, He Baoqing immediately retorted, "Don't even think about it. You'll definitely try to palm off a kitchen helper on me."

Xie Baomin popped another biscuit into his mouth. "No, I'll swap my head chef from the stir-fry section with you. Our up-and-coming chef, Qin Wei, specializes in various home-style dishes. You've heard of him, right?"

As Building One was closest to Building Two, He Baoqing naturally knew Qin Wei. Besides being introverted, this young chef didn't have many other issues. Not like Wei Qian from Building One, who was becoming slicker by the day. Lately, Wei Qian had been constantly swapping shifts with the chefs who bullied him; who knew what he was scheming.

With this in mind, He Baoqing looked at Xie Baomin and asked, "Old Xie, are you really willing to trade Qin Wei for one of my pastry chefs?"

"Yes, but let's be clear: they must know how to make these biscuits. If you try to send me a kitchen helper from the Snacks section, I'll definitely have a bone to pick with you."

When He Baoqing heard this, he scoffed. "You think I'm like you, always trying to trick people? Just give the nod, and we'll make the swap!"

"Then I'll go back and talk to Qin Wei. After he arrives, just symbolically give him a bonus of a thousand or two to appease him. That kid is sensitive; just make sure he doesn't feel slighted."

"Don't worry, Old Xie, I know what to do."

Within Fishing Platform, such personnel transfers were actually quite normal, especially with the tacit approval of the head chefs. The personnel department would provide full cooperation.

After settling Qin Wei's matter, Xie Baomin then turned to Qiu Zhenhua. "Qiuqiu, that front desk manager in the qipao at your reception... Little He, right? I'd like to swap Shu Yun for her. Are you willing?"

Qiu Zhenhua had been enjoying the unfolding drama when Xie Baomin suddenly dragged him into the conversation. But wait a minute... Shu Yun? Wasn't she just voted the most popular front desk manager for the first half of the year?

He looked at Xie Baomin and asked, "Don't try to fool me. Would you really be willing to part with an outstanding employee like Shu Yun?"

Xie Baomin sighed. "I have no choice. A few days ago, I had a fight with Shu Yun because of Lin Xu. Things have reached a point where we can't work together, so I want to transfer her out."

Oh? All the surrounding head chefs looked on, their expressions like spectators at a juicy drama. No one had expected that someone at Fishing Platform would actually dare to argue with Old Xie.

Qiu Zhenhua still couldn't believe such good fortune would fall into his lap. But seeing Xie Baomin didn't seem to be lying, he nodded. "I'll go back and talk to Little He. If she's willing to go to Building Two, we'll swap. Don't worry; if Shu Yun comes to Building Six, her bonuses won't be lacking."

Although Little He from Building Six was quite good, there was still a gap compared to Manager Shu Yun. After all, Shu Yun had even been praised by foreign heads of state; she was the benchmark among all front desk managers at Fishing Platform. This swap was definitely a win.

After they confirmed the exchange, Xie Baomin breathed a long sigh of relief.

Although his junior brother hadn't yet tried to poach Shu Yun and Qin Wei, the intention was practically written all over his face. As his senior brother, Xie Baomin could see it clearly. To prevent his junior brother from feeling awkward about poaching from his own people, he had devised this plan. By transferring Shu Yun and Qin Wei out, his junior brother could invite them to join Lin Ji's Food without any reservations.

As for what He Baoqing and Qiu Zhenhua would do after their staff were poached... Hah! The culinary world is a treacherous place. If this experience makes He Baoqing and Qiuqiu a little more wary, they'll have me to thank for the lesson!

As they were talking, another contestant was eliminated, leaving only seven on stage. Not a single member of the Fishing Platform trio had been eliminated. They dominated the group points leaderboard, their position virtually unshakeable.

At that moment, two staff members brought in a large basket of eggplants and wheeled in a new rack. On it were various ingredients like pork belly, salted fish, beef, and Scallion and Ginger.

Head judge Liu Zhengyu stood up, microphone in hand, and announced, "Eggplant is a very common ingredient, featured in countless dishes. This round's challenge is to create a dish using eggplant. There are no restrictions on flavor profile or cooking method. You have half an hour. The timer starts now!"

Eggplant? So, this round has a limited ingredient.

Fans in the live stream instantly erupted:

"My Garlic Paste Eggplant must get some recognition!"

"Please make Minced Pork with Eggplant; it's my favorite!"

"Braised Eggplant, ready for action!"

"How can our great Sichuan's Fish-Flavored Eggplant not make an appearance?"

Chapter 297: Sweet and Sour Eggplant + Dry-Fried Eggplant = Flavored Eggplant!

"I like eggplant stew. I hope the contestants can make it and show me how good this dish can get."

"What about sweet and sour eggplant? Doesn't sweet and sour eggplant deserve a name?"

"I think Eggplant Dragon tastes the best. It's fried till it's crispy, then topped with minced pork sauce—the flavor is just amazing!"

"Everyone should try Eggplant Sandwiches. If they're not delicious, I'll eat my hat."

"..."

The comment section of the livestream was a battleground for all kinds of eggplant lovers, and it actually made Chen Yan, who was following the stream, hungry.

She pinched a piece of snack from her cousin's hand and popped it into her mouth, then curiously asked:

"My brother-in-law doesn't seem to have made many eggplant dishes before. Yueyue, which one do you think he'll make?"

This question actually stumped Shen Baobao:

"I don't know either. The only eggplant dish I've had from him before is Braised Eggplant and Pork Sauce. There's only half an hour for this round; he probably doesn't have time to make fresh noodles, right?"

What Xu Bao makes isn't important.

The important thing is that as long as he wins, it's fine.

Chen Yan rolled her eyes helplessly at her younger sister.

If husband-obsession were an illness, Yueyue would definitely be terminal.

At the competition site.

The contestants were all picking the ingredients they wanted to use.

Guo Xinghai grabbed a piece of salted fish from the pantry—it looked like he was going to make Salted Fish Eggplant Stew.

Wei Qian, on the other hand, picked up a chunk of pork belly—probably planning to make Minced Pork Eggplant.

Lin Xu watched everyone busy picking ingredients, feeling a bit lost and not sure what to make.

Although he liked eating eggplant, the only eggplant dish he'd ever made was Braised Eggplant and Pork Sauce.

But for today, that was definitely out of the question.

Because there weren't even any noodles on the shelf, and it was way too late to make dough and hand-roll fresh noodles.

Thinking back on the techniques he knew, there were actually a few methods he could choose from, like sweet and sour eggplant or dry-fried eggplant—he could make either today.

But sweet and sour eggplant and dry-fried eggplant were both too common.

Besides, one was sweet and sour, the other was numbing and spicy—the flavors were a bit too one-dimensional, and making them might not score him major points.

Think, think, think—is there any other dish that's tasty and might score high?

This round, the ingredients are set.

Everyone's articles have to be about eggplant.

So it had to be something creative—only then would the judges be impressed.

He walked himself again through the methods for sweet and sour eggplant and dry-fried eggplant, and then a new idea suddenly popped up in his mind:

What if you combined those two dishes together, would that make it better?

Following that train of thought,

he gradually worked out the approach for the whole dish.

First, the eggplant had to be fried till it was really crispy—that way, when you poured the rich sauce over, the collision between the fragrant, crunchy texture and the sweet, sour, numbing, spicy sauce would be even stronger.

To achieve that, the eggplant needed to be sliced a bit thinner.

Otherwise, the fried eggplant would definitely get soggy.

As for the sauce, it also needed to be simmered until nice and thick.

Ideally, thick and glossy, like crystal-sugar pork hock.

That way it would cling to the eggplant.

And it would help the eggplant stay crispy for longer, without getting soft.

After so much time cooking, Lin Xu's experience was getting richer and richer—he could even use what he'd learned and deduce entirely new dishes.

Once he figured out the entire process,

he picked up two long, purple eggplants, then got some dried chili, Sichuan peppercorns, garlic, plus white sugar, Chen Vinegar, cornstarch and other seasonings, and brought them back to his cooking station to start prepping.

"What is Boss Lin making this time?"

"White sugar and Chen Vinegar are probably for sweet and sour eggplant. The chili and Sichuan peppercorns are for dry-fried or spicy eggplant. But putting all these together? Can't figure this one out."

"Could it be spicy sweet-and-sour eggplant?"

"Or maybe sweet-and-sour spicy eggplant."

"Hey, what are you two even on about?"

"Doesn't matter what he makes—just hope Boss Lin hurries up and wins, don't do anything weird."

"..."

In the satellite van outside Building 1,

Zeng Xiaoqi said excitedly:

"Mr. Zhen! We've surpassed Minsheng Channel's 'Hot News Pursuit,' and we're not far off from the Sports Channel's 'Today in Sports.' If things keep going like this, maybe in the finals, our show could win the lunchtime ratings for the entire station!"

This was just so exciting.

The channel known for last-place ratings had suddenly pulled off a salted-fish comeback.

What could be more satisfying than that?

Zhen Wensheng was watching the livestream online, and the comments gave him an idea.

"Xiaoqi, what do you think about interacting with the TV audience? Have them leave comments on our WeChat public account, guess what Lin Xu is making, and whoever gets it right wins tickets to the scenic area."

Well...

Zeng Xiaoqi figured it was worth a try.

It'd be a decent way to bring a wave of traffic to the travel channel's official account, too.

Back at his cooking station,

Lin Xu cleaned the eggplants thoroughly with salt.

Then he put them on the cutting board.

This was a brand-new attempt with nothing to reference, so everything needed to be as careful and cautious as possible.

This round, he didn't even care about taking first place—he just wanted to make sure he didn't get eliminated.

He put the washed eggplants on the cutting board.

First, he cut off the eggplant stems, then sliced the eggplants in half lengthwise.

After cutting them open, he thought for a moment, then halved them again.

Mm, now these looked more like the real deal.

But with the eggplants cut this way, there was too much of the seedy pulp part—in his experience with fried skewers, that kind of eggplant gets soggy very quickly, and it's hard to make it crisp.

He needed to remove the excess pulp.

He used the side of his chef's knife to shave away most of the pulp, then cut the remaining part diagonally into strips about one centimeter wide.

Chapter 298: Sweet and Sour Eggplant + Dry-fried Eggplant = Flavorful Eggplant!

After being chopped, it was placed on a plate.

Then, a bit of water was drizzled over, and a handful of dry starch was sprinkled in.

To make the fried eggplant crispy, he couldn't use salt to draw out moisture anymore; otherwise, the eggplant would be soft and not achieve the desired crisp texture.

He stirred the mixture in the bowl by hand to evenly coat the eggplant strips with dry starch.

Once coated, he heated oil in a wok, preparing to deep-fry the eggplant.

While waiting for the oil to heat up, Lin Xu didn't idle. He chopped dried chili into segments, peeled and sliced the garlic cloves, and added a handful of Sichuan peppercorns.

These were the aromatics for the dish.

Initially, Lin Xu was somewhat anxious, fearing that he wouldn't do well and might mess up. By this moment, however, he had become calm. He even cared less about the rankings, only wanting to make the dish he had conceptualized and taste it, to see where it might still be lacking.

When the oil was medium-hot, Lin Xu scattered the starch-coated eggplant strips into the oil.

The eggplant strips couldn't be stirred right after being added to the oil; otherwise, the dry starch coating would come off.

He had to fry them until the eggplant strips were lightly golden brown, then gently stir them with a ladle, separating any pieces that were stuck together.

Under the effect of the hot oil, the eggplant strips, which had been somewhat soft before, quickly hardened.

While stirring with the ladle, one could even hear the friction sound of the eggplant strips colliding.

Once they were golden brown, they were scooped out with a slotted spoon to drain the oil.

Meanwhile, he used a fine-mesh skimmer to remove any residue from the oil in the wok, preventing dislodged bits of dry starch from burning and making the oil bitter.

When the oil was seven-tenths hot, the eggplant strips were put back into the wok for a second fry.

The second fry made the surface of the eggplant strips even crispier and also made them less likely to soften again.

He refried them for fifteen seconds.

Then, he scooped the eggplant strips out of the wok and poured out the oil, leaving just a little oil in the bottom. After heating it up, he tossed in the dried Sichuan peppercorns, dried chili, and sliced garlic.

He stir-fried them over low heat to release their numbing and spicy fragrance.

Immediately, he swirled in a bit of Dark Soy Sauce to enhance the color and savory taste.

After stirring for a bit, he poured in half a ladleful of Chen Vinegar along with an equal amount of White Sugar, followed by a small spoonful of salt and a little Light Soy Sauce.

He began to stir the contents of the wok.

This step couldn't be rushed. It had to be done like when making Crystal Sugar Pork Knuckles: the sugar syrup needed to be thoroughly melted and reduced, and the moisture in the sauce cooked off. This way, the eggplant would become even more delicious.

Soon, the sauce in the wok became thick, and a mix of sweet, tangy, spicy, and numbing aromas wafted from it.

Xie Baomin watched in astonishment. When did his Junior Brother master Flavorful Eggplant? And to such an authentic degree! He had thought this round would be tough, but now it seemed that the competition was as certain as "holding a snail with three fingers"—virtually a sure thing!

Guo Weidong remarked from the side, "The so-called dish that goes with rice must be paired with rice to be delicious. Eating the dish without rice, one may find it either too salty or too greasy, or both. This round, only Lin Xu didn't make a dish that goes with rice. He's bound to win."

Laymen watch the excitement; experts watch the technique.

Guo Weidong didn't even wait for the results before he guessed the outcome of the match.

Of course, that was also his hope. Who wouldn't want to see someone from Fishing Platform win the cooking competition held at Fishing Platform?

The sauce in the wok thickened more and more.

Once it could cling to the spoon, Lin Xu added the fried eggplant strips and also sprinkled in a handful of Roasted White Sesame.

The Roasted White Sesame seeds enhanced the fragrance and also improved the dish's appearance.

After adding them, he tossed the wok to mix the sauce and eggplant strips together, ensuring each strip was coated with the sauce and white sesame seeds.

Having done all this, he took the dish out of the wok and plated it.

Just as he plated the dish, a system prompt echoed in his mind:

"Host has boldly innovated using existing cooking experience to create the Perfect Level dish, Flavorful Eggplant. Reward: Superior dish—Chopped Pepper Fish Head."

Wuhu! He had bet correctly! It was totally unexpected; round after round of the serial quest hadn't awarded any significant rewards, and then trying a new dish actually earned him the Chopped Pepper Fish Head. What a pleasant surprise!

By this time, all the chefs had finished preparing their dishes.

The judges left their seats and began the evaluation.

「In the audience seats below.」

Lu Lu turned to Zhu Yong, who was sitting beside her, and asked, "Can Boss Lin win this round?"

As a top-three contestant from the last Fishing Platform competition, Zhu Yong had a clear understanding of this round. He smiled and said, "Whether Boss Lin can win depends on whether the judges have rice. If each of them gets a bowl of rice, he's definitely going to lose. But if there's no rice, then this round is his for sure."

Rice? Isn't this a cooking competition? What does it have to do with rice? Lu Lu didn't quite understand what Zhu Yong was saying for a moment.

However, contestants like Guo Xinghai on stage realized this point. They looked at the dishes they had made, then at Lin Xu's dish...

They had been too careless. They should have carefully considered the theme before starting. No wonder Lin Xu hesitated for so long before beginning. He must have been considering what dish to make.

After Liu Zhengyu and the others came down, they exclaimed after tasting each dish, "If only we had a bowl of rice!"

All of these dishes, without exception, were perfect with rice. But unfortunately, this was a cooking competition; no rice was prepared for the judges, so they could only taste and lament.

Finally, they came to Lin Xu's dish.

Liu Zhengyu adjusted his glasses and asked with a smile, "Lin Xu, everyone else made dishes that pair well with rice. Why didn't you?"

Lin Xu honestly replied, "I don't know how."

Liu Zhengyu immediately burst out laughing, "Look at how modest this young man is."

The other judges also laughed and chimed in, praising Lin Xu for not having the arrogance typical of young people and for being a role model for others.

Lin Xu: "..."

I was just telling the truth; I really don't know how to make eggplant dishes that go with rice.

After the judges finished speaking, they began tasting the Flavorful Eggplant under Liu Zhengyu's lead.

The first taste was sweet, sour, numbingly spicy, and carried a hint of sesame aroma.

With a bite, the crisp eggplant strips were enveloped by a rich sauce. The sour, sweet, numbing, and spicy flavors, along with the eggplant's own fresh taste, converged in the mouth.

It tasted absolutely fantastic.

And the seasoning of the eggplant strips was just right.

Finally, they could stop thinking about the absence of rice.

"Delicious! Lin Xu, your cooking skills are truly incredible—superb!"

"Indeed, it's changed my perception of eggplant."

"Looking forward to your performance in the next round!"

"I can't help but take another bite; these eggplant strips are just perfect."

"..."

After the judges finished eating, they returned to their seats to score.

Lin Xu took the opportunity to taste the Salted Fish Eggplant Stew made by Guo Xinghai and the Minced Pork Eggplant made by Wei Qian.

Their flavors were perfect. The only pity was the lack of a bowl of rice.

Soon, the scores were out. Lin Xu once again received first place.

The system's notification sounded in his mind:

"Congratulations to the host for achieving first place in this round of the competition, completing the fourth stage of the 'Overcoming Challenges' serial quest, and receiving one Superior Cooking Learning Card."

Eureka! Finally, something useful as a reward. Too bad it came a little late. If it had arrived earlier, he might have learned a dish that goes with rice just now. But no matter. He could continue to covertly learn in the next round. For instance, Huo Yifan had glared at him several times at the start of the contest—it wouldn't be too much to secretly learn a dish from him later, would it?

Chapter 299: Huo Yifan Wants to Make White Robed Shrimp? What are you waiting for, learn!

The contestants' scores were displayed on the big screen one by one. Beneath Lin Xu's ranking were Huo Yifan from the Xia Gong Restaurant of China Grand Hotel and Zhuang Yizhou from the Chinese Restaurant of Yanjing Hotel, occupying second and third places, respectively. Guo Xinghai still ranked fourth. Wei Qian, because his minced meat eggplant had too much meat and was too greasy, received eighth place and was eliminated.

Out of thirty contestants, eight were eliminated in the first round, seven in the second, five in the third, and three in the fourth. Now, only seven contestants remained on the field, two of whom were from Fishing Platform.

At this point, both the eliminated contestants and those still competing had lost the arrogance and discontent they had before the competition started, along with the illusion that Lin Xu is nothing special; with a little effort, I could surpass him. Four rounds of competition had passed. He had consistently scored either full marks or 9.9 points, firmly holding the first-place position. In such a situation, how could anyone compete?

In the front row of the audience, Liao Jinming, the head of the Dining Department, quietly said to Bai Pengbo next to him, "Go tell He Baoqing to prepare a lavish lunch to reward Lin Xu and the others; they've really made Fishing Platform proud today."

"Okay, Director Liao."

Bai Pengbo made his way over to the advisors' section and relayed Liao Jinming's instructions.

Upon hearing this, He Baoqing immediately grumbled, "Reward them? What am I supposed to reward them with? Our Building One is more home-style; we don't have anything particularly special to serve. Giant Grouper? There's just a Giant Grouper that arrived fresh this morning, but can we actually butcher that thing?"

Xie Baomin, upon hearing that Building One's kitchen had this treasure, immediately said, "Of course you can! Since we're rewarding the champion, surely we pick something delicious, right? A Giant Grouper needs to be kept in seawater and requires an oxygen supply; it's incredibly troublesome to maintain."

No sooner had he finished speaking than Dai Jianli, who loved stirring up excitement, chimed in, "Exactly, exactly! It might die any day if it's not well taken care of; better to slaughter it now. Do you need my help, boss? I'm quite good at handling these things."

Song Dahai looked at these two with disbelief. "Get real, you two. When your buildings have a Giant Grouper, I never see you slaughtering it for yourselves."

"Mainly because there wasn't any competition going on... Old Song, you're good at cooking fish, why don't you do it?" Seeing Song Dahai speak up, Dai Jianli immediately tried to drag his old buddy into it.

Song Dahai glared at him, then sat to one side, looking at He Baoqing with a sympathetic gaze.

He Baoqing wasn't foolish and directly passed the buck to Bai Pengbo. "Can the Giant Grouper be butchered? If so, I'll start preparing right now."

"I'll go ask Director Liao. Chef He, don't be impulsive. Giant Groupers are getting harder to buy these days; you'll be in trouble with Director Liao if you just butcher it."

Upon hearing Bai Pengbo would go back to consult, Dai Jianli and Xie Baomin immediately sat back and resumed eating their cookies.

"With Director Liao's penny-pinching ways, we can forget about even tasting the Fish Scales of the Grouper."

"Right, let's just have the suckling pig Chef He made for lunch. Its flavor might be a bit home-style, but it's really good with rice."

「On the field.」

As soon as Wei Qian confirmed his elimination, he immediately carried his minced meat eggplant and Guo Xinghai's Salted Fish Eggplant Stew out of the competition area. While these dishes were still quite hot, he hurried to the kitchen to get some rice to eat with them. He planned to eat and drink his fill before watching Lin Xu win the championship.

After the eliminated contestants left, the staff replaced the racks with new ones, filled with various ingredients.

Liu Zhengyu, holding a microphone, stood up and said, "Chinese cuisine is vast and profound, with dishes of various colors, but white dishes tend to have an artistic touch. So, please prepare a dish with

white as the main color. There are no restrictions on meat or vegetarian ingredients, nor on flavor profile. The time limit is one hour. The timer starts now!"

White?

As soon as the competition's requirement was announced, a buzz of discussion erupted among both the audience and the live stream viewers.

"WOW! The topics for this competition are always so unexpected."

"Indeed, you can never guess them right."

"There are indeed many white-colored dishes, but with only one hour, they have to think carefully."

"I bet many contestants will choose tofu."

"Not necessarily. There are a lot of white Chinese dishes, like Chicken Bean Curd, Furong Chicken Slices, Milk Soup with water spinach, and so on, which are much classier than tofu."

"Don't forget Lin Xu's White Jade Lotus Root Strips are also white."

"Right, right, how could we forget the White Jade Lotus Root Strips!"

"Looks like he's going to win this round too."

"..."

「In the audience seats.」

Upon hearing that they had to make a white dish, Shen Guofu immediately said with a happy expression, "This round is in the bag."

He had just eaten the Steamed Rice Flour Silver Strips cooked by his son-in-law yesterday—its appearance, taste, and texture had left a deep impression on him.

Han Shuzhen, Chen Meijuan, and others also nodded in agreement. With Steamed Rice Flour Silver Strips, passing this round should be no problem.

Chen Yan, seeing everyone's agreeing expressions, suddenly felt as if she had missed several episodes of a TV series. "What's going on? Did my brother-in-law cook a new dish yesterday?"

Shen Jiayue said, "Yesterday, my Xu made Steamed Rice Flour Silver Strips; it's white and tasted absolutely amazing. If he makes this dish, then this competition is a sure win."

Upon hearing this, Chen Yan immediately felt like she had missed out on billions. AAARGH! If only I'd known, I would have gone with Uncle and Aunt to freeload a meal yesterday!

As she was fuming, Shen Baobao even took out his phone and showed her a picture of the Steamed Rice Flour Silver Strips.

Chen Yan's regret grew even stronger. I heard their engagement party is tomorrow.

Chapter 300: Huo Yifan Wants to Make White Robed Shrimp? What are you waiting for, learn!

No matter what, they resolved, their brother-in-law had to cook that dish one more time for everyone to try something new.

「Before the storage racks.」

The contestants were picking out the ingredients they needed.

Guo Xinghai had taken the only grouper from the storage rack, along with some eggs and Potato Starch. It was unclear what dish he intended to make.

Zhuang Yizhou chose chicken breast, stock, and eggs. It was uncertain whether he was planning to make Chicken Bean Curd.

As for Huo Yifan, he had taken a small basin of shrimp from the rack.

Actually, there were still two lotus roots on the rack, and they were the crunchy type, but everyone turned a blind eye to them.

Everyone knew that Lin Xu could make White Jade Lotus Root Strips, and also knew that this dish had won the competition last time. Now, if anyone chose to use the lotus root, wouldn't that be showing off to the master?

Just as everyone was waiting for Lin Xu to pick the lotus root to make White Jade Lotus Root Strips, he instead picked up the only white radish from the storage rack, casually grabbing a bag of Potato Starch and some garlic.

His actions immediately confounded everyone.

What was going on? Instead of making the guaranteed winning dish, what was he doing with the radish?

"Old Xie, what's going on with your junior brother?" He Baoqing asked anxiously.

If Lin Xu made White Jade Lotus Root Strips, they would surely win this round. So why choose the white radish? Wasn't he just making things harder for himself?

Although Xie Baomin was also a bit surprised, he wasn't too worried. My junior brother isn't one to act recklessly—he definitely has a plan in mind. All I have to do is wait patiently for the surprise my junior brother will bring.

With this thought, he leisurely said, "Boss, did you know my grandma is almost a hundred years old and still doesn't need a walking stick? That's because she doesn't worry about so many things."

After saying that, he patted He Baoqing on the shoulder and, imitating the tone of the foolish brother-in-law from "Crazy Racing," said, "You gotta keep your cool!"

Dai Jianli chimed in, "Exactly, exactly. All the other hotels' people are here. If you make such a fuss, those who don't know might think we're taking them seriously."

He Baoqing: "..."

Damn it, you two always stick together!

「Under the Lin Ji's Food topic.」

Fans were also discussing Lin Xu's choice.

A Little Brain Axe: "Ahhh, why didn't he choose lotus root? I wanted to see White Jade Lotus Root Strips again."

Hi everyone, my name is Weeping Willow: "Boss Lin can't just make one dish. He also needs to create new dishes."

Only Smoke Hademen, Love Only One Person All My Life: "What if he doesn't win the championship?"

Blind Taxi Driver: "I see that the boss lady and Boss Lin's family are all very calm. Maybe this is a new dish he has been working on recently."

Great Mahayana Stage Cultivator: "Right, not only are they calm, they're even looking content. Boss Lin surely has been studying in secret."

Liang Mountain Needs Rain: "Remember to post pictures, family. I don't get a signal up in the crane, can't watch the live stream, only text and pictures to satiate my craving."

Lin Daiyu Pulling Willows: "I asked the boss lady, and she said the dish Boss Lin is going to make is called Steamed Rice Flour Silver Strips, which can't be found on the internet. It might be an original dish."

Upon hearing this, the fans all quieted down.

They were looking forward to Boss Lin continuing to dazzle everyone.

After getting the radish, Lin Xu returned to his stove and began to get busy.

An hour seemed like plenty of time, but the dish, Steamed Rice Flour Silver Strips, involved many steps, and he needed to maximize the drying time. If he didn't dry off the moisture before steaming, the dish could easily stick together into a clump.

After giving the radish a quick wash, he placed it on the cutting board to start slicing.

Wu Kexin, who was responsible for the live broadcast, along with the TV station's cameraman, hurried over.

Lin Xu's knife skills were always impressive. Now that he was slicing radish, an ingredient well-suited for showcasing such skills, they definitely couldn't miss it.

He cut off the top and bottom of the radish with his knife, leaving only a uniform middle section. Then, using the chef's knife, he cut along the radish to create a flat side. After cutting all four sides, the original white radish had turned into a rectangular block about twenty centimeters long.

Next, he positioned the radish block properly and started slicing it.

As the knife blade danced up and down, paper-thin slices of radish were cut, astonishing the fans watching the live stream.

"I was just about to say I can do the Dubai Knife Technique when Boss Lin used it earlier, but now I realize the Dubai Knife Technique was just an appetizer."

"Damn! The slices are so thin you can see the wood grain of the cutting board through them."

"Were these cut by human hands? A slicer can't make them this thin, right?"

"That's so freaking beautiful. I have a feeling Boss Lin is going to bring out the big guns this round!"

"The other contestants are also bringing out the big guns. Zhuang Yizhou is making Chicken Bean Curd, Guo Xinghai is probably making Slippery-fried Grouper Fillets, and Huo Yifan is preparing shrimp; he might be making White Robed Shrimp."

"Damn it, theirs are all meat dishes. Boss Lin only used a radish. Can he win?"

"He won with White Jade Lotus Root Strips last time, and he'll win the same way today."

"Alright, that's a relief to hear!"

Lin Xu sliced quickly and steadily, and in no time, he had finished slicing the radish.

After finishing the slices, he flexed his wrist, then neatly arranged the radish slices and began to shred them.

The fans once again admired his extraordinary knife skills.

After shredding them, he soaked the radish strips in salt water to draw out excess moisture. While waiting, Lin Xu glanced at the other contestants' dishes.

Chicken Bean Curd, Slippery-fried Grouper Fillets, White Robed Shrimp, Almond Tofu Stuffed with Premium Bird's Nest, Milk Soup Stewed Meatballs, Delicate Winter Melon Box...

All tough dishes. Which one would be best to learn from?

After thinking it over, he finally chose White Robed Shrimp.