

# **Kitchen Confidential: Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly Study Guide**

**Kitchen Confidential: Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly by Anthony Bourdain**

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# Plot Summary

*Kitchen Confidential: Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly* by Anthony Bourdain is the story of Bourdain's initiation into the world of food and the love for the culinary arts which fuels Bourdain's life and career.

Bourdain is introduced to French food during a summer vacation to Europe as a young boy, and recalls that the taste of vichyssoise was the impetus for his love of food. Spurning many of the dishes served to him during this vacation, Bourdain's senses come alive when given the opportunity to taste French provincial food, including oysters fresh from the sea.

A completely random job as a busboy at a Provincetown, Massachusetts restaurant during a summer during his college years launches Bourdain into the established world of restaurant work. Bourdain witnesses the power of not only the food, but also the chefs and cooks who inhabit and control the very private world of restaurant kitchens. Bourdain garners basic kitchen skills during his summer work at a family style restaurant called *The Dreadnaught*, where he also learns the macho culture of kitchen work.

Determined to rise in the kitchen hierarchy, Bourdain attends the Culinary Institute of American in Hyde Park, New York for two years. Armed with newfound skills and expertise, Bourdain works for a while at the *Rainbow Room* in New York City, learning the kitchen dynamics of food preparation in massive quantities.

Bourdain's career is filled with jobs at many restaurants in varying degrees of success and decline where he learns how to manage restaurant owners as well as his kitchen colleagues. During his career, Bourdain indulges in self-destructive behavior, including drug and alcohol abuse, partly because of his indulgent personality and partly because of the extreme circumstances of enduring long and brutal hours of kitchen work.

While cynical and sarcastic, Bourdain maintains a deep loyalty for his friends in the culinary profession and hires them each time he moves to various restaurants. By the time Bourdain is chef at the famous *Brasserie Les Halles* in New York City, he has reached a point where he is confident in his skills and his position and also secure enough to acknowledge the skills of other chefs who have taken more disciplined paths during their careers.

Bourdain also acknowledges that his self-destructive behavior early in his career has taken its toll not only on himself but on others depending on him, such as his wife and various restaurant owners, and he regrets some of the things he has done to squander talent and resources. Ultimately though, Bourdain loves the restaurant business and plans to remain a chef as long as he is able and as long as someone has the faith to hire him.



# A Note from the Chef and Food is Good

## A Note from the Chef and Food is Good Summary and Analysis

Kitchen Confidential: Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly by Anthony Bourdain is the story of Bourdain's initiation into the world of food and the love for the culinary arts which fuels Bourdain's life and career.

Anthony Bourdain begins his book by telling the reader that he loves being a chef and that he wants to share the true story about living and working in the culinary profession. This glimpse at reality will include the joy of making exceptional food, running a kitchen in a big-city restaurant and the ambiance of the kitchens and people that punctuate the chef's life. Bourdain admits that he is not the best chef who has ever worked and acknowledges those whose talents and credentials supersede his own.

Bourdain is interested in sharing the street-level reality of his experiences, the good and the bad. Bourdain feels that good cooking and good eating involve some level of risk, and he invites the reader to understand some of the risks he has taken on his lifelong journey with food.

Bourdain's love affair with food begins during a family vacation in 1966 while on board the ocean liner, the Queen Mary, en route to Europe. Bourdain vividly remembers the startling first taste of his cold soup, vichyssoise, and his life is never the same again. Bourdain also recalls time spent in his father's native France where he and his brother explore the beaches of Normandy and remnants of World War II. Bourdain is largely unimpressed with the food even during the family's ventures into Paris.

It is not until a trip to nearby Vienne when Bourdain and his brother whose parents do not allow the boys to enter a fine dining establishment because of their usual brooding behavior. Bourdain takes the exclusion as a personal affront and realizes for the first time that food can be important. From this point on, Bourdain approaches food with a new zeal and embraces stinky cheeses, sweetbreads, horsemeat, and other delicacies that until now would have never entered his mouth.

During this vacation Bourdain spends time with his aunt, Tante Jeanne, and goes on oyster fishing trips with the local oyster fishing expert, Monsieur Saint-Jour. During one of the fishing expeditions, Bourdain eats his first oyster and knows that his life will never be the same. Bourdain now realizes the power that food can hold over people, and he wants not only to enjoy the powerful and sensual nature of food but also impart those same sensations to others.

It is not apparent to Bourdain at the time, but the trip to France, the country of his ancestors, will become the cornerstone of his career and life with food. Ironically, Bourdain rejects all French food offerings until his parents exclude him from a fine



dining experience one evening because of the boorish behavior exhibited by Bourdain and his younger brother. This act of exclusion will turn Bourdain's life around as he completely immerses himself in the art and senses surrounding the French style of cooking.

# Food is Sex and Food is Pain

## Food is Sex and Food is Pain Summary and Analysis

Bourdain graduates high school in 1973 and attends Vassar College but is undisciplined and uninterested in his studies there. Bourdain shares a summer house with friends in Provincetown, Cape Cod, Massachusetts, where he takes a summer job as a dishwasher at a restaurant called The Dreadnaught. Although the restaurant is essentially a summer tourist establishment serving common fried foods, Bourdain loves the job and learns the power that comes with being a chef by observing Bobby, the restaurant's focal point.

Bourdain loves the easy bravado and swagger exhibited by Bobby and the cooks and desperately longs to join their ranks. Bourdain also realizes that the sexual antics, drinking, and criminal behavior of The Dreadnaught crew are vastly different from his college pranks, and Bourdain wants to be part of the adventure and brotherhood they all seem to share.

Bourdain feels that the time of the early 1970s is a primitive one for the cooking world, long before any culinary celebrities have emerged, but he finds his own heroes in the chef and cooks in a restaurant called Mario's, across the street from The Dreadnaught. Bourdain is especially in awe of Mario's chef, Howard Mitcham, a middle-aged alcoholic known for being the best chef in the area.

Bourdain hopes to move up in rank at The Dreadnaught during the next summer. Unfortunately, the owner of Mario's Restaurant purchases The Dreadnaught and Bourdain is given a job to assist the broiler man, Tyrone. Tyrone is a big black man who easily outweighs Bourdain's lanky frame, and Bourdain learns how to manage the avalanche of meals each night as well as the physical pain of burns, cuts, and fatigue. Bourdain loves the restaurant business by now, but vowing not to be stuck in subordinate kitchen roles, determines to enroll in the Culinary Institute of America.

Bourdain's unplanned summer job in a restaurant seals his fate and helps define his career goals when he sees both the power and the sense of adventure that run rampant in a restaurant kitchen. Bourdain is also attracted to the bawdy nature of the people who work in the kitchens, which appeals to Bourdain's own irreverent attitude toward life in general. It is ironic that Bourdain, who is from New York and initially feels superior to the people in the Provincetown restaurants, learns some of the best lessons of his career from these unconventional people.



# Inside the CIA and The Return of Mal Carne

## Inside the CIA and The Return of Mal Carne Summary and Analysis

In 1975, Bourdain leaves Vassar to enroll in the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) in Hyde Park, New York. Bourdain finds the classes easy and excels over his classmates, who have never had professional culinary experience like Bourdain. The school is designed to turn out hotel and corporate dining facility chefs, and Bourdain endures two years of buffet-style dishes like grilled ham steaks with pineapple rings and cauliflower in Mornay sauce.

In spite of the lackluster culinary style, Bourdain makes the most of his time at the CIA to learn the basics of everything from pastry to charcuterie skills. Bourdain even manages to excel in the final class before graduation, the Escoffier Room, a three-star restaurant open to the public and known for its culinary excellence. The instructor for the Escoffier Room class is Chef Bernard, a man known for unrelenting, despotic instructional techniques and rumored to have worked with Auguste Escoffier, the famous French chef for whom the restaurant is named.

During summer break after his first year at the CIA, Bourdain returns to work at The Dreadnaught in Provincetown. With some newly acquired skills to his credit, Bourdain is determined to impress his colleagues with his new prowess and gets a job as a broiler man. Bourdain becomes friends with Dimitri, the pasta cook, an introverted man in his thirties who still lives with his mother.

The owner of Mario's Restaurant selects Bourdain and Dimitri to cater a large garden party and the two cooks create dishes never before seen or tasted in Provincetown. The culinary duo earns extra money catering end-of-season parties on the Cape, filled with both successes as well as failures, including a turquoise wedding cake, an overcooked steamship round of beef, and a Szechuan pepper-overloaded Chinese meal which sends guests into fits of pain.

The summer catering experiences forge a bond between Bourdain and Dimitri, who plan to take their talents to New York City for even better opportunities.

Up until this point in Bourdain's life he is a sarcastic, irreverent kid seeking pleasure and avoiding any type of personal or professional commitment. Once he realizes that cooking will be his life, Bourdain enters the Culinary Institute with a fixed determination to survive the banal elements and squeeze out the interesting parts of the education in order to have the credentials necessary to be recognized as a qualified chef. While Bourdain's personality remains largely unchanged, he is able to temper it in order to achieve what he must in order to move forward, marks of his emerging maturity.



# Who Cooks? and From our Kitchen to your Table

## Who Cooks? and From our Kitchen to your Table Summary and Analysis

Bourdain explains the makeup of the line cooks working in most kitchens as dysfunctional types, most probably immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries. The role of the line cook, however, is an important job, one requiring loyalty and endurance despite long hours of grueling work. Bourdain explains that line cooking is not about innovation but rather cooking the same dishes every day with the consistency that brings customers back.

Bourdain and many of his colleagues hire people from Latin countries because of their strong work ethic and willingness to work, despite difficult circumstances in contrast to their American counterparts, whom Bourdain considers to be lazy and high maintenance. Bourdain also points out that the talented pool of Latin workers, especially in New York City, is a highly coveted group of people sought after by demanding chefs.

In addition to never calling in sick, the quality that Bourdain most values in a line cook is a neat mise-en-place, a set up of seasonings, oils, cooking wines and other condiments essential to line cooking. A cook's mise-en-place is just as critical as his knives, and is considered to be sacred territory in the kitchen. Also critical for the line cook is to work in a clean area with plenty of dry towels available.

In addition to being organized and clean, a line cook must be able to keep a clear head and stay focused when the kitchen turns frenetic with activity. The best line cooks work well with others on the team but will not bend on quality of the final product.

Bourdain further breaks down the line cooks into three categories: Artists who create spectacular dishes that validate their high maintenance behavior; Exiles who simply cannot make a living in any other structured job; and Mercenaries who do the work for the money only. Bourdain prefers to hire craftsmen instead of artists because craftsmen are more disciplined and not prone to diva behavior.

According to Bourdain, good food and good eating involve some level of risk, especially if visiting a foreign country and the chance to taste local food may never come again. If eating locally, however, Bourdain has some rules to avoid digestive discomfort. One of the cardinal rules known to all people working in the food industry is to never eat fish at a restaurant on a Monday, because fish deliveries are usually made on the prior Thursday and the fish served on a Monday will not be as fresh as it should be.

Bourdain also advises against eating at brunch buffets because the potential for bacteria is very high in the egg dishes typically served. Chefs have a tendency to clean





out their refrigerators at the end of the week to develop Sunday brunch menu items, which should be avoided if at all possible. One of the items that Bourdain will eat as a leftover in a restaurant is bread, because recycling unused bread from someone else's table is an industry-wide practice and one that Bourdain considers a safe one.

Bourdain will never eat in a restaurant that has dirty bathrooms because it indicates an indifference to cleanliness in public places that belies even further filth in the hidden area of the kitchen.

Bourdain has very definite opinions on the proper cooking techniques for food and does not understand anyone with a preference for well done meat. Bourdain also has disdain for vegetarians because they are counter to everything Bourdain stands for: the full enjoyment of food.

Bourdain suggests that the best nights to eat out are Tuesday through Saturday because the business will be brisk, indicating good turnover and fresh food. Tuesday may be the best day of all because the chef has just returned from a day or two off and is ready to invest time in each meal served. If that meal happens to be a seafood dish, all the better because seafood is normally delivered on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

In this section, Bourdain transitions from his philosophical stance and early career start to practical information about large restaurant kitchens. The information is delivered in a no-nonsense, conversational style, as if Bourdain has taken the reader into his confidence to take advantage of dining secrets and to avoid gastronomic distress. Bourdain's personality still comes through in spite of the cautions and he tells the reader about the typical cautions, but Bourdain is willing to take dining risks if the adventure warrants.



# How to Cook Like the Pros, Owner's Syndrome and Other Medical Anomalies and Bigfoot

## How to Cook Like the Pros, Owner's Syndrome and Other Medical Anomalies and Bigfoot Summary and Analysis

Bourdain outlines a few items essential to the home cook who aspires to prepare meals with professional flair: a good chef's knife, flexible boning knife, paring knife, offset serrated knife, plastic squeeze bottle, metal ring, pastry bag, mandoline, stockpots, saucepans, and thick-bottomed sauté pans. The elemental food items include shallots, butter, roasted garlic, chiffonaded parsley, stock, demi-glace, chervil, basil, chives, and mint tops.

According to Bourdain, owning a restaurant feeds an ego as well as customers. Unfortunately, many people enter the restaurant business unprepared for the unexpected financial expenditures that always arise. This is especially true of people who decide to open a restaurant after retiring from another unrelated profession because of compliments received at dinner parties about the person's culinary skills. When this person's restaurant begins to fail, he/she will frantically try anything from theme nights and happy hours in an attempt to save the doomed venture.

Those who do succeed in restaurant ownership do so because they are knowledgeable about the risks and know when to pull out before losing too much. Bourdain has worked for one man whom he calls Bigfoot, who exemplifies the characteristics of the perfect restaurant owner, and Bourdain continues to carry the lessons Bigfoot taught him.

Bourdain had met Bigfoot at the Culinary Institute and the two form a bond that survives despite fluctuations in employment for both of them. Bigfoot is the most brilliant, cunning, and intellectual man Bourdain has ever met, and also the most loyal and deserving of respect. Bigfoot hires Bourdain during an extremely low period when Bourdain is broke and in drug rehab. Bigfoot's strict regimens and confidence in Bourdain are exactly the structure and incentives that Bourdain needs to turn his life around.

Bourdain continues to instruct the reader on the basics of restaurant ownership and kitchen management, both strategic and tactical, but the most important lessons he shares are the ones learned from his association with Bigfoot. Bigfoot teaches Bourdain that a man's essential character is more important than lapses in judgment or destructive personal behavior. This is probably why Bigfoot retains such an important spot in Bourdain's life, despite the fact that the two men are not in regular contact.

Lessons learned about character and trust are just as important as the basics of using the proper culinary tool for each kitchen task.



# I Make my Bones and The Happy Time

## I Make my Bones and The Happy Time Summary and Analysis

Bourdain's first real job after graduation from The Culinary Institute is at the Rainbow Room atop Rockefeller Center in New York City. As one of the most famous restaurants in the country, the Rainbow Room is a real testing ground for Bourdain's culinary and interpersonal skills. By comparison to the other kitchens Bourdain has worked in, the Rainbow Room kitchen seems the size of an airport hangar filled with workers from almost every ethnicity.

Bourdain's job responsibilities include preparation of hundreds of a la carte dinners, huge sit-down banquets, and entrees for a private dining room. Just as in other kitchens where he has worked, Bourdain sees male antics, drug use, and sexual indiscretions among the kitchen staff workers.

Bourdain is especially tormented by a chef de garde-manger named Luis, who repeatedly assaults Bourdain's derriere with his dirty fingers. One day Bourdain jams a big fork into Luis's hand to intercept another inappropriate advance and Bourdain gains immediate respect from the other cooks.

As Bourdain spends more time at his new job he learns about the healthy appetite the kitchen workers share for sports betting, and how many of the men would use this method to supplement their meager incomes.

One of the perks of working in such a famous restaurant is the sighting of celebrities, and Bourdain recalls the electricity that spreads through the restaurant one night when Frank Sinatra visits and gives an impromptu concert for the late dinner crowd. Another memorable night is the RFK charity tennis tournament and the resulting team of Kennedy children and security personnel swarming all over the establishment.

Having learned the skills of managing interpersonal dynamics and cooking excellence as well as atrocities, Bourdain leaves the Rainbow Room after a year and a half of employment.

In 1981, Bourdain joins an old friend from his Provincetown days, Sam G, who is the new chef de cuisine at a New York restaurant called Work Progress. Sam G also successfully recruits Dimitri, and the three friends consider themselves to be the most talented trio of chefs in the city. Creating the kitchen environment at Work Progress is almost an exact duplicate of the kitchens of the Provincetown restaurants where they had worked and bonded years before, and the men are feeling at the top of their careers.



One thing all three men also have in common is drug use, and they end up stoned or high in the kitchen all the time, thinking that the drugs enhance their pleasure as well as their productivity.

The unprofessional behavior of the kitchen staff eventually takes its toll and the restaurant begins to fail. This is the first time Bourdain witnesses what he calls "Failing Restaurant Syndrome", where owners will try various random attempts such as themed brunches and radical menu changes to rescue their failing businesses, most of the time to no avail.

In this section, Bourdain sheds unflattering light on the behind-the-scenes behavior in big city restaurants. This may be unsettling to the reader, who presumes that the demeanor of the kitchen staff will mirror the setting of the dining room, especially at a notable restaurant like the Rainbow Room. What is also becoming evident is the rampant drug use by the chefs and kitchen workers who need the meds to not only work the extremely long hours, but also to take the edge off some very tedious, repetitive work.



# Chef of the Future!, Apocalypse Now and The Wilderness Years

## Chef of the Future!, Apocalypse Now and The Wilderness Years Summary and Analysis

Bourdain is only twenty-two-years old when he lands the job of chef at a theater district restaurant called Tom H. The restaurant is named after one of its owners named Tom whose business partner, Fred, is also Tom's lover. Most of the kitchen staff and customers are gay men, and because of the restaurant's location, it also draws a contingent of celebrities and gossip columnists.

Bourdain soon finds himself in another situation where the restaurant is failing because it is owned not by true restaurant owner types, but by two men who had a dream of converting a brownstone and serving meatloaf to celebrities. Bourdain finds his hands tied when attempting to make any alterations to the menu, but he works steadily because he likes the owners. Ultimately the restaurant fails, and Bourdain takes a job at a Casablanca-themed restaurant called Rick's Café.

Although Bourdain abhors the fake atmosphere at Rick's Café, he is making good money, and soon Dimitri joins him at the new establishment. The increase in salary increases Bourdain's drug usage and he finds himself in yet one more doomed restaurant location.

Bourdain's next job is at a New York restaurant called Let's-Call-It-Gino's, which serves Northern Italian cuisine. The restaurant is owned by a man called the Silver Shadow because of his Rolls-Royce automobile and his extremely brief visits to his restaurants. The Silver Shadow owns a network of restaurants reaching from New York to Baltimore with plans to open more in Boston, New Orleans, and other sites.

The Silver Shadow's frenetic business practices find Bourdain working at several different restaurants in the business network, even the one in Baltimore, an experience that Bourdain detests. Eventually Bourdain returns to New York City to work once again in the Italian restaurant and gains the Silver Shadow's respect for his culinary and people management skills. Bourdain becomes the man who fires underperforming employees, and Bourdain soon tires of this non-creative job and resigns, learning soon afterwards that the Silver Shadow's restaurant empire has collapsed and the Silver Shadow is imprisoned for tax evasion.

By this time, Bourdain is off heroin and on methadone and, considered in general to be unemployable, takes a succession of low-paying jobs in seedy establishments, one of which is called Billy's, a chicken restaurant. Billy's is owned by a man with a long history of unethical behavior and mob ties, which helps the restaurant get financial credit and customers. Bourdain soon learns that the purveyors are met in secret, and he buys

meat and produce from men in cars parked in dark alleys. The owner makes unrealistic demands that Bourdain fire anyone wearing gold chains, jewelry, and tattoos and Bourdain soon tires of the eccentricities and resigns.

After Billy's, Bourdain lands jobs in a series of nondescript restaurants and finally realizes that he must make some radical changes to turn his life around.

This period in Bourdain's life can be compared to the rite of passage that comes before a person finds his true calling. Typically, rites of passage involve placing a person in an unfamiliar environment with little or no resources in order to see how that person will survive. Bourdain's unsatisfactory employment history combined with his drug usage has dulled his senses to his true calling, and he merely exists during this period of exploration and self destruction. Fortunately Bourdain reaches the point where he knows he must make radical improvements for his life and the balance of the book will chronicle that journey.



# What I Know About Meat and Pino Noir: Tuscan Interlude

## What I Know About Meat and Pino Noir: Tuscan Interlude Summary and Analysis

During Bourdain's wilderness period he continues to interview at a string of lackluster restaurants and eschews the jobs, even though his unemployment is soon to come to an end. Bourdain is in a severe state of depression, which deepens when he blows his chance at a good job at a steak house because of a misunderstanding between himself and the owner. The owner asks Bourdain what Bourdain knows about meat and Bourdain misunderstands, thinking the man asks, "What do you know about me?" to which Bourdain answers, "Next to nothing!" It is only later that Bourdain understands the miscommunication and it is too late to remedy the situation.

One day Bourdain gets a call from a friend telling Bourdain that the owner of an Italian restaurant called Le Madri wants to meet Bourdain. Bourdain is skeptical because he does not particularly like cooking Italian food, but Bourdain meets with the chef, Gianni Scappin, who hires Bourdain as executive chef to a new restaurant called Coco Pazzo Teatro scheduled to open in just a few weeks. Bourdain, along with a few other job candidates, must cook for the restaurant's owner, Pino Luongo.

Bourdain studies Pino's books on Tuscan cooking and prepares a rustic seafood dish which appeals to Pino's heritage and love for fish dishes. Bourdain wins out over all the other candidates and his acceptance of the position launches him into a whirlwind of activities, including everything from finalizing the menu to hiring old friends and new colleagues to staff the kitchen. Bourdain's first hire is his faithful sous chef, Steven, and the two of them steal away other cooks they have worked with from many other kitchens.

By the time the restaurant opens and is running successfully, Bourdain is working seventeen hours a day, seven days a week. The position of executive chef is mostly an administrative one and Bourdain eventually resigns, exhausted from the soul-sapping tasks of administrating repairs and human resources issues.

This is the end of the middle section of Bourdain's book and represents the end of his wilderness period. Bourdain writes candidly of his endless interviews, unemployment depression, and the string of dead end jobs during this period, leaving the reader longing for some respite for all involved. Bourdain is maturing emotionally and understands his own role in some of the disappointments and is able to more quickly identify problem areas and extricate himself before too much time elapses.



# A Day in the Life and Sous-Chef

## A Day in the Life and Sous-Chef Summary and Analysis

Bourdain is now executive chef at Brasserie Les Halles, a French restaurant in New York City, and works long hours. His first thoughts upon waking are about food preparation for the day ahead. Bourdain is generally the first to arrive, and the kitchen staff gradually drifts into place in order to begin lunch service at noon. Bourdain has earned a reputation for being demanding, and the purveyors know not to bring inferior products into his kitchen.

Before long, preparations are underway for the dinner serving and Bourdain leaves the restaurant temporarily to explore the fresh produce market where he purchases a few items that will become part of tonight's specials. In between expediting orders and managing inventory for upcoming days, Bourdain also manages personnel issues. Dinner service at the popular restaurant is explosive and Bourdain is a whirling center of anxiety fueled by caffeine and cigarettes.

At the end of an exhausting day, Bourdain finds himself in a bar at 1:00 a.m., knowing that he has to be back at work in six hours but needing the release from the liquor and the music.

Bourdain's old friend, Steven, serves as his sous-chef at Les Halles, and Bourdain comes to rely heavily on Steven's loyalty and solid performance. Steven also brings an old friend of his who Bourdain calls Adam Real-Last-Name Unknown, an amazing cook and baker with sporadic work habits and an eccentric personality. Bourdain tolerates the juvenile antics created by Steven and Adam because both men are exceptional cooks.

Steven and Adam had met in California where they worked together and also used recreational drugs. Eventually Steven had returned to New York, landing jobs at several restaurants where he garnered different skills at each. Eventually Steven had met Bourdain at one of these restaurants and the two had become fast friends, each with irreverence for authority and convention.

Each time Bourdain had moved to another restaurant he always hired Steven as his sous chef because the two men are so comfortable with each other and can manage through the most grueling situations in any kitchen.

As this section opens, Bourdain moves away from the generalized rambling thoughts to a progressive retelling of a typical day in his life at Brasserie Les Halles. Bourdain does a masterful job of delineating even the most miniscule details in order to show the breadth of tasks he must administer each day, coupled with his management preparation skills. The tone and pace of the chapter are burdensome and intense to mirror the mood and energy required from Bourdain in order to navigate a single day.

Bourdain's writing style is very conversational, extremely informal, and very entertaining. For example, he writes that "the tuna will get a quick walk across the grill". Obviously, a tuna cannot walk, but this is Bourdain's way of saying that the fish will be lightly grilled.



# The Level of Discourse and Other Bodies

## The Level of Discourse and Other Bodies Summary and Analysis

One night, during a lull in dinner service, Bourdain takes a break and listens to the banter of the kitchen staff and realizes that what he hears is essentially the same conversation he has heard in every kitchen for twenty-five years. Much of the talk revolves around gentle ribbing about which of the men is homosexual or has the potential to be. No matter which restaurant, cuisine or dialect, the topic is the same.

Bourdain goes on further to explain that this art form of cook-talk has a rigid set of rules known to all who work in kitchens. All comments must be based in some part on involuntary rectal penetration, penis size, physical flaws, or annoying mannerisms or defects. There are some variants in the rules, however, such as the word *cabron*, which can mean that a man's girlfriend is being intimate with another man or can simply be interjected to mean "my brother" as a term of endearment. The meaning lies in the tone and inflection. "The word 'fuck' is used principally as a comma. 'Suck my dick' means 'Hang on a second' or 'Could you please wait a moment?' And 'Get your shit together with your fucking meez, or I come back there and fuck you in the culo' means 'Pardon me, comrade, but I am concerned with your state of readiness for the coming rush. Is your mise-en-place properly restocked, my brother?'" (The Level of Discourse, p. 220).

Bourdain admits that this type of environment is not suitable for everyone, especially women, but that any person who wants to do this type of work must be prepared for this in order to survive. After culinary proficiency, a person's ability to take and give back this level of insults will determine kitchen success.

Bourdain admits to loving the verbal sounds in his kitchen as much as the other sounds indicating energized activity, and realizes that he has also sunk to this level of speaking which must be curtailed to some degree outside the kitchen.

There are also word substitutions for restaurant people and equipment: a six-top is a table with six people; weeded means running behind; floor personnel are referred to simply as floor or scum; the Queez is the Cuisinart food processor; and crunchies are aspirin because they are consumed like candy.

Bourdain also explains the roles of various people who interact with the kitchen staff. Runners function similarly to waiters but are loyal to the kitchen staff and help deliver food to tables while providing surveillance information for the chef. The night porter cleans the restaurant and takes out the trash after closing each night. Bourdain feels that the bartender is the second most important person in the establishment after the chef and that a symbiotic relationship between the two is critical.

In these two chapters Bourdain provides even more detail on the bawdy and sometimes lewd behavior occurring in restaurant kitchens. This is not done as an attempt to shock but rather to show the true nature of the environment so that anyone considering this type of work may be forewarned and can manage expectations appropriately. Bourdain also explains the roles of some of the people in the restaurant outside the kitchen to complete the full picture of restaurant personnel.



# Adam Real-Last-Name-Unknown and Department of Human Resources

## Adam Real-Last-Name-Unknown and Department of Human Resources Summary and Analysis

One night Bourdain receives a call in the kitchen and the caller tells him to "Feed the bitch or she'll die!" Bourdain knows this is Adam Real-Last-Name-Unknown, the psychotic bread maker, calling to ask Bourdain to feed his bread dough starter because he is in no condition to come in to take care of it himself. Bourdain imagines Adam languishing in his apartment, coming off a high of cocaine and liquor, and with no money to get a cab to the restaurant, so Bourdain relents and takes care of the bread starter.

If Adam were not such a genius at bread baking, Bourdain would have never hired him, but the results of Adam's work are amazing pieces of crusty art created perfectly every day. Bourdain has hired and then fired Adam for unprofessional behavior and then re-hired Adam again and again because Adam bakes the best bread Bourdain has ever tasted.

The facet of being a chef that Bourdain most despises is the human resources tasks. Bourdain recalls a chef colleague who fires an insolent cook who then hangs himself later that day, so Bourdain is always aware of the potential impact that his words or actions may have on any one of his kitchen staff. Bourdain tries to tolerate personal situations, substance abuse problems, and antisocial tendencies until a person's behavior becomes a detriment to himself or the kitchen as a whole.

By this point in time, Bourdain has transitioned from the kitchen employee with drug problems and a surly attitude and now must manage those who follow in his footsteps. He has gone from someone who felt free to speak anything that came to mind to now being mindful of the impact that his words will have on those workers whose livelihoods depend on his comments. This shows an emotional maturity and professional stance befitting Bourdain's executive position he has achieved.



# The Life of Bryan and Mission to Tokyo

## The Life of Bryan and Mission to Tokyo Summary and Analysis

Among all the excellent chefs and cooks on the restaurant scene, Bourdain considers a man named Scott Bryan to be the best. Scott is an iconic figure in New York known for his standards of excellence and willingness to innovate. Bourdain admits that Scott is better than he because Scott has been working on his culinary skills for a very long time and has never lost interest in perfecting the art.

Scott had also been more selective in accepting culinary jobs than Bourdain, who took almost any job along the way just for the money. Scott has also expanded his skill sets by jumping the a la carte cuisine line to master the art of pastry making, something Bourdain would have never done.

In the spring of 1999, the owners of Les Halles ask Bourdain to go to the Les Halles restaurant in Tokyo to show the chef and cooks how to make the food identical to the food at the New York restaurant location. Bourdain is apprehensive about going to Japan to show a French chef in a French restaurant how to properly prepare and display the food, but Bourdain makes the fourteen-hour flight for his next adventure.

Sedated by airport liquor and boredom, Bourdain survives the flight to Japan by sleeping as much as possible. When Bourdain arrives in Tokyo, he takes a cab to Les Halles where he meets his boss, Pierre, who assists Bourdain in transporting Bourdain and his luggage via bicycle to his corporate apartment maintained by the restaurant corporation.

After a brief respite, Bourdain finds his way to Les Halles to meet the kitchen staff, where he stays briefly before returning to his apartment completely jet lagged and desperate for sleep. Waking very early, Bourdain ventures out into the streets to find breakfast on his first morning in Tokyo.

Bourdain enters a Starbucks for its familiarity but determines that his first meal in Japan will not be at a coffee shop and ventures out again and finds a Japanese noodle shop where he orders a dish of noodles, pork, rice, and pickles. Bourdain continues to explore the city for a short while before returning to Les Halles to begin his first day. Bourdain finds inconsistencies in the quality of the products and serving sizes in the Les Halles here, so Bourdain makes those adjustments as well as introducing the staff to some items such as truffle oils, which are completely foreign to the Japanese staff.

Bourdain continues to explore the city during his free time and one night is treated to dinner at an exclusive restaurant, where he enjoys a twenty-course meal which he considers to be the finest meal he has ever eaten. The restaurant staff is in awe of the appetites of Bourdain and his dinner companion, who consume massive amounts of



seafood including snapper, bass, mackerel, flounder, Chilean pompano, sashimi, tiger shrimp, and raw sea eel punctuated by drinks of frozen sake.

Soon it is time for Bourdain to return to New York, and he regrets not having had enough time to explore the city of Tokyo even further. Bourdain briefly entertains thoughts of eschewing his identity to disappear into the Japanese culture for the ultimate adventure, but reality prevails and Bourdain makes the return trip to New York.

At last Bourdain has reached the place where he can practice his profession in an environment that allows for his personality and culinary style. Bourdain has reached a level of success which surprises even himself, especially in comparison to chefs whom he considers to be more talented or disciplined. Bourdain admits that he is lucky to have arrived at this place in his life, especially given his penchant for self-destructive behavior, and is grateful for the opportunity.



# So You Want to be a Chef? A Commencement Address and Kitchen's Closed

## So You Want to be a Chef? A Commencement Address and Kitchen's Closed Summary and Analysis

Bourdain cautions anyone considering a career as a chef to seriously consider the lifestyle and deep commitment necessary for a culinary career. Bourdain suggests these parameters as prerequisites for a chef's preparation: Be fully committed; Learn Spanish; Don't steal; Always be on time; Never make excuses or blame others; Never call in sick; Lazy, sloppy and slow are bad; Be prepared to witness every variety of human folly and injustice; Assume the worst; Try not to lie; Avoid restaurants where the owner's name is over the door; Think about that resume; Read; and Have a sense of humor about things.

On a Sunday morning while lying in bed and aching from a brutal night's work the night before, Bourdain philosophizes that he has arrived at his culinary destination. Bourdain's hands now look like the hands of a chef, scarred and burned with recent scratches and scrapes. Bourdain also does a brief mental inventory of some of the people with whom he has worked over the years and acknowledges the positive influence of his wife throughout his career. Ultimately, Bourdain admits that things have not always run smoothly and there have been culinary casualties along the way, but he would not have missed the journey for anything else in the world.

This last section is a blend of practicalities and philosophies that Bourdain imparts to those interested in culinary careers. Bourdain also brings the book full circle by informing the reader of the whereabouts of some of the people Bourdain has encountered during his career. At this point in his life, Bourdain's point of view is one of cautious optimism learned from a twenty-year career filled with highs and lows inherent in the volatile restaurant business. Although having experienced both personal and professional successes and setbacks, Bourdain rationalizes that they all combine to create the person he is today, and he is proud of what he has accomplished and earned during his career. Bourdain also offers guarded optimism to those interested in pursuing culinary careers, and his no-nonsense attitude and tone is both frightening and believable.





# Characters

## Anthony Bourdain

Anthony Bourdain is the author and narrator of the book, which relates his own experiences on the way to becoming a chef in New York City restaurants. Bourdain first realizes his love for food during a family vacation in Europe when he is a young boy. That love for food is perpetuated at Cape Cod restaurants during summers of his college years, and Bourdain attends the Culinary Institute of America to gain formal training. Utilizing his newfound skills and expertise, Bourdain lands a job at the prestigious Rainbow Room in New York City. From there, Bourdain works at several restaurants where he garners professional and interpersonal expertise. Bourdain also indulges in self-destructive behavior, including drug and alcohol abuse due both to his self-indulgent personality as well as a means to endure the rigors of grueling kitchen work. Bourdain maintains loyal friendships with those he considers to be experts in their culinary crafts, and hires them whenever given the opportunity at various restaurants. Ultimately, Bourdain accepts the head chef position at the noted Brasserie Les Halles in New York City, which provides the environment necessary for his culinary talents to shine.

## Bigfoot

Bourdain meets the man he calls Bigfoot while attending the Culinary Institute of America. Bourdain works for Bigfoot on weekends during the 1970s, and hears the legend that Bigfoot had once killed a man with his bare hands, a fact that interests but does not deter Bourdain from associating with Bigfoot. Bigfoot is self-described as "a big, fat, balding, red-faced Jewboy". Bourdain likens Bigfoot's appearance as an elongated Bruce Willis, well over 6'4" with huge hands and a massive body. Bigfoot's personality and wit are more facile than his massive body, and Bourdain stings more than once from Bigfoot's rapier wit. Although Bigfoot is intimidating in every way, he befriends Bourdain, who learns not only culinary skills but also lessons in integrity and loyalty. Bourdain admires Bigfoot because even though Bigfoot owns the restaurant, no task is beneath him in order to keep the restaurant functioning properly, whether plunging a stopped-up toilet or filling in as a line cook. Later in Bourdain's life, Bigfoot comes to Bourdain's rescue and hires Bourdain after Bourdain has had a series of failed jobs and trouble with drugs and alcohol, a fact which forever endears Bigfoot to the usually cynical Bourdain.

## Tante Jeanne

Tante Jeanne is Bourdain's aunt with whom he stays during a summer vacation in France and learns to love French food.



## **Monsieur Saint-Jour**

Monsieur Saint-Jour is an oyster fisherman in France who introduces Bourdain to the skill of fishing and appreciating the taste of fresh oysters.

## **Howard Mitcham**

Howard Mitcham is the head chef at Mario's Restaurant in Provincetown from whom Bourdain draws early culinary inspiration.

## **Tyrone**

Tyrone is the broiler man at Mario's Restaurant who teaches Bourdain how to manage large quantities of dinner orders and how to toughen up in order to withstand the physical rigors of kitchen work.

## **Chef Bernard**

Chef Bernard is Bourdain's instructor for the Escoffier Room class, the final class before graduation from the Culinary Institute of America.

## **Dimitri**

Dimitri is the introverted pasta cook at The Dreadnaught with whom Bourdain becomes a lifelong friend.

## **The Silver Shadow**

The Silver Shadow is the owner of Let's-Call-It-Gino's and other East Coast restaurants and whose mercurial personality creates havoc for his employees and restaurant operations.

## **Pino Luongo**

Pino Luongo is an Italian businessman and owner of Coco Pazzo Teatro where Bourdain works as executive chef for a brief time.

## **Steven Tempel**

Steven Tempel is an old friend of Bourdain's, the two having met during the Bigfoot days, and Steven serves as Bourdain's sous-chef at Brasserie Les Halles.

## **Adam Real-Last-Name-Unknown**

Adam Real-Last-Name-Unknown is a friend of Steven's, and Bourdain hires him as a baker at Brasserie Les Halles.



## **Objects/Places**

### **The Queen Mary**

Bourdain and his family sail to Europe on the Queen Mary ocean liner in 1966.

### **Normandy**

Bourdain and his family spend time on the Normandy coast during their summer vacation in 1966.

### **Vienne**

Vienne is the town where Bourdain's aunt lives and where Bourdain learns to love French cooking and going oyster fishing.

### **Oysters**

Eating oysters as a boy in France changes Bourdain's view on food and his visions for his future in the culinary arts.

### **Vassar College**

Bourdain attends Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York, after high school graduation in 1973.

### **Provincetown, Cape Cod**

Bourdain spends the summer of 1973 with friends in the village of Provincetown, Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

### **The Dreadnaught**

Bourdain's first restaurant job is as a busboy at The Dreadnaught in Provincetown, Cape Cod.

### **Culinary Institute of America (CIA)**

Bourdain attends the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York for formal culinary training in 1975.



## **Knives**

Kitchen knives become the indispensable tools of a chef and they are carefully wrapped and carried with the chef at all times.

## **Mise-en-place**

Mise-en-place is the set-up of seasonings, oils, and other essentials at the line cook's station.

## **The Rainbow Room**

Bourdain's first real job after graduating from The Culinary Institute is at the Rainbow Room at the top of Rockefeller Center in New York City.

## **Work Progress**

Work Progress is the New York City Restaurant where Bourdain works with an old friend from Provincetown, Sam G, who has been named chef de cuisine.

## **Tom H.**

Tom H. is the theater district restaurant on West 46th Street in New York City where Bourdain gets his first chef job.

## **Rick's Café**

Rick's Café is the Casablanca-themed restaurant in New York City where Bourdain works for a short time after leaving Tom H.

## **Let's-Call-It-Gino's**

Let's-Call-It-Gino's is a two-story restaurant in New York City serving Northern Italian cuisine.

## **Coco Pazzo Teatro**

Coco Pazzo Teatro is a New York City restaurant where Bourdain serves as executive chef for a short time until he resigns, weary of the heavy administrative duties.



## **Brasserie Les Halles**

Brasserie Les Halles is a notable French restaurant in New York City where Bourdain serves as executive chef.

## **Tokyo, Japan**

Bourdain spends a brief time in Japan training the chef and cooks at Les Halles how to prepare and display the food in the Tokyo Les Halles restaurant.

# Themes

## Machismo

There is a strong overriding sense of machismo throughout the book, as evidenced by the behavior and thoughts of both Bourdain and his colleagues. Machismo is a very strong masculine essence with accompanying personality traits of bravado and superiority even in the face of insecurity. Even as a young boy, Bourdain feels a sense of masculine superiority when he is the youngest and only person to swallow a raw oyster on a fishing boat in France. Bourdain experiences machismo firsthand during his summer jobs in restaurants on Cape Cod, where the chefs and cooks exhibit strong, bullying behavior. This is appealing to the slightly built Bourdain, who realizes that his real power will come not from his physical stature but from the achievement of culinary success. Machismo is very often associated with men from Latin cultures, so it is a natural extension to see it exhibited in restaurant kitchens where many of the workers come from Latin countries or are of Latin descent. Because of the strong masculine environments in most restaurant kitchens of the time, few women gravitate toward or choose to stay in these male-dominated work places, which further strengthens the pervading sense of virility, male domination, and aggressiveness.

## Excellence

Bourdain is consumed with doing excellent work and hires only those who he feels have not only the skills but also the personal fortitude to work in the extremely demanding world of big city restaurants. Not content to merely work as a line cook in obscure restaurants, Bourdain attends the prestigious Culinary Institute of America, where he learns the highest art forms of food preparation and display. From there Bourdain works in notable restaurants such as the famous Rainbow Room, where he leaves after he gleans all that he can from that experience. Even the bad employment situations teach Bourdain valuable lessons that he takes with him, and he often leaves failing restaurants in search of better opportunities. Bourdain's relationship and obsession with his friend and mentor, Bigfoot, belies Bourdain's pursuit of excellence when he maintains Bigfoot's schedules and stringent work practices even when Bourdain is employed at other restaurants not owned by Bigfoot. Although Bourdain strays personally from the path of excellence with drug and alcohol abuse, he is diligent in his quest for perfect food and perfect presentations. Bourdain also readily acknowledges those whom he feels have achieved culinary excellence and attempts to discover their secrets and passions in order to learn from their various careers. At the end of the book, Bourdain is employed at the Brasserie Les Halles in New York City, the pinnacle of his career to this point, and he is both grateful and satisfied with achieving this level of success.



## Passion for Food

It is during a family vacation to Europe that the young Bourdain first experiences the delight of French food and the resulting pleasurable sensations. Perhaps it is his French ancestry, or being in France where even everyday food is raised to an art form, but Bourdain immerses himself in experiences he has never forgotten. During his early restaurant years, Bourdain discovers the power of food prepared by domineering men who rule their worlds with bravado and confidence, and Bourdain is seduced into choosing the culinary arts as his career. Even during the long hours and grueling pace of kitchen work, Bourdain still loves the sights and sounds of the kitchen and never tires of creating new menu items and exploring different cuisines in order to further his interests in all things food-related. Bourdain even encourages the reader to try exotic foods just as he does, even though he knows he may experience some digestive discomforts later, because he believes in living fully and that includes indulging in one-of-a-kind food experiences. Bourdain's passion for food extends into his personal life as most of his friends are chefs, cooks, and restaurant owners and the common bond is both solidifying and enervating.



# Style

## Perspective

This nonfiction book is written in the first person narrative perspective. This means that the person telling the story is the author himself, and he delivers his views and relates events according to his own perception of them. The author does not supply any insight into the motives, feelings, or actions of any other people and can only relate instances about these people from his own point of view. When there are detailed conversations, the author can simply relate what the other person says, and although the author may guess at the other person's thoughts, he cannot share them with the reader. Because the nature of the book is a nonfiction account of a person's philosophy on different topics, there is little room for any other points of view. This relaying of personal thoughts is punctuated at times by the retelling of events or incidents to add some dimension to the book, and everything is still from the author's own experiences and perspective. While this technique can be viewed as limiting, the author is able to provide much detail on his own thoughts and emotions, which would not otherwise be available to the reader and is in complete alignment with the nature of the work.

## Tone

The tone of the book is very informal and engaging, almost as if the reader is having a one-on-one conversation with the author. The language is informal, casual, and sometimes crude to define the author's personality and energy. There are several instances of slang words and profanity, but they are in context with the dialogue and appropriate for the work. The narrative is also very high energy with a sophisticated wit belying the author's own personal style of speaking and managing his interactions with his business colleagues and employees. While the piece is very high energy, there is an undercurrent of authenticity and sincerity throughout the book that makes the story believable. This is important to note because a business biography can be a dry retelling of notable points on a timeline, but this book exudes raw enthusiasm and pulls in the reader who is anxious to share Bourdain's experience from the very first page. The book has the perfect mix of energy, humor, and excitement tempered with maturity and obligation to the business and the reader, which makes it a very engaging piece.

## Structure

The book contains a preface in which the author shares some information about what has happened in his life since the publishing of this book. The book is then divided into five parts: First Course, Second Course, Third Course, Dessert and Coffee, and a Cigarette. These divisions are consistent with Bourdain's personal and professional evolution, with the first part describing his introduction to food and his resulting early education and work experiences in the food industry. The subsequent parts cover the

years that Bourdain grows as a chef personally and professionally. The final sections are more philosophical than practical wherein Bourdain offers advice to anyone considering the culinary arts as a career. There are a total of twenty-seven chapters divided almost equally among the five sections. The narrative does not necessarily follow any chronological timeline format, but rather focuses on topics and main points of Bourdain's experiences and growth. The timeline of Bourdain's career is punctuated with interjections both practical and philosophical in nature, which accounts for some of the back-and-forth of dates within the story.



## Quotes

"Brains? Stinky, runny cheeses that smelled like dead men's feet? Horsemeat? Sweetbreads? Bring it on!! Whatever had the most shock value became my meal of choice. For the rest of that summer, and in the summers that followed, I ate everything. I scooped gooey Vacherin, learned to love the cheesy, rich Normandy butter, especially slathered on baguettes and dipped in bitter hot chocolate. I sneaked red wine whenever possible, tried fritures—tiny whole fish, fried and eaten with persillade—loving that I was eating heads, eyes, bones and all. I ate ray in beurre noisette, saucisson a l'ail, tripes, rognons de veau (kidneys), boudin noir that squirted blood down my chin." Food is Good, p. 13

"I took it in my hand, tilted the shell back into my mouth as instructed by the now beaming Monsieur Saint-Jour and with one bite and a slurp, wolfed it down. It tasted of seawater... of brine and flesh... and somehow... of the future. Everything was different now. Everything." Food is Good, p. 16

"I saw a lot of bad behavior that first year in P-town. I was impressed. These guys were master criminals, sexual athletes, compared to my pitiful college hijinks. Highwaymen rogues, buccaneers, cut-throats, they were like young princes to me, still only a lowly dishwasher. The life of the cook was a life of adventure, looting, pillaging and rock-and-rolling through life with a carefree disregard for all conventional morality. It looked pretty damn good to me on the other side of the line." Food is Sex, p. 22

"Howard showed us that there was hope for us as cooks. That food could be a calling. That the stuff itself was something we could actually be proud of, a reason to live. And that stuck with some of us from those early frontier days. He influenced a lot of my friends. I read a Molly O'Neill column in the New York Times Magazine recently, in which she was describing the delights of Portuguese-influenced Cape Cod food like white beans, kale and chorizo, and I knew she'd eaten the old man's food, and probably read his books too. Without his name being mentioned, Howard's reach had extended across the decades to my Sunday paper—and I was glad of it." Food is Pain, p. 29

"I had been shown up for the loud-mouthed, useless little punk that I was. I was, I learned later, a mal carne, meaning 'bad meat' in Italian, referred to as 'Mel' for weeks after. I had been identified as a pretender, and an obnoxious one at that." Food is Pain, p. 34

"After a few days of sulking and self-pity, I slowly, and with growing determination, began to formulate a plan, a way to get back at my tormentors. I would go to school, at the Culinary Institute of America—they were the best in the country and certainly none of the P-town guys had been there. I would apprentice in France. I would endure anything: evil drunk chefs, crackpot owners, low pay, terrible working conditions; I would let sadistic, bucket-headed French sous-chefs work me like a Sherpa . . . but I would be back. I would do whatever was necessary to become as good as, or better than, this



Mario crew. I would have hands like Tyrone's and I would break loudmouth punks like myself over the wheel like they'd broken me. I'd show them." *Food is Pain*, p. 34

"'You are a shit chef!' he would bellow. 'I make two cook like you in the toilette each morning! You are deezgusting! A shoemaker! You have destroyed my life! . . . You will never be a chef! You are a disgrace! Look! Look at this merde . . . merde . . . merde!' At this point, Bernard would stick his fingers into the offending object and fling bits of it on the floor. 'You dare call this cuisine! This . . . this is grotesque! An abomination! You . . . you should kill yourself from shame!'" *Inside the CIA*, p. 42

"Our early efforts were, in the cold light of day, pretty crude and laughable. But nobody else in town was doing pate en crouete or galantines in aspic, or elaborate chaud-froid presentations. Mario tasked his most pretentious cooks with an important mission, and we were determined not to let him down—especially as it allowed us time off from our regular kitchen chores and all the overtime we needed. We threw ourselves into the task with near-fanatical once-in-a-lifetime zeal and prodigious amounts of cocaine and amphetamines." *The Return of Mal Carne*, p. 47

"Mise-en-place is the religion of all good line cooks. Do not fuck with a line cook's 'meez'—meaning his setup, his carefully arranged supplies of sea salt, rough-cracked pepper, softened butter, cooking oil, wine, backups and so on. As a cook, your station, and its condition, its state of readiness, is an extension of your nervous system—and it is profoundly upsetting if another cook or, God forbid, a waiter, disturbs your precisely and carefully laid-out system. The universe is in order when your station is set up the way you like it: you know where to find everything with your eyes closed, everything you need during the course of the shift is at the ready at arm's reach, your defenses are deployed." *Who Cooks?*, p. 58

"When a job applicant starts telling me how Pacific Rim cuisine turns him on and inspires him, I see trouble coming. Send me another Mexican dishwasher anytime. I can teach him to cook. I can't teach character. Show up at work on time six months in a row and we'll talk about red curry paste and lemongrass. Until then, I have four words for you: 'Shut the fuck up.'" *Who Cooks?*, p. 63

"Good food and good eating are about risk. Every once in a while an oyster, for instance, will make you sick to your stomach. Does this mean you should stop eating oysters? No way. The more exotic the food, the more adventurous the serious eater, the higher the likelihood of later discomfort. I'm not going to deny myself the pleasures of morcilla sausage, or sashimi or even ropa vieja at the local Cuban joint just because sometimes I feel bad a few hours after I've eaten them." *From our Kitchen to your Table*, p. 64

"He taught me everything really important I know about the business. He, more than anyone else I encountered in my professional life, transformed me from a bright but druggie fuck-up into a serious, capable and responsible chef. He made me a leader, the combination of good guy/bad guy the job requires. He's the reason I am never out sick, why I go to sleep every night running tomorrow's prep lists and menus through my mind.



He's also the reason I smoke three packs of cigarettes a day and know everything there is to know about everyone I work with, why my purveyors cringe when they get my call and why my wife has to remind me when I get home from work that she's my wife and not an employee." *Owner's Syndrome and Other Medical Anomalies*, p. 90

"Cunning, manipulative, brilliant, mercurial, physically intimidating—even terrifying—a bully, a yenta, a sadist and a mensch: Bigfoot is all those things. He's also the most stand-up guy I ever worked for. He inspires a strange and consuming loyalty. I try, in my kitchen, to be just like him. I want my cooks to have me inside their heads just like Bigfoot remains in mine. I want them to think that, like Bigfoot, when I look into their eyes, I see right into their very souls." *Bigfoot*, p. 92

"Bigfoot understood—as I came to understand—that character is far more important than skills or employment history. And he recognized character—good and bad—brilliantly. He understood, and taught me, that a guy who shows up every day on time, never calls in sick and does what he said he was going to do is less likely to fuck you in the end than a guy who has an incredible resume but is less reliable about arrival time. Skills can be taught. Character you either have or don't have." *Bigfoot*, p. 96

"I didn't care what atrocities we were inflicting on a credulous public, lulled into docility by our spectacular view, our swank appointments, big band and high prices. I was putting up serious numbers, and holding my own with the best of the lifers. I could destroy and serve a nice piece of veal or a Dover sole as fast as, if not faster than, any of them. I was working every station in the kitchen, keeping up with the ugliest, meanest twenty-year veterans anyone back in Provincetown had even dreamed of. I was a line stud, an all-around guy, a man's man. I was on top of the world." *I Make My Bones*, p. 116

"The new owners of Work Progress, our putative masters, were a textbook example of People Who Should Never Own a Restaurant. There were two brothers—one-half smart, the other genuinely dumb—who'd gotten a few bucks from Mommy and Daddy, along with their partner, a slightly more cognizant college friend who could actually read a P and L sheet and crunch a few numbers. Their principal business was investing in off-Broadway shows. As this, apparently, wasn't unprofitable enough, they'd chosen the restaurant business as a way to lose their money more quickly and assuredly." *The Happy Time*, p. 122

"When the restaurant opened, we'd begin every shift with a solemn invocation of the first moments of *Apocalypse Now*, our favorite movie. Emulating the title sequence, we'd play the soundtrack album, choppers coming in low and fast, the whirr of the blades getting louder and more unearthly, and just before Jim Morrison kicked in with the first few words, 'This is the end, my brand-new friend . . . the end . . .' we'd soak the entire range-top with brandy and ignite it, causing a huge, napalm-like fireball to rush into the hoods—just like in the movie when the tree line goes up. If our boobish owners and newly hired floor staff weren't already thoroughly spooked by our antics, then they were by this act." *The Happy Time*, p. 122



"But Betty Bacall loves that dish!" Tom would protest when I suggested removing a particularly moribund item from the menu. He'd keep certain things on, favorites of celebrity pals, day in and day out, waiting for them to return. But Betty Bacall was not coming to dinner every day, I could have pointed out, nor every week—in fact, she probably wasn't ever coming back. The place was dying. The smell of desperation was in the air. You could detect it halfway down the block, as we were surrounded by equally customer-hungry places; you could see it in Tom's face; and when a few straggling celebrities would on occasion wander through the door, he'd pounce on them like a starved remora." *Chef of the Future!*, p. 131

"I was three for three for my last three restaurants. Fortunately, I was still young, so I could comfortably blame other factors on my unhappy success rate: bad owners, bad location, ugly clientele, crappy décor . . . I could live with that. I still had hope." *Chef of the Future!*, p. 133

"I was hooked on a chef-sized paycheck—and increasing dosages of heroin. I was condemned to become Mr. Traveling Fixit, always arriving after a first chef had screwed things up horribly, the wolves already at the door. I was more of an undertaker than a doctor; I don't think I ever saved a single patient. They were terminal when I arrived; I might, at best, have only prolonged their death throes." *Chef of the Future!*, p. 133

"I was reaching rock bottom, both personally and professionally. I got canned from the Mexican place, for which particular reason I don't know; there were plenty of good ones—alcoholism, drug abuse, pilferage, laziness—I don't know which of these unlovely traits actually did me in. But I didn't mind; the rats were really bugging me, especially when I was high on coke, which was most of the time." *The Wilderness Years*, p. 150

"Something had to change. I had to get it together. I'd been the culinary equivalent of the Flying Dutchman too long, living a half-life with no future in mind, just oozing from sensation to sensation. I was a disgrace, a disappointment to friends and family and myself, and the drugs and the booze no longer chased that disappointment away." *The Wilderness Years*, p. 152

"I was utterly depressed. I lay in bed all day, immobilized by guilt, fear, shame and regret, my ashtrays overflowing with butts, unpaid bills stacked everywhere, dirty clothes heaped in the corners. At night, I lay awake with heart palpitations, terrors, bouts of self-loathing so powerful that only the thought of diving through my sixth-floor window onto Riverside Drive gave me any comfort and allowed me to lull myself into a resigned sleep." *What I Know About Meat*, p. 154

"This steakhouse owner—whose end-of-week sales reports probably constituted at least 90 percent meat sales—hadn't been asking me what 'I knew about me . . .' He'd asked a more reasonable question for the owner of a very successful steakhouse. He'd asked me, 'WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT MEAT?' And I, like some half-crazed suicidal idiot-savant kamikaze pilot, had asked him to repeat the question, pondered it



thoughtfully, then proudly replied, 'Next to nothing!' It was not my finest hour." *What I Know About Meat*, p. 161

"A few hours earlier, I'd been lying dazed and hopeless in my unmade bed, wondering whether to take another nap or call out for pizza. Now I was the sous-chef at one of the best Italian restaurants in New York, with an inside track—I was assured—to becoming the executive chef at Pino Luongo's latest celeb-friendly restaurant in the ultracool, Philippe Starck-designed, Schrager-owned hotel. It was a dazzling development." *Pino Noir: Tuscan Interlude*, p. 164

"In the opening weeks at Coco Pazzo Teatro, I lost eleven pounds. These were not pounds I had to spare. I'm a bony, whippet-thin, gristly, tendony strip of humanity, and after two weeks running up and down the steps at Teatro from prep kitchen to a la carte kitchen—like some hyperactive forest ranger, always trying to put out brush fires in order to avoid actual conflagrations—I looked as if I'd been breathing pure crack in some VC tiger cage for the last ten years." *Pino Noir: Tuscan Interlude*, p. 172

"As I brush my teeth, turn on the shower, swallow my first couple of aspirin of the day, I'm reviewing what's still kicking around in my walk-in from previous days, what I have to unload, use in specials, merchandise. I hear the coffee grinder going, as Nancy is awake, which leaves me only a few more minutes of undisturbed reflection on food deployment before I have to behave like a civilian for a few minutes." *A Day in the Life*, p. 181

"Steven, my sous-chef from 1993 until recently—when he finally took on a kitchen of his own—was my evil twin, my doppelganger, my director of clandestine services, a Bilko-esque character who, in addition to the usual sous-chef responsibilities such as running the kitchen in my absence, line cooking at a high level and watching my back, was invaluable to me for his remarkable ability to get things done." *Sous-Chef*, p. 204

"If I did half the things that Steven does regularly—and I'm not even talking about the felonies, just the brutish misbehavior, the bad taste, the remarks, the exhibitionism, the conniving—I'd end up in court defending myself against a host of sexual harassment lawsuits. And yet, I can't think of anyone, except the owner of Sullivan's (but that's another story), who doesn't like Steven, who doesn't find him adorable, who doesn't confide in him, go to him when he's confused or in trouble . . . an amazing accomplishment for a guy who shows up to work with sperm on his shoes ('Stopped at a peep booth to toss off,' he explains casually. 'Hey! I was horny!'), who behaves like an utter pig at times, freely discussing his every digestive, dermatological and sexual manifestation with anyone within hearing. And this . . . this, dear reader, is my closest and most trusted friend and associate." *Sous-Chef*, p. 218

"Who's the bigger homo? Who takes it in the ass? Who, exactly, at this particular moment, is a pede, a maricon, a fanocchio, a puta, a pato? It's all about dick, you see. It's chupa mis huevos time, time for mama la ping, take it in your culo time,





motherfucker, you pinche baboso, crying little woman. And your vierga? It looks like a fucking half-order of merguez—muy, muy, muy chica . . . like an insecto." *The Level of Discourse*, p. 220

"Homophobic, you say? Sub-mental? Insensitive to gender preference, and the gorgeous mosaic of an ethnically diverse work force? Gee . . . you might be right. Does a locker-room environment like this make it tougher for women, for instance? Yep. Most women, sadly. But what the system seeks, what it requires, is someone, anyone, who can hold up his station, play the game without getting bent out of shape and taking things personally. If you are easily offended by direct aspersions on your lineage, the circumstances of your birth, your sexuality, your appearance, the mention of your parents possibly commingling with livestock, then the world of professional cooking is not for you." *The Level of Discourse*, p. 221

"'Feed the bitch!' said the voice on the phone. 'Feed the bitch or she'll die!' It was Adam. What he wanted me to do—what he was telling me—was that he was too drunk, too tired, too lazy, too involved in some squalid personal circumstances to come in and feed his starter: a massive, foaming, barely contained heap of fermenting grapes, flour, water, sugar and yeast which even now was pushing up the weighted-down lid of a thirty-five-gallon Lexan container and spilling over on the work table where it was stored." *Adam Real-Last-Name-Unknown*, p. 233

"Why of all His creatures, did He choose this loud, dirty, unkempt, obnoxious, uncontrollable, megalomaniacal madman to be His personal bread baker? How was it that this disgrace as an employee, as a citizen, as a human being—this undocumented, untrained, uneducated and unwashed mental case who's been employed (for about ten minutes) by every kitchen in New York—could throw together a little flour and water and make magic happen?" *Adam Real-Last-Name-Unknown*, p. 235

"I don't know, you see, how a normal person acts. I don't know how to behave outside my kitchen. I don't know the rules. I'm aware of them, sure, but I don't care to observe them anymore—because I haven't had to for so many years." *Department of Human Resources*, p. 245

"'Only one in four has a chance at making it. Ha, ha, ha,' I said, my words ringing immediately painful and hollow as soon as I'd said them. I counted our number in the back of that rattling Checker Marathon. Four. And right there, I knew that if one of us was getting off dope, and staying off dope, it was going to be me. I wasn't going to let these guys drag me down. I didn't care what it took, how long I'd known them, what we'd been through together or how close we'd been. I was going to live. I was the guy." *Department of Human Resources*, p. 246

"The whole world of cooking is not my world, contrary to what impression I might have given you in the preceding pages. Truth be told, I bring a lot of it with me. Hang out in the Veritas kitchen, take a hard look at Scott Bryan's operation, and you will find that





everything I've told you so far is wrong, that all my sweeping generalities, rules of thumb, preconceptions and general principles are utter bullshit." *The Life of Bryan*, p. 252

"I often use the hypothetical out-of-control ice-cream truck. What would happen if you were walking across the street and were suddenly hit by a careening Mister Softee truck? As you lie there, in your last few moments of consciousness, what kind of final regrets flash through your mind? 'I should have had a last cigarette!' might be one. Or, 'I should have dropped acid with everybody else back in '74!' Maybe: 'I should have done that hostess after all!' Something along the lines of: 'I should have had more fun in my life! I should have relaxed a little more, enjoyed myself a little more . . .' That was never my problem. When they're yanking a fender out of my chest cavity, I will decidedly not be regretting missed opportunities for a good time. My regrets will be more along the lines of a sad list of people hurt, people let down, assets wasted and advantages squandered." *Mission to Tokyo*, p. 267

"I wasn't kidding when I said earlier that, at least in the beginning, you have no rights, are not entitled to an opinion or a personality, and can fully expect to be treated as cattle—only less useful. Believe it. I wish I had a dollar for every well-meaning career changer who attended a six-month course and showed u to be an extern in my kitchen. More often than not, one look at what they would really be spending their first few months doing, one look at what their schedule would be, and they ran away in terror." *So You Want to be a Chef? A Commencement Address*, p. 289

"I got, finally, the hands I always wanted. Hands just like the ones Tyrone taunted me with all those years ago. Okay, there are no huge water-filled blisters—not this weekend anyway. But the scars are there, and as I lie in bed, I take stock of my extremities, idly examining the burns, old and new, checking the condition of my calluses, noting with some unhappiness the effects of age and hot metal." *Kitchen's Closed*, p. 295

## Topics for Discussion

Bourdain reveals some restaurant kitchen secrets in this book. Discuss any particularly enlightening facts.

There are several personality traits and characteristics that are essential to a successful culinary arts career. Discuss what traits you think would make a person a good chef.

Bourdain's personality is extremely strong and sometimes abrasive. Discuss why this has both helped and harmed his career.

Loyalty is an important aspect of the interpersonal dynamics in a kitchen. Discuss reasons why this is so important in the culinary industry.

Has Bourdain's book changed your views on restaurant dining? Discuss.

This book was published before the rise of culinary superstars in the media. Today Bourdain is one of those superstars with books and television programs to his credit. Why do you think Bourdain has achieved such notoriety?

In this book the role of women is sublimated in the male-dominated world of restaurant kitchens. Do you think this dynamic has changed since the book was originally published in 2000?