

Akino was staring at a rather odd letter that was pinned to his tree house door. It was a crisp-looking white envelope with blue cloud patterns upon the edges and his name was on the front with red ink. He carefully broke the wax seal on the back and opened it to find a letter from Dan himself.

It detailed an invitation from the mochi maker himself to come and learn more intensive recipes. Akino's fur stood on end, remembering all too well how much of a mess he was after his last round of lessons. For a whole week he could barely move, every muscle screaming in protest from even the slightest movement.

However, if he learned to make these specialized mochi, he could give them as treats for his pet imps. This prospect was definitely appealing and Akino decided it was well worth the impending pain. He headed out from his treehouse home and made his way towards town.

The snow was making things a bit difficult, slowing his usual pace, but the notion of arriving at Dan's warm shop kept him going. As soon as he saw the sign, Akino sprinted in and felt the heat hit him dead on. His snow-weighted fluff instantly started to melt and he looked akin to a drowned rat, daring not to move from the doormat, lest he get water everywhere.

Dan came out from the back to see Akino standing there, completely soaked and asked him if everything was alright. Akino meekly told him he'd be okay and within seconds, his angora fur floofed, drying as if it hadn't been through the wintry outdoors at all. He looked akin to a dandelion puffball and fished within his neck fluff to pull out the somewhat soggy letter Dan had sent him.

Dan nodded upon seeing it and instructed Akino to follow him over to the mochi preparation area. Akino waddled until he got fed up with his slowness, smoothing out his fur and scuttling over beside his mentor. Dan showed him how to cook an incredible amount of rice, the sheer amount nearly baffling Akino. Dan then whisked it all away temporarily (to save for later) and then brought out bowls of strange ingredients, some Akino had never seen up close before.

Dan suddenly started sorting them and explained each combination, telling Akino to memorize them quickly as soon as he had taken a pause. Before Akino could say anything, Dan dumped the bowls and asked him to sort them once more.

Akino stood there stunned, blinked a few times and then internally screamed, at the fact he now had to undertake this task. He instantly regretted his choice to come, but knew this had to be worth it. After what seemed to take forever, he finally got everything placed where he believed it needed to be and Dan took a quick look, then promptly frowned.

He mentioned one was unfortunately incorrect and Akino was baffled. He looked at the bowls over and over again, until finally he realized he was missing an item...A demon pepper required for the demon pepper mochi recipe.

Akino began to panic, announcing it was missing and started lifting bowls...Until Dan presented the demon pepper he had sneakily swiped with a small smile. Akino sighed in relief, happily taking the pepper and placed it into the correct container. Dan patted Akino on his back and then directed him over to where a series of large, wooden usu mortars stood, the prepared cooked rice sitting within.

He told his student to pour each set of ingredients into a specific one, then they could REALLY get started. Dan handed a kine mallet to Akino and showed him the general motions and explained how to pound each one to get the proper consistency. Akino worked and worked each usu, mochi being pounded until he couldn't feel his paws anymore. Once Dan was satisfied with the look, he gave him a solemn thumbs up to cease.

It seemed like they had been working for an eternity, the shop becoming slightly darker as night fell, but soon Akino had completed each step of his work. He had successfully formed every mochi under Dan's guidance, presenting them upon little plates that had been left at the corner of the worktable. His entire body was ruined, trembling and shaking from the strain.

Dan scanned over the work before him and finally gave a grunt of approval, stating it was no easy feat to be standing after all this work. Akino nodded, giving a broken-looking salute. Due to the lateness and all of the snow, Dan invited Akino to spend the night on Shibani's pillow pile, which Akino immediately accepted.

He dragged himself to the biggest, softest pillow he could find and was out as soon as he landed upon it. Dan heard snoring arise and chuckled, slipping a well-earned recipe book under his student's little arm and shut the rest of the lights out in the shop for the night.