

## Culinary 571

Chapter 571: Cui Qingyuan: The roasted gluten is a pleasant surprise, and even more surprising is finding a promising talent!

Can I learn how to make dry dipping sauces tomorrow?

Seeing the message from Dai Jianli, Lin Xu was somewhat surprised.

Not bad at all! With this, I can upgrade all the dry dipping sauces in the store. From now on, whenever I need dry dipping sauces, I'll have the Perfect Level method at hand.

From this perspective, this is more exciting than getting two Perfect Level dishes.

Moreover, once I have the dry dipping sauces, I can improve the quality of many dishes that use them. I can even use these sauces in the preparation of other dishes.

What's more important is that in the Points Shop, the sale price for Perfect Level dry dipping sauces is 3,000,000 points.

A regular Perfect Level dish starts at eight hundred thousand points. However, the Technique for dry dipping sauces costs three million, and you also have to complete a so-called Trial Task.

When compared like this, using a Perfect Level learning card to acquire this seasoning becomes even more urgent and necessary.

Hmm, mastering it would save me three million points—that's roughly equivalent to earning a hundred million—so why not learn it?

Plus, I'll get to see the fine Sichuan cuisine Dai Jianli talked about.

The so-called fine Sichuan cuisine probably refers to those non-spicy dishes, like Boiled Cabbage in Clear Broth, Chicken Bean Curd, and the like.

Many people's first impression of Sichuan cuisine is its spiciness. However, spicy dishes are actually considered lower-end Sichuan cuisine, affordable for everyday people.

Above those, there are many non-spicy dishes.

Each one is almost like the pinnacle of Chinese culinary art.

So, am I going to expand my horizons tomorrow? This is really something to look forward to!

After agreeing on a time to meet with Dai Jianli, Lin Xu put his phone into his pocket and continued to fry kaofu.

This process is relatively long, a minimum of thirty minutes. If the temperature increases slowly or the kaofu is too moist, it could take up to fifty minutes. Regardless of the time it takes, the kaofu must be fried until its surface turns golden brown. The pieces should make a crisp sound when they knock against each other and feel light when scooped out. Only then is the kaofu considered properly fried. The secret to delicious kaofu is to fry out all its moisture completely, then simmer it until soft in a sauce rich with soy sauce and sugar. Honestly, with this method of first frying until dry and then simmering in sauce until soft, even if you didn't use kaofu, any similar ingredient prepared this way would still taste quite good. For example, the popular braised dried tofu in the store—isn't it made this way as well?

While Lin Xu was frying the kaofu, Shen Baobao got off work.

"Xu Bao, what's for dinner?"

"Whatever you feel like eating, we'll make."

The oil in the pan hadn't heated up yet, so Lin Xu strolled to the kitchen doorway. Shen Baobao immediately came over with a smile.

It feels really good to be close to Xu Bao after an afternoon apart.

She rubbed her head against Lin Xu's shoulder and then mumbled, "I ate too much rice at noon and felt stuffed all afternoon. I'm not very hungry now, but I still want to eat something... Do you think I'll become chubby like Dundun in the future?"

"You won't."

Lin Xu looked his Baobao up and down. With her tall stature and perfect figure, he thought, Even if she became chubby, she'd be a 'big chubby,' not a 'little chubby.' That word 'small' just sounds belittling, not pleasant at all.

"Thanks, Xu Bao. Even though you spoil me, I still need to exercise. I can't become a plump fatty; that would bring down our family's good looks!"

Lin Xu pinched her cheek. "If you're going to exercise, then let's just stay at the villa tonight. It's perfect because I have to go to the Fishing Platform tomorrow morning and won't be here."

I'll swing by here on the way to the Fishing Platform tomorrow to leave Dundun with Shu Yun. The grandparents have to go to work, and Dundun's relationship with his biological mother isn't good, so I can only send the little guy to his godmother.

"Going back to the villa? Yes, let's do that! We can bring some tasty treats to pamper Dad."

Shen Jiayue pulled out her phone from her bag and, TAP-TAP-TAP, typed a message to Shen Guofu: "We're bringing Dundun back to the villa tonight. Do you want anything in particular? I'll sneak some for you."

No sooner had she sent the message than Shen Guofu transferred ten thousand yuan: "Good daughter, always thinking of her dad. This money is for you to buy ice cream."

Haha, Boss Shen is always so generous.

Shen Guofu, having just gotten home from work, fell into deep thought. He imagined a myriad of foods: pressed pig's head, Beef Steaks, Chicken Feet, dried tofu, and even that 'super vegetarian dish,' Braised Pork Belly—all things he craved.

But what should he actually eat? Shen Guofu wanted to eat everything but didn't dare ask his daughter to bring too much. If his wife found out, he'd never hear the end of it.

After pondering for a while, he sent his daughter a message: "What delicious things did the store make today?"

Yes, let's see what's available at the store and then decide what to eat, making the most of the delicious food.

Shen Baobao replied, "Today Xu Bao is making something with kaofu for a customer. Do you want to try some?"

Seeing the word 'kaofu,' Shen Guofu couldn't help but frown. Isn't that something added to animal feed?

But the moment he thought of his son-in-law's culinary skills, Boss Shen's interest was piqued: "Get me a bit to try, not too much. For the rest, make me some pressed pig's head and Chicken Feet. I've been doing aerobics these days, and my skin has loosened; I need to eat some collagen to replenish it."

Loosened skin? Isn't that just your skin becoming slack after fat loss?

Shen Baobao teased her father a little and then said to Lin Xu, "Dad wants to try the kaofu, so let's bring him some when we go over. Just a little; he probably just wants to try something new."

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"Sure."

As the oil temperature rose, the wheat gluten lost more and more moisture, and its volume even shrank slightly. Lin Xi took a ladle and stirred the contents of the wok a couple of times to ensure the wheat gluten heated evenly. When the oil temperature first rose, the wheat gluten still contained a lot of moisture. A sour, fermented smell continuously wafted from the wok, which was rather unpleasant. But now, as the moisture content decreased, the initial sour smell from the wok gradually faded, while the aroma grew increasingly rich.

"Hello everyone in the live stream! Our boss is making wheat gluten. Boss, say hello to my live stream viewers."

While Lin Xu was busy, Zhuang Yizhou came over, holding his phone.

In the morning, the operations department team had come to film the method for making hand-torn cabbage. They also captured some footage of the kitchen prep process, which was edited into a fast-paced clip. Once released, it immediately sparked a heated discussion among netizens. Everyone felt they hadn't seen enough and wanted more glimpses of Lin Ji's kitchen prep and various scenes. Some even suspected it was staged because the kitchen was too clean, a stark contrast to the grimy, grease-covered kitchens they typically imagined.

To satisfy the viewers and dispel some prejudices, Lin Xu arranged for the kitchen to do a live stream in the afternoon. However, he didn't have time to manage it himself, and it wasn't appropriate for Wu Kexin, an outsider, to stay in the kitchen for an extended period. Just then, the handsome Zhuang Yizhou appeared in Lin Xu's line of sight.

When Zhuang Yizhou received this assignment, he could hardly believe his ears. Not only would he have less work to do, but he could also boost the popularity and follower count of his live stream. The boss was so supportive! As soon as the afternoon prep began, he started live streaming, showing viewers the entire kitchen environment and equipment, repeatedly explaining the uses of various kitchen tools. Now, he had wandered over to Lin Xu.

Lin Xu waved to the live stream camera:

"Hello everyone, welcome to Lin Ji's Food's kitchen for a visit and some guidance."

His words sent the live stream chat into a frenzy:

"Hahaha, 'graced us with your presence' was a great choice of words."

"Thank you, Boss Lin, for making me feel like a VIP."

"Online, urging for the hand-torn cabbage video! It was supposedly filmed this morning, why hasn't it been released yet?"

"Exactly! I bought a cabbage first thing this morning, waiting to cook it, but the video still isn't up. Are they planning to release it tonight to make us all hungry?"

"Just curious, besides hands and cabbage, what else do you need to make hand-torn cabbage?"

"..."

Seeing these comments, Lin Xu said, "It might be set to a timer. I'll have the company post the video shortly, so hopefully, you can follow along and make dinner."

After saying this, he also helped Zhuang Yizhou attract some followers: "Everyone, feel free to follow Chef Zhuang's account. He'll be doing more kitchen live streams periodically, and we welcome everyone's guidance and supervision then."

Once the interaction ended, Zhuang Yizhou carried his phone over to the duck roasting oven to continue the live stream. This recent interaction had caused the live stream's popularity to surge significantly, gaining tens of thousands of new followers—far more successful than any previous live session, which left him quite moved. It was a good thing he'd casually applied for the job on the day of the competition; otherwise, he really would have missed out on such a great development opportunity.

Meanwhile, Lin Xu pulled out his phone and called the company, urging the operations department to release the video quickly. The demands for an update had even reached the live stream; the netizens' interest in the hand-torn cabbage was beyond imagination!

Before long, the wheat gluten was perfectly fried. After scooping it out, Lin Xu checked the time and soaked some black fungus.

By six-thirty in the evening, he scooped out the soaked shiitake mushrooms and snapped off their stems. He then divided the caps into quarters. Next, he scooped out the wood ear fungus and set it aside with the shiitake mushrooms and daylily buds.

He began to prepare, setting up a wok. After heating it and lightly oiling the surface, he poured in a typical amount of vegetable oil for stir-frying. Before the oil heated up, he added a small piece of cinnamon and one Star Anise, heating them on low to release their fragrance. Once the fragrance emerged, he added the wood ear fungus, daylily buds, and shiitake mushrooms to the wok. He turned the heat to high and stir-fried them to reduce their moisture, which would make the dish's flavors more concentrated.

Next, he started seasoning. He added a ladleful of Light Soy Sauce, a ladleful of Dark Soy Sauce, a ladleful of Crystal Sugar, and a small teaspoon of salt. Aside from Cui Qingyuan, Shen Baobao's elder sister and the others were also eager to try the dish, so the quantity of food in the wok was substantial, requiring a generous amount of seasoning. The Four Happiness Roasted Glutinous Rice dish is characterized by its rich, glossy, reddish-brown sauce and an interplay of sweet and savory flavors, so the amounts of Soy Sauce and sugar needed to be relatively high. However, only a little salt was necessary for seasoning, because both Light Soy Sauce and Dark Soy Sauce contain salt, which makes the ingredients savory.

After seasoning, he added the fried wheat gluten to the wok and stir-fried it a few times to ensure the Soy Sauce and sugar were evenly mixed. Following this, he added the soaked peanuts and poured in the water used for soaking the shiitake mushrooms, ensuring it covered all the ingredients. He then covered the wok, adjusted the heat to medium-low, and simmered it for over twenty minutes to allow the seasonings' flavors to fully permeate the ingredients.

Having finished these tasks, Lin Xu noticed several orders of hand-torn cabbage yet to be made in the back kitchen. He swiftly prepared these dishes on an adjacent stove, plated them, and carried an extra portion out to the dining area.

At that moment, Shen Baobao was sipping Pumpkin Soup while chatting with the weight-loss quartet about their efforts.

"Wow, so burpees are really that effective for burning fat! But if you do them at home, wouldn't the downstairs neighbors protest?"

Zeng Xiaoqi sipped her iced Sour Plum Soup through a straw, the liquid gurgling softly.

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"I'm not really sure," Shen Baobao said. "I live in a villa, so there's no one downstairs. If you're worried about disturbing the neighbors, you could just buy a thick carpet; then it wouldn't be a nuisance."

Shen Baobao casually flexed a bit, then immediately offered a sincere suggestion.

Exercising before bed is essential; it burns fat, you know.

However, it's best to exercise half an hour after meals. That way, fat has nowhere to hide, and it can also boost your stomach's motility, preventing indigestion.

Lin Xu placed the hand-torn cabbage on the dining table. "Whoever's hungry, eat up. The Four Happiness Roasted Gluten still needs a little more time. Besides, you might not be used to this kind of local Shanghai cuisine."

Zeng Xiaoqi said, "We didn't specifically come for local dishes! We just want to try it. If it's good, we'll eat it more often in the future. Roasted gluten is a whole grain, so it's good for you."

Lin Xu looked at the Sour Plum Soup she was holding and smiled helplessly. "Is that your second or third cup? If you want to be healthy, you should drink less Sour Plum Soup. That kind of cold drink isn't very good for girls."

Sour Plum Soup is considered a "cooling" food, and pregnant women or girls on their period should avoid it.

Zeng Xiaoqi was speechless.

I was just making a casual comment! Why are you taking it so seriously?

Do you think we girls collect so many fitness videos and tutorials because we're really planning to work out? Aren't they mostly for a bit of psychological comfort after overeating?

When the Four Happiness Roasted Gluten in the pot was almost done simmering, Cui Qingyuan arrived.

After greeting Shu Yun, he sat alone at a window-side booth on the second floor, working on his laptop. He dealt with teaching matters while waiting for his food.

In the kitchen, Lin Xu lifted the pot lid. The broth inside had reduced significantly and thickened as well.

Turning up the heat, he began to further reduce the sauce.

The Four Happiness Roasted Gluten dish requires no visible liquid on the plate when served, but when eaten, the gluten should burst with sauce in every bite. That's what makes it authentic.

To achieve this, one needs to reduce the sauce over high heat right before plating, to thicken it and remove excess moisture as much as possible, meeting the standard of "no sauce on the plate, but sauce in the dish."

When the sauce in the pot was almost perfectly reduced, he drizzled in a bit of Sesame Oil.

He mixed it evenly, then plated the dish.

Half a pot of roasted gluten yielded three plates. One plate was brought to Professor Cui, and another was for Shen Baobao and the others to try.

The remaining plate was split in half again: one half for the kitchen staff to taste, and the other half packed up for his father-in-law to take home, so he and his mother-in-law could also try it.

It wasn't often one made this kind of dish, which isn't commonly eaten in the North, so it was best to let everyone have a taste.

At the dining table, Professor Cui's eyes lit up at the sight of the roasted gluten on his plate.

It was actually hand-torn, not sliced with a knife, and it exuded a rich, savory soy aroma. Through the honeycomb-like pores of the gluten, one could see the dark sauce nestled within.

Hmm, this roasted gluten is quite interesting.

He picked up a piece with his chopsticks and put it into his mouth. As he chewed gently, the salty-sweet sauce burst from the pores in the gluten.

Delicious!

This sauce instantly awakened a deeply buried memory.

He remembered the first time he went to his maternal grandmother's house in Shanghai. He had eaten Four Happiness Roasted Gluten, and it tasted exactly like this. Was he five or six years old then?

After eating the roasted gluten, he had followed his grandmother to buy candy. At the entrance of the alley, he met Yan Lin for the first time. She was wearing a floral dress and red shoes; that sharp-tongued girl who, upon seeing him for the first time, had called him a 'little rascal'...

Gently chewing, the tender yet chewy texture of the roasted gluten brought Cui Qingyuan back from his reverie.

Yes, this is the texture, this is the taste.

The young owner of Lin Ji's Food was truly full of surprises, having recreated the Four Happiness Roasted Gluten exactly as he remembered it from his childhood at his grandmother's house.

I'll have to come here often.

There might be even more surprises in store.

He took out his phone, tapped on Yan Lin's profile picture, and quickly typed a message: "Boss Lin's cooking skills are truly excellent. The Four Happiness Roasted Gluten he makes is simply divine! Next time you come to Beijing, you absolutely must..."

He typed this far, paused to think, then deleted the message letter by letter. After exiting the chat, he nonchalantly slipped his phone back into his pocket.

His childhood playmate had become the high and mighty President Yan. Perhaps... it's better to keep some distance.

He gave a wry smile. Just as he was about to continue eating, he saw a quirky little girl run up the stairs.

"Is this the roasted gluten? How does it taste? It looks a bit like stir-fried gluten, huh?"

Zeng Xiaoqi said, "It's so yummy! It has a sweet and salty flavor, and the gluten is packed with rich sauce. I've decided, I'm going to eat this every day from now on. I get to eat whole grains, and it's delicious too. My body fat is bound to plummet, right?"

Geng Lele, after tasting a bite, immediately called out to Lin Xu, "Lin Xu, I designed a set of personal logos and online avatars for you. Take a look when you're not busy."

Lin Xu, who had just come out of the kitchen, heard this and asked curiously, "Weren't you supposed to be working on practice papers this afternoon? How did you get sidetracked again?"

"I went through two sets of last year's Math Olympiad papers, but they were boring. Then I self-studied some advanced algebra and spatial analytic geometry for a while, but that was boring too. So, I just fiddled with the computer and designed a set of avatars and personal logos for you..."

Everyone: ???

Good heavens, she did all that in one afternoon?

It feels like many people couldn't finish that much in an entire summer vacation. How is this girl's brain wired?

Cui Qingyuan hadn't initially paid attention to the commotion, but as he listened, the disappointment and melancholy he'd felt while messaging Yan Lin earlier were replaced by surprise.

Going through two Math Olympiad papers in an afternoon was nothing special.

Self-studying advanced algebra and spatial analytic geometry wasn't a big deal either.

And people who knew design were a dime a dozen in the country.

But for all these abilities to be combined in one person, and for all of it to be accomplished in a single afternoon—now, that was genuinely impressive.

He closed his laptop and strode over to Geng Lele, who was proudly showing off her work. "Young lady, may I see what you've designed?"

Geng Lele had just taken out her phone and was about to open her photo album to show Lin Xu her designs. Seeing this stranger approach, she instantly became wary. "What for? You're not planning to squat on the trademark, are you?"

With the implementation of copyright law, many people had started looking for ways to make claims. Registering trademarks and then suing for infringement had enriched a whole host of 'copyright trolls.'

Geng Lele was worried that someone else might preemptively register Lin Xu's trademark. So, she designed one for him today. If it looked okay, they should hurry to register it, staying one step ahead of these copyright trolls and leaving them no recourse.

The girl's wary words made Cui Qingyuan chuckle. He smiled and said, "I know a little about design myself. May I see what you've created?"

Geng Lele glanced at Lin Xu. After confirming he was an acquaintance, she opened her phone and displayed the icons she had designed that afternoon.

Cui Qingyuan had initially assumed the girl was just tinkering for fun, but upon seeing the icons, he realized they were nearly at a professional designer's level.

If she also knew how to 'tell a story' with her designs, she could even help major corporations revamp their logos.

"Did you teach yourself the software?"

"Yes."

"How long did it take you to learn?"

"Just a few hours, I suppose. Back then, I wanted to make a store logo for Lin Xu, so I didn't study the software in depth. I just tinkered for a few hours and got the hang of it. Later, I designed a few other things for the shop... Why are you asking all this?"

"Is self-studying advanced algebra difficult?"

"Not difficult, just a bit dry. I usually only glance at it when I'm bored. It's not on the college entrance exam, and I'm worried that studying it too much might affect my performance on the actual tests."

The more Cui Qingyuan listened, the more delighted he became.

He casually pulled paper and a pen from his bag. On the spot, he wrote down a math problem typical for second or third-year university students and placed it before Geng Lele.

The girl promptly solved it and then asked, "What exactly do you do?"

"I'm a professor at Tsinghua University. I'm hoping to find a group of exceptionally talented young people to research some unconventional topics. Are you interested in joining us?"

Geng Lele's eyes darted around, and then she said to Lin Xu, "Lin Xu, call the police, quick! This guy is running a pyramid scheme!"

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Report a crime? Pyramid scheme?

Cui Qingyuan was thrilled to have found a genius student, but he hadn't expected her to give him such a big surprise right off the bat.

He took out his business card holder from his bag and was about to introduce himself when Geng Lele said, "Haha, handing out business cards the moment we meet? Definitely a pyramid scheme! During the last joint school-police drill, the police officer said the more titles on a business card, the more likely it's a pyramid scheme. Lin Xu, call the police!"

Cui Qingyuan looked at the row of slash-separated titles on his own business card. This student seems like she won't be easy to get along with, he suddenly thought.

However, a student like her, much better than those who only knew how to cram and had rigid thinking, was precisely the kind of talent urgently needed in the Artificial Intelligence field.

He put his business card away. Since this young lady said business cards weren't trustworthy, he figured he might as well.

But just as he stuffed it into his bag, Geng Lele piped up again, "The moment I mentioned the business card, you hurried to put it away. That clearly shows a guilty conscience! Xu, what was the number for 110 again?"

Lin Xu, exasperated, said to the girl, "Stop messing around, Lele. Professor Cui is Boss Yan's good friend. Weren't you just praising Boss Yan for being so cool last night?"

Only when he spoke did Geng Yiji finally quiet down.

Cui Qingyuan seized the opportunity to ask her, "Young lady, are you willing to come to Tsinghua University?"

Chen Yan and the others nearby crowded around, their faces filled with surprise and curiosity.

"Professor Cui, if our Lele agrees, does that mean she'll officially be a Tsinghua University student?"

"Isn't this equivalent to a special admission?"

"Lele, quickly agree!"

"Yeah, opportunities like this are really rare."

However, Geng Lele was still preoccupied with the college entrance exam. She shook her cute mushroom-cut hair and asked curiously, "If I agree now, will I get extra points on the college entrance exam?"

Cui Qingyuan: ?????

Why am I finding it a bit hard to follow this student's train of thought?

Lin Xu explained from the side, "You might not know this, but two months ago, the admissions offices of both Tsinghua University and Beijing University approached Lele. However, due to issues with the available majors, Lele gave up the special admission offers and decided to take the college entrance exam."

Upon hearing this, Cui Qingyuan finally understood.

Something unpleasant must have happened during the previous special recruitment, which is why this student has an aversion to Tsinghua University. No wonder she demanded to call the police the moment I mentioned I was from Tsinghua. It seems this girl really holds a grudge. Ha! As expected of a student I, Cui Qingyuan, have taken an interest in! Such personality!

At this thought, he looked at Geng Lele and asked, "Little girl, last time the people from the admissions office contacted you, did they speak with a condescending tone, conveying a sense of superiority, as if them contacting you was a once-in-a-lifetime blessing your ancestors had secured for you?"

Geng Lele was startled for a moment, then nodded. "Yeah! They even told me to be mentally prepared to accept that I'm a mediocrity because Tsinghua University is full of talented people, and my abilities wouldn't amount to anything there... Their tone made it sound like the special admission opportunity was some kind of charity they were bestowing upon me."

Cui Qingyuan slapped his forehead, an 'I knew it' expression on his face. "Those folks in the admissions office are becoming more and more outrageous... You didn't give them a piece of your mind?"

Geng Lele's expression froze. "This... I could have actually cursed them?"

"Of course! The first time Tsinghua University offered me special admission, I gave the admissions officer a thorough tongue-lashing."

Lin Xu: ????????

That really doesn't match your refined and gentle appearance at all, Professor, he thought.

The others also wore expressions that clearly pleaded, "Please don't lead our dear Lele astray!"

Geng Lele, on the other hand, now looked significantly more interested.

Now this kind of teacher is interesting! Much better than high school teachers who only ever nag you to study, she thought.

Chen Yan asked curiously, "Professor Cui, why don't the people in admissions speak properly? Is it a way to intimidate newcomers?"

Cui Qingyuan smiled. "There's an element of intimidation, yes. But the most important thing is... wherever there are people, there's a 'jianghu'—a world of social intricacies. And what is this 'jianghu'? It's nothing more than navigating human relationships and unspoken rules."

In front of everyone, he briefly explained the special recruitment process.

"Special recruitment, like the college entrance exam, also has first and second batches. If parents of a student in the second batch pull some strings in advance, the admissions staff might deliberately make things a little difficult for students in the first batch. Young high school students are often proud; if they can't endure such treatment, they'll give up. And just like that, a spot opens up, see?"

"As for what happens after they enter Tsinghua University, the admissions office doesn't manage it, nor will they. They are only responsible for getting people into the school and, incidentally, collecting a bonus per head."

"This kind of admissions process causes a large number of students with strong personalities to give up on Tsinghua University directly. Even if they end up taking the college entrance exam, they no longer list Tsinghua University as one of their choices. And these kinds of students, rich in individuality, are exactly what the AI Honors Class desperately needs."

"That's why Cui Qingyuan has quite a strong opinion of the admissions office; he always feels that they are holding back the AI Honors Class."

"But," Geng Lele said, looking troubled, "I promised my homeroom teacher I'd take the college entrance exam. I was even planning to become the top scorer in the Yanjing Region for her..."

All special privileges come with a price; even a leave of absence slip is no exception.

Cui Qingyuan said gently, "Leave all of those negotiations to me. I guarantee that your homeroom teacher, and indeed all the teachers and students at your school, will be proud of you."

He didn't want his student to get entangled in these worldly complexities so early on. For students, maintaining a strong thirst for knowledge and curiosity is fundamental. The more they get involved in other matters, the weaker that thirst and curiosity become, he thought.

To pique Geng Lele's interest in the AI Honors Class, Cui Qingyuan pulled out a small, lighter-shaped cube from his pocket.

"This is a little trinket I made when I was bored," he said. "It's for you."

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"What is this?"

Geng Lele took it. Although it looked like a lighter, it wasn't one. Instead, it resembled a collection of metal strips and blocks.

Could it be a Luban Lock? I stopped playing with those things in kindergarten.

Cui Qingyuan said, "Place it on the table and knock on it twice with your knuckles."

Upon hearing this, Geng Lele promptly placed it on the table.

With a tap of her knuckles, the mundane cube flashed with light. Then, the variously sized metal strips on top twisted and turned, transforming into the shape of arms and legs.

Quickly, the cube transformed into a robot that looked a bit dopey.

It even had a small monitor on its head, across which scrolled the words "Hello."

After the greeting scrolled by, the robot began to march in place. Once done, it circled its arms in front of its chest, took a step forward with its left leg, and then raised its arms high.

Everyone was stunned.

This... isn't this the stretching exercise from the eighth set of broadcast calisthenics?

Filled with surprise, Geng Lele looked at the little robot, then turned to Cui Qingyuan and said, "Teacher, I want to learn this!"

"Then you'll have to work hard. Making this little robot involves electronic engineering, mechanical engineering, programming, and about a dozen other subjects. It's quite challenging."

Desire for knowledge was written all over Geng Lele's face. "I'm not afraid of challenges... but I need to discuss it with my mom and dad, as well as my grandparents, since this is kind of a big deal in our family."

Both her parents worked in research institutes. Her grandfather was a nationally renowned calligrapher, while her grandmother, though a housewife, was also the leader of the local square dance group.

To the Geng family, whether she attended Tsinghua University or Beijing University wasn't really important.

After all, they didn't rely on their daughter to support the family; her choices were based on her interests.

Cui Qingyuan said, "Okay, add me on WeChat. When your family has time, I'll invite them for a meal. It's part of the special recruitment process, sort of a home visit."

He wasn't worried about recruiting the wrong student, as this young lady had already rejected Tsinghua University once.

Without a certain level of ability, who would turn down those pesky little devils from the admissions office?

Cui Qingyuan tapped the little robot's head twice. The robot immediately stopped exercising, slowly retracted its head and mechanical arms, and turned back into its unremarkable lighter shape.

Everyone watched, filled with longing, each wishing for a similar robot.

"Lele, study hard at Tsinghua University, okay? I'm counting on you to make me a robot for my birthday gift!"

"Me too, me too! This adorably clumsy little guy is just so lovable."

"If it were bigger, that would be even better. I could raise it like a son."

"When the time comes, make my robot do square dance instead of broadcast calisthenics. That way, I won't be embarrassed about not learning it after I retire, and the other seniors won't look down on me."

"..."

Geng Lele collected the small cube and said to Cui Qingyuan, "Teacher, these sisters here have been really nice to me. Do you have more of these little robots? Maybe eight or ten more, one for each of them, so nobody can accuse us of being stingy."

Cui Qingyuan was flabbergasted. Fleecing her teacher right after they'd met? Wasn't that a bit much?

He smiled gently. "I think gifts are more meaningful when they're handmade. And given your intellect, you should be able to learn pretty quickly. Go for it! I believe in you!"

Today was truly a happy day. Not only had he enjoyed the much-anticipated Four Happiness Roasted Glutinous Rice, but he had also discovered a genius student. It was worth celebrating with some vintage wine.

Thinking this, he looked at Shu Yun and asked, "Is there any of the vintage liquor Manager Yan left last night still around?"

"Yes, Professor Cui. I'll go get it for you right away."

Everyone usually treated Geng Lele like a younger sister. Now that her teacher wanted a drink, there were no second thoughts. Shu Yun quickly brought over the more-than-half-full bottle of Western liquor Manager Yan had left the previous day.

Cui Qingyuan returned to his booth and sat down. He poured a glass of liquor, then picked up his chopsticks, took a bite of the delicious Four Happiness Roasted Glutinous Rice, and sipped a bit of the vintage drink.

So satisfying!

「At seven-thirty」

Lin Xu said goodbye to everyone, picked up Dundun, and, along with Shen Baobao—who had packed a heap of delicious food—left the restaurant to drive to the West Fourth Ring.

Arriving at the villa, he parked the car in the underground garage on level B2. As he took the elevator upstairs, Han Shuzhen, who was sitting on the sofa, immediately said, "Where's the food you packed? Bring it out."

Shen Baobao was taken aback for a moment.

What's going on? Is Dad fessing up without being pressed?

She glanced at the elder Shen, who was playing a tile-matching game and pretending to be calm, then pointed downward. "It's in the car on B2... Mom, how did you know I brought food back? Did Dad tell you?"

Shen Guofu instantly heaved a long sigh. Silly girl, spilling the beans the moment someone bluffs you! Can't you see I'm almost blinking my eyes out trying to signal you?

Han Shuzhen huffed. "Your dad didn't say anything, but he's been noticeably excited tonight. He even deliberately ate less, clearly making room for other food..."

Since his mother-in-law was in on it, Lin Xu put down Dundun and said, "Go play with your grandma. I'll go get the food. Mom, Dad, you should eat while it's warm. The Four Happiness Roasted Glutinous Rice tastes pretty good, better than I expected."

After all, having been fried and then stewed, it couldn't taste bad. It's just that some people aren't used to the sweet-salty flavor, and many cook it improperly, making Four Happiness Roasted Glutinous Rice a controversial delicacy.

By the time he came back up carrying a large package of food, Shen Guofu had eagerly cleared the dried fruit platter and fruit basket from the coffee table to make space.

Chapter 576: Making Tofu with Chicken Breast and Pork Fat? The Variety of High-End Sichuan Cuisine is Indeed Remarkable! \_3

Han Shuzhen, with Dundun in her arms, was at the grand piano, playing with the keys.

"Come, Lin Xu, put them here."

As Lin Xu took out and unwrapped the bags of food one by one, Han Shuzhen walked over, holding Dundun.

"So much food! You were actually planning to hide it from me..."

Just as she was about to scold her husband, Shen Guofu picked up a piece of braised wheat gluten with his chopsticks and brought it to her mouth.

"Zhenzhen, this is the braised wheat gluten Lin Xu was talking about. Try it and see how it tastes."

Han Shuzhen kicked Old Shen in annoyance. What are you shouting about in front of the child? Just wait until we're back in our room tonight, I'll deal with you then... She took a bite of the braised wheat gluten, nodding as she said, "The taste is really good. Dundun, you can get down and play. Grandma will eat a bit more."

And just like that, the Shen Family's second round of dinner began.

Shen Baobao snuggled up beside her mother, Han Shuzhen, and said with a giggle, "Mom, in a few days, Lin Xu is going to make those Milk Yellow Mooncakes that you and Grandma love the most. Is there any reward for us? Making mooncakes is really hard work, you know!"

Lin Xu: "..."

Baobao, everyone knows you tend to favor outsiders... but this is taking it to a whole new level, isn't it? It's fine to accept gifts from your parents, but asking for them outright... that just doesn't feel right.

Who would have thought, just as Shen Baobao finished speaking, Han Shuzhen said, "Your grandma has a gold bracelet, supposedly once worn by Empress Dowager Cixi. When the mooncakes are ready, you can drive me to her place to deliver them. I'll figure out a way to get that bracelet from her."

"Okay!"

Lin Xu: ???????

Can it really work like that? No wonder Shen Baobao is like this; it turns out the root of it all is my mother-in-law.

「The next morning」

Lin Xu drove from the villa, taking the North Fourth Ring Road to Yingchun Street.

As he reached the shop entrance, Shu Yun came out from inside. Today, Boss Shu was wearing a trim white business suit, her hair tied back in a ponytail. She looked sharp and youthful.

Lin Xu handed Dundun to her. Noticing a brand-new bicycle locked to the lamppost by the entrance, he asked curiously, "Whose bike is that? Why is it locked right at the front door?"

Shu Yun glanced at it and said, "It's Master Wei's. Lately, Tiantian has been crushing him every time they cycle. He blamed it on the shared bikes, so in a fit of pique, he splurged several thousand yuan on this one. It was delivered last night, right after you left."

Delivered last night? Lin Xu's interest was piqued. "So, what about their race last night?"

"Same old story!"

TSK. So it wasn't the equipment, huh? That Wei Qian is such a dimwit. Tiantian cycles home with him every day, and all he can think about is racing her? Can't he broaden his horizons a little?

After these thoughts, he started the car. "I'll probably be back after lunch. Building Eighteen is all Sichuan food. Anything you're craving? If so, I can bring some back for you all."

Upon hearing this, Shu Yun immediately replied in a rather unconvincing Sichuan-Chongqing accent, "Rabbit heads!"

Rabbit skulls? Spicy rabbit heads? Shen Baobao wanted to eat this very dish this morning too. This surprised Lin Xu quite a bit. Why do girls nowadays like such intensely flavored snacks like spicy rabbit heads so much?

He drove to the Fishing Platform. After having his pass checked at the gate, he didn't go straight to Building Eighteen. Instead, he first dropped by Building Two to greet his senior brother before driving to Building Eighteen.

As soon as he entered, the manager at the front desk said cheerfully, "Chef Lin, Head Chef Dai said for you to go straight to the main kitchen. Everything's prepared. They'll start as soon as you get there."

Hearing this, Lin Xu unconsciously felt like he was arriving to give guidance. Just yesterday, Zhuang Yizhou had used that very phrase to tease his online viewers during a livestream. Lin Xu hadn't expected to experience it himself today.

Arriving at the main kitchen, he bumped into a young chef he had competed with once. Lin Xu greeted him with a smile and then asked, "Where's Head Chef Dai?"

"He's in the small kitchen further inside. A customer made a last-minute addition of Soft Burned Chicken Cake. The head chef plans to practice it with a few of the section chefs... It's a rare dish, so they want to get some practice in beforehand."

Urgent? Having gotten used to the pace at Lin Ji's Food, Lin Xu found the slow pace at the Fishing Platform increasingly hard to adapt to. It was still several hours until noon, yet a customer adding one dish to a pre-order was considered an 'urgent addition'? Their definition of 'urgent' is certainly generous, isn't it?

Entering the kitchen area, Lin Xu found the small kitchen. The moment he stepped in, a rich, savory aroma wafted over him. Then he saw what looked like blocks of tofu, neatly arranged on plates on the cutting board.

This 'tofu' looked a bit strange. It wasn't firm like northern tofu, nor was it silky and moist like southern tofu. It seemed to be a hybrid of the two. However, the quality of the 'tofu' must have been excellent. When the workbench vibrated, these blocks quivered slightly, looking quite springy.

Aren't they supposed to be making Soft Burned Chicken Cake? Why so much tofu? Could it be an imitation dish made from tofu?

"Yo, Brother Lin, you're here!" Dai Jianli exclaimed. "Perfect timing. Later, you can judge for us and see whose Chicken Cake is more delicious."

He wants me to be their judge?

Lin Xu said with a wry smile, "How could I be qualified to critique you all? Besides, I've never even seen this dish before. I wouldn't know how to score it."

Dai Jianli looked surprised. "No way, you've never seen this dish? This is Chicken Cake, made from chicken breast and pork fat, steamed together. For diplomatic banquets, when required, it's served to guests disguised as tofu. This Soft Burned Chicken Cake is a classic example... I'm amazed you don't know it!"

Lin Xu was even more surprised than him.

Good heavens! Those quivering blocks on the cutting board, looking just like tofu, are actually made from chicken breast and pork fat? They look exactly like tofu! Non-spicy Sichuan dishes are truly not for common folk like me. I'd better stick to my spicy food.

He gazed at the Chicken Cake on the table, a touch of envy in his eyes, and then asked, "Head Chef Dai, this dish... could I learn how to make it?"

Chapter 577: The Pinnacle of Soft Burned Dishes—Soft Burned Chicken Cake! New Side Quest!

Lin Xu had never heard of Soft Burned Chicken Cake.

But as soon as he heard that this "tofu" was made with Chicken Breast and Pork Fat, he immediately realized it was a high-end Sichuan dish, and even an obscure one at that.

This kind of dish might become extinct one day; if I have the chance to learn it, I have to seize it.

"Brother, you want to learn? Welcome, welcome! We were just worrying about whether this dish would be lost to time, and here you are eager to learn. That's just great."

Dai Jianli greeted him enthusiastically. He brought over a piece of Chicken Breast and Pork Fat, saying, "They've all finished theirs, and I'm the only one left. It's perfect timing to demonstrate for you... You can learn it in one go, right, brother? I've heard you managed to learn Qingshui Furong in just one attempt, so this dish should be no problem for you."

Lin Xu smiled helplessly.

This is the consequence of setting up a false reputation!

However, with Qingshui Furong as the basis, if the method for making this Chicken Cake was similar to Furong Chicken Slices, then truly learning it in one go might not be that difficult after all.

With this in mind, he said, "We can certainly give it a try later. If I can learn it, next time we compete at the Fishing Platform, I'll use it and crush the opposition!"

Dai Jianli deftly placed the Chicken Breast on the cutting board, removing the surface membranes, then flipped the cleaver over to use the thick back of the blade to pound on the meat.

This was exactly the same as making Furong Chicken Slices.

Lin Xu watched and understood quite clearly.

Pounding the Chicken Breast required the principle of starting slow then fast, and light before heavy.

The process was not about pounding blindly but involved several iterations.

The first round aimed to loosen the Chicken Breast, so the force had to be lighter, with about a centimeter interval between each hit to ensure that the fibers of the chicken loosened, resulting in fluffier Chicken Meatball.

The second round flattened the Chicken Breast to further loosen the fibers. The force should be slightly increased during the pounding, and the interval halved.

Starting from the third round, one had to use the cleaver's back in a continuous motion to gradually pound the Chicken Breast into a paste.

After repeating the process a few times, the Chicken Meatball would become fine and fluffy.

At this point, use the blade of the cleaver to scrape the Chicken Meatball to the side, about two to three centimeters wide, pressing it tightly against the cutting board. The hair-like membranes in the meat would then be revealed.

Using a bamboo skewer, Dai Jianli picked out these membranes and scraped the bulk of the Chicken Meatball into a small bowl. He then spread the remaining Chicken Meatball flat on the cutting board and continued picking out membranes.

After repeatedly picking out all the membranes, the Chicken Meatball was ready.

The whole process was complex and tedious, demanding high physical strength, concentration, and stamina. Moreover, a high-quality cutting board was essential to prevent wood splinters from mixing into the Chicken Meatball.

Once the Chicken Meatball was ready, half a ladleful of Scallion and Ginger water was added to marinate it.

While this was happening, it was time to start preparing the Pork Fat.

"For this dish, you need fresh Pork Fat because the freshness gives it a jelly-like elasticity after cutting. Frozen Pork Fat loses that elasticity and also lacks the fresh taste."

Dai Jianli explained while handling the Pork Fat, slicing it into pieces and then using the cleaver's back to pound it into a paste.

The reason for pounding was also to make the Pork Fat fluffier.

Lin Xu was beginning to get the picture.

The Pork Fat, once pounded into a paste and mixed into the Chicken Meatball, would presumably result in a trembling dish resembling tofu – the Chicken Cake, right?

Never mind the taste, the sheer effort involved in making it alone was enough to deter many.

Compared to Chicken Breast, Pork Fat was easier to pound as it had no membranes; simply pound it into a semi-transparent paste.

After pounding the Pork Fat, he took a portion equivalent to half the amount of the Chicken Meatball and mixed it in.

Now, for the seasoning.

Into a bowl, add a small spoonful of salt, a small spoonful of sugar for enhancing umami, and a small spoonful of pepper powder to remove any gamey taste.

Mix thoroughly by hand, allowing the Chicken Meatball and Pork Fat to blend together completely.

Due to the presence of salt, the mixture would bind slightly, and the Scallion and Ginger water originally used to marinate the Chicken Meatball would gradually be absorbed.

At this point, he slammed the mixture against the bowl a few times, ensuring an even blend of Chicken Meatball and Pork Fat.

Once it was thoroughly worked until elastic, he then added five Egg Whites and a small handful of potato starch that had been soaked thoroughly in water.

Continue to mix until the paste in the bowl turned into a fine, white, smooth consistency.

Seeing Lin Xu watching intently, Dai Jianli said, "Pound the Pork Fat until it's completely smooth, without any granules, or the texture won't be pleasant. When mixing it with the Chicken Meatball, don't use too much or you'll steam out the pork oil. Also, make sure it's evenly distributed to prevent the Pork Fat from clumping together, or it will spoil the presentation."

He explained the key points of making the Chicken Cake in just a few sentences.

Lin Xu was quite moved. Despite only a few brief remarks, the experience contained within would likely take numerous trials to discover. Chef Dai is really a genuine person!

While he was reflecting, a kitchen assistant hurried in and asked, "Boss, Chef Song from Building 15 sent someone to ask if you took two river groupers from their aquarium this morning?"

Without turning his head, Dai Jianli responded, "Bullshit, his river groupers are skinny and small; why would I bother with that stuff?"

"But... Building 15 has checked the cameras, and it definitely was you who took the fish, Boss. Maybe we should just give them back. Chef Song has gone to the Dining Department to complain."

Dai Jianli pulled out his phone and, without hesitation, called Song Dahai. He said, "Today Brother Lin came to Building 18, and I took two of your fish to entertain him. Why are you acting like it's such a big deal? Believe it or not, I'll have Brother Lin dock your nephew's wages."

Chapter 578: The Ceiling of Soft-Burn Dishes - Soft Burned Chicken Cake! New Side Quest! \_2

Lin Xu was speechless. It's not that serious! Just now they said Chef Dai was straightforward, but isn't this a bit too much?

Song Dahai's voice came through the phone, "You rascal, don't you have plenty of river groupers in your pond? Since Chef Lin is here, I'll call the others, and we'll all go to Building Fifteen for dinner later. Make sure the dishes are good; don't disgrace Fishing Platform's reputation."

Old Song knew very well that he wouldn't be getting the fish back. He figured he might as well drag the other executive chefs to Building Eighteen for a meal, treating it like feasting at a rich man's expense.

Dai Jianli helplessly put down his phone. While washing his hands, he said, "Old Song brought over some wild river groupers this time, so I prepared a couple for you to try. Who knew he'd be so stingy as to go complain? Such a miser! This morning, when I came back, I saw he'd planted some small vegetables in the yard. I'll call you over to eat when they're ready. These homegrown greens are much tastier than what's sold outside."

Looks like this is a habitual offense. No wonder everyone guards against Chef Dai as if he were a thief.

After this little interlude, Dai Jianli brought over two slightly larger square boxes. He cleaned them and dried them off, then brushed a thin layer of rendered lard inside a dish.

Once ready, he poured the prepared white meat paste into them.

While pouring, he said, "You must brush on lard for this step, not vegetable oil, or the steamed Chicken Cake won't be a pristine white color."

Lin Xu nodded in agreement. "Indeed, vegetable oil tends to color ingredients too easily. Salad oil might be a bit better, but it's still not as effective as lard."

After all the meat paste was poured into the trays, he gently tapped them to release any air bubbles. This would ensure the steamed Chicken Cake would be smooth and free of holes.

After completing these steps, he placed the two boxes into the steamer. He covered them with plastic wrap but didn't seal it tightly—just enough to prevent condensation from the lid from dripping down.

Then he covered the steamer with its lid and began to steam on low heat.

"Lin, my young friend," Dai Jianli began, "notice something? We're using low heat for steaming. Do you know why?"

This question indeed stumped Lin Xu.

He thought for a moment before asking, "Is it to prevent bubbles from forming in the Chicken Cake, which would make it look unappealing?"

When there's too much steam, the food often develops bubbles. To prevent this, dishes like steamed egg custard are cooked over medium heat, allowing the egg to solidify more gently. This results in a much better texture for the custard. This Chicken Cake must have a similar rationale, right?

As soon as Lin Xu finished speaking, Dai Jianli nodded and then asked, "What else?"

What else? This suddenly feels like a thesis defense.

Lin Xu glanced at the kitchen counter, noticing some Pork Fat left unused. An idea sparked in his mind, and he said to Dai Jianli, "Is it to prevent the lard from rendering out?"

"Right! Brother Lin, you truly are someone nurtured in the arms of the heavens. Such talent! Back when I was learning to cook, it took me a good while to figure that out."

A good while?

Lin Xu mused. Isn't *he* the one truly nurtured in heaven's embrace? Folks like us are just sneaking into heaven's kitchen to steal some food. Whether we get anything good is all down to luck.

The steaming time for Chicken Cake shouldn't be too long; it needs to be taken out as soon as it solidifies. Otherwise, if steamed for too long, the ingredients will shrink and spoil the appearance.

Lin Xu inquired in detail with Dai Jianli and the head chefs of Building Eighteen.

He learned that Chicken Cake can generally be steamed in about eight to ten minutes, but the exact time depends on the quantity of the meat paste and the depth of the container.

Generally speaking, the deeper the meat paste, the harder it is to steam thoroughly, and the steaming time needs to be extended.

While steaming, it's best to use metal containers, especially those made of aluminum, which conduct heat the fastest, followed by stainless steel or iron pans.

Containers made of plastic, ceramic, or any other materials that conduct heat poorly should be avoided as much as possible, as they can result in unevenly cooked Chicken Cake.

For instance, the center of the meat paste might remain runny and uncooked while the edges are over-steamed, releasing oil and forming bubbles.

These are not only key points for steaming Chicken Cake but also important considerations for all steamed dishes.

While discussing these topics, Lin Xu suddenly looked at Dai Jianli and asked, "Chef Dai, if Chicken Breast can be made into Chicken Cake, can Fish be made into Fish Cake too?"

Dai Jianli turned to the other head chefs with a smile and said, "See that? He immediately thought of Fish Cake from Chicken Cake. That's talent! Brother, the method for making Fish Cake is similar to this. In fact, in Hubei, Fish Cake is a very common delicacy. Whether it's in braised dishes, boiled food, or steamed ones, adding a few slices of Fish Cake can make the flavor much more vibrant."

With that explanation, Lin Xu got the general idea. It probably tastes somewhat like Fish Balls. I could try making some when I get the chance. After all, Fish is much lower in calories compared to pork, beef, and lamb. Plus, there's no need to use lard during preparation; just a bit of fish oil should do the trick, and the effect might be pretty good.

Soon, the Chicken Cake in the steamer was ready.

Dai Jianli used platter tongs to take the two boxes of Chicken Cakes from the steamer. He removed the plastic wrap from the top, and a rich, savory aroma wafted from the boxes.

The meat paste inside had solidified. Its surface was snowy white and smooth, and combined with that rich, savory scent, it tempted Lin Xu with the urge to take it out, slice it, and eat it with garlic dipping sauce.

"It's done," Dai Jianli said, "but I don't recommend taking it out of the containers immediately, as some parts might not be fully cooked through. The correct method is to take them out and let them cool naturally for a while. This allows the residual heat to finish cooking any underdone parts, resulting in a Chicken Cake with a better texture."

Chapter 579: The Ceiling of Soft-Burn Dishes - Soft Burned Chicken Cake! New Side Quest! \_3

Lin Xu nodded, finally understanding the intricacies involved.

Taking advantage of the time it took for the Chicken Cake to cool, Dai Jianli chopped some green onion strips, preparing to make Soft Burned Chicken Cake.

The so-called "soft burning" is a cooking method that keeps ingredients tender, unlike techniques such as red braising or Dry Burning.

Before long, when the Chicken Cake was almost cool, Dai Jianli carefully poured it out of its container.

The Chicken Cake trembled. Visually, it was indistinguishable from tofu, perhaps even more delicate and tempting.

At this moment, the Chicken Cake couldn't be cut yet. It needed to cool down a bit more so that it wouldn't crumble when cut.

"There are many ways to cook Chicken Cake. Just like Furong Chicken Slices, you can quickly stir-fry it in a pan, simmer it in chicken soup, or make Freshly Smooth Chicken Cake, Soft Fried Chicken Cake, Clear Soup Chicken Cake, and so on. Just treat it like tofu, and don't let your thinking limit you."

Don't let your thinking limit you?

Lin Xu felt that this statement was quite apt.

The more skilled the chef, the easier it is to fall into rigid patterns of thinking.

Take this Chicken Cake, for instance. Since it's being treated like tofu, why not make it into Mapo Chicken Cake? Aha, Mapo Chicken Cake.

Making Chicken Cake using the Mapo Tofu method... that flavor must be incredibly delicious, right?

Just as he thought of this, a system alert sounded in Lin Xu's mind:

"Host has expanded their thinking, triggering the sub-quest [Dish Innovation]. The host is required to make a Mapo Chicken Cake of at least Superior Level using the Mapo Tofu method within 12 hours. Upon completion, the reward will be one draw for a Perfect Level obscure Sichuan dish."

A sub-quest? Dish Innovation?

Lin Xu hadn't expected that merely by letting his thoughts wander, the system would generously create a task for him.

Twelve hours... so, today then.

For him, the method for making the Chicken Cake wasn't difficult; the key was that he still hadn't mastered the method for making Mapo Tofu. His only option was to use points to exchange for the recipe.

Once he had the recipe, he would then use the Mapo Tofu method to cook the Mapo Chicken Cake.

My hard-earned points are about to be spent again.

Lin Xu grumbled to himself, then entered the points shop to exchange for Mapo Tofu.

However, when he found the dish, his eyes couldn't help but bulge.

[Qualified Level Mapo Tofu: 350,000 points]

[Excellent Level Mapo Tofu: 700,000 points]

[Superior Level Mapo Tofu: 1,200,000 points (includes a Skill Task)]

[Perfect Level Mapo Tofu: 2,000,000 points (includes a Trial Task)]

What's going on? It's just a tofu dish, so why does it start at 350,000 points? Is there some mistake? Is this greedy system price gouging?

But with the task at hand, he had to make the exchange.

He had originally wanted to exchange for the Superior Level cooking method. However, considering the Mapo Chicken Cake needed to be at least Superior Level, it was best to get the Perfect Level method.

With this in mind, he didn't hesitate and exchanged for the Perfect Level Mapo Tofu method.

Two million points were deducted instantly, leaving Lin Xu no room for regret.

"2,000,000 points consumed. Obtained Perfect Level classic Sichuan dish—Mapo Tofu. Trial Task triggered: The host must create a similar dish using the Mapo Tofu cooking method within twelve hours. Only upon successful completion will the classic Mapo Tofu method be officially acquired; otherwise, it will be downgraded to Superior Level."

(Note: If the Perfect Level cooking method is downgraded to Superior Level, the Skill Task will not be triggered. Please take note.)

After reading the task description, Lin Xu felt somewhat relieved.

He could tackle both tasks simultaneously, which was the only piece of good news in this sub-quest.

He would start preparing the dish after returning home in the afternoon.

Since the number of 'rice killer' dishes at the restaurant is increasing, why not add another, like Mapo Tofu? At this rate, these 'rice killers' are bound to form a group and debut at Lin Ji's Food sooner or later.

While he was muttering to himself, Dai Jianli, beside him, set a pot on the stove. He filled it half with salad oil and half with lard, then turned the heat to low and began cutting the Chicken Cake.

The cooled Chicken Cake was slightly firmer, making it easier to cut.

Using a kitchen knife, he cut the Chicken Cake into diamond-shaped slices, about seven to eight millimeters thick, and placed them in a large colander.

By then, the oil in the pot had warmed slightly, reaching about 30% heat. Dai Jianli submerged the colander into the oil, and small, dense bubbles gradually formed on the surface of the Chicken Cake.

Like Furong Chicken Slices, this Chicken Cake also had to be fried in lukewarm oil to maintain its tenderness as much as possible.

Lin Xu recalled his mother performing a similar step of passing ingredients through oil when she made Soft-baked Tofu in the past.

It turned out that Soft Burned Chicken Cake followed the same procedure.

They're really treating the Chicken Cake just like tofu.

The Chicken Cake didn't need to be fried for long; the goal was merely to let its surface tighten slightly. This would prevent it from breaking apart during the simmering process.

Once fried, the Chicken Cake pieces were removed and immediately soaked in warm water to remove excess grease.

He poured out the oil from the pot and added a small piece of lard. Once it melted, he tossed in a few Sichuan peppercorns to fry until fragrant, then removed them. Next, he added the shredded green onions, followed by the Chicken Cake, which he had drained.

Without stirring, he poured a large ladleful of rich chicken broth down the side of the pot. Then he began to season, adding table salt, white sugar, pepper, and a dash of light soy sauce.

He brought it to a boil over high heat, then reduced the heat to a simmer, allowing the sauce to fully penetrate the Chicken Cake.

Finally, he thickened the sauce with a little Water Starch, drizzled over some chicken oil, and transferred the dish to a plate.

The entire simmering process wasn't complicated, but it demanded care. The Chicken Cake was extremely tender, and any rough handling could easily cause it to break apart into a mush.

After plating the dish, Dai Jianli looked at Lin Xu and asked, "How is it, brother? Have you learned it?"

"Almost," Lin Xu replied. "I plan to go home and practice thoroughly today. If I have any questions, I'll consult you again, Chef Dai."

"You're too kind, brother. Feel free to ask anything; there's no need for such formality between us."

Dai Jianli pointed to the dish on the plate and said to Lin Xu, "Try it. See how it tastes."

Do I even need to taste it? The flavor is undoubtedly delicious.

But grumbling inwardly was one thing; Lin Xu still immediately picked up a pair of chopsticks and a small saucer.

A dish like this required a saucer underneath, as it was very easy to break when picking it up.

He carefully picked up a slice of Chicken Cake with his chopsticks, placed it on the saucer, blew on it gently, and then eagerly took a bite.

Just like tofu, even though he had blown on it, the first bite still scalded his mouth slightly.

The first sensation was the fresh taste of chicken, immediately followed by the rich aroma of lard.

Beyond the taste, the delicate texture of the Chicken Meatball and the unctuousness of the lard intertwined, creating a profound sense of happiness that welled up from the bottom of his heart.

It was truly wonderful.

Suppressing the burning sensation in his mouth, Lin Xu gave Dai Jianli a thumbs-up, "Master Dai, your skill is incredible!"

Dai Jianli waved his hand modestly. "This is about the extent of my abilities," he said. "However, at the Fishing Platform, my Chicken Cake is considered quite good. If it were Old Song, you could take him apart bone by bone, and he still wouldn't be able to make this..."

Before he could finish speaking, Song Dahai's voice boomed from outside, "You son of a gun, say that again if you dare!"

Chapter 580: Getting the Sauce Dish! The Indistinguishable Real and Fake Jiang Tuan!

Upon seeing Song Dahai, Dai Jianli immediately changed his tune. "Oh, I was just saying this morning how the magpies were chirping up a storm in the tree by the door! Turns out it was because my Brother Song was coming! Little Brother Lin, you might not know this, but my Brother Song here, in a past life, he was Song Jiang of Liang Mountain—a man of immense righteousness, who would readily lay down his life for his friends..."

Annoyed, Song Dahai kicked him. "Oh, cut it out! Showing off your Chicken Cake again, are we? When are you going to compete with me on Fish Cake, huh?"

Dai Jianli laughed. "Me? Compete with you on that? Wouldn't that be like an old man tired of living eating arsenic? I'm not \*that\* eager to die! Come on, Brother Song, try this Soft Burned Chicken Cake. See if it's as good as Soft-baked Tofu."

Having said that, he glanced towards the kitchen door.

Why isn't Old Xie here yet? he wondered. Without one of our own around, there's no calming down Old Song, that powder keg.

Song Dahai didn't stand on ceremony. Holding the plate in one hand and chopsticks in the other, he carefully picked up a piece of Chicken Cake and tasted it. "It really is good," he declared. "Both the taste and appearance are top-notch. You son of a gun, you really have a knack for making this kind of dish."

After speaking, he looked at Lin Xu and said, "Master Lin, whenever you feel like eating Fish Cake, just tell Zhu Yong to make it. But if you want to learn how, you'd better come find me in building 15. Zhu Yong's skills aren't quite there yet; he can't teach you."

When Zhu Yong first went to Lin Ji, Song Dahai hadn't quite understood. He'd always felt that the nephew he had painstakingly trained had been lured away.

Later, after careful consideration, he realized that going to Lin Ji allowed Zhu Yong to encounter more complex dishes and meet a wider range of people. For a chef, this was actually a good thing.

Only by struggling and gaining real-world experience for a few years could one truly develop a profound understanding of cooking.

In contrast, staying cooped up at the Fishing Platform, while the work was stable and not overly tiring—almost like a vacation when there were no foreign assignments—meant something else.

Learning only a handful of dishes and knowing just a few people over an entire lifetime made for a rather limited existence.

It was better to break out, to see a broader world. Only that way could one truly do justice to oneself.

After tasting the delicious Soft Burned Chicken Cake, Dai Jianli said, "Since Brother Lin is here, let's start making the dry dipping sauce. Old Song, you can join in too, and we can exchange some insights on our understanding of dry dipping sauces."

Song Dahai smiled and said, "Then you son of a gun better not accuse me of stealing your techniques later."

"How could I? Am I that kind of person?" Dai Jianli retorted.

The exchange made Lin Xu chuckle inwardly. He wondered if the atmosphere would remain so harmonious if Chef Song knew Chef Dai was eyeing the vegetables in his yard.

He recalled that his Senior Brother also seemed to have his sights set on the young greens in the yard of building 15.

It felt like Chef Song's gardening efforts were doomed to be in vain once more.

His Senior Brother and Chef Dai were like a pair of villains at the Fishing Platform. Someone else's painstakingly grown sugarcane had been plucked clean by them in less than two hours.

The sugarcane field had been replanted as a vegetable garden, and before the vegetables were even ripe, the nefarious villains were already targeting it again...

If this were some Western blockbuster, he mused, the next scene would probably involve Chef Song, pushed beyond his limits, awakening superpowers and transforming into 'Gardening Guardian' to thrash the villains, right?

They arrived at a workroom next to the warehouse. Inside stood a commercial stir-frying machine and a commercial grinder. Beside them was an oversized workbench laden with all sorts of ingredients needed for making the dry dipping sauce.

Lin Xu glanced around and noted there were four or five types of dried chili alone.

As for spices, there were too many to count—even more varieties than their shop used for making braised goods. He even spotted Luo Han Guo, or monk fruit, commonly found in Cantonese tea houses, on the workbench.

Is this also an ingredient for the dry dipping sauce? he wondered.

Song Dahai examined the ingredients intently, muttering, "You son of a gun. Every time I ask you how many ingredients go into your dry dipping sauce, you always say five or six, maybe seven or eight. I never imagined it'd be thirty or forty different things! How is anyone supposed to replicate that?"

He remembered the last time they had a barbecue at home. Guo Xinghai and Wei Qian, with nothing better to do, had tried to guess the ingredients in the dry dipping sauce.

Chatting and tasting, they had managed to name nearly thirty ingredients.

At the time, they thought they had listed too many, but it turned out they hadn't even gotten all of them.

Too bad I hadn't acquired the Eye of Discrimination back then, he thought. Otherwise, I could have figured out all the ingredients right on the spot.

"Old Dai, are you really not afraid I'll secretly copy this?" Song Dahai asked after looking through all the ingredients. He glanced at Dai Jianli, somewhat surprised. This guy is being a little too generous today, he thought.

Dai Jianli smiled and said, "If you could learn it just by seeing these ingredients, then Director Liao of the Dining Department might as well hand his position over to you, Director Song."

Only after Dai Jianli said this did Lin Xu understand.

Simply knowing the ingredients wasn't enough. You also needed to know the specific production techniques, processes, and preparation methods. Most importantly, you had to know the precise proportions of the various seasonings.

All these factors combined were necessary to replicate this delicious dipping sauce.

Without the correct ratios, who knew what kind of culinary disaster one might create.

After all, spices in Chinese cooking had to be used in strict proportions. Take Cloves, for instance; even one too many or one too few could make a world of difference in the final result.

Other spices, while perhaps not as overpowering as Cloves, also couldn't be used indiscriminately. Many of them, after all, also served as traditional Chinese medicines.

"So that's why you're being so generous, you son of a gun!" Song Dahai exclaimed. "You held back on the proportions! Next time I want some, I'll just come get it from you. Saves me a lot of trouble."

As an executive chef, Song Dahai was perfectly capable of making a dry dipping sauce himself.

It was just that Old Dai's version was exceptionally good. Plus, since the guy was always "borrowing" this or "nicking" that, everyone else felt justified in occasionally "raiding" him in turn—a practical way of reminding Old Dai that what goes around comes around.