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Intermediate Student’s Book

Life

Dangerous dining

**Part 1**

**00.16–00.52** Fish is a major food in Japan. Every morning, thousands of fish sellers crowd the famous Tsukiji seafood market in Tokyo. Here, no product has a higher price than the one that’s the most dangerous – the puffer fish, or fugu. Eating this fish is like playing a dangerous game. If a person gets a piece that has poison in it, he or she may die! Despite the danger, fugu appears on more than 80 menus in the Asakusa restaurant area of Tokyo. The puffer is so ugly, it’s cute, but it doesn’t fool most diners.

**00.55–01.18** Tom Caradonna has come to Tokyo for the complete fugu experience, and he’s brought his friend, Aki. Wisely, Tom has chosen to eat at the famous Matsumoto restaurant. This fugu restaurant is 120 years old and it’s well-known for its careful preparation of puffer fish. That’s important when you’re taking risks with a toxin that is 1,000 times stronger than cyanide!

**01.19–01.25** ‘I’ve heard stories about people dying by trying the fugu, but it hasn’t really concerned me.’

**01.26–01.39** Even though Tom isn’t too worried to try fugu, there is a big risk. Over the years, hundreds of people have died from eating it. Chef Hayashi is the one who must prepare the fish safely so that Tom and Aki don’t get sick.

**01.40–01.55** ‘It’ll be fine, don’t worry. I’ve been doing this for 53 years. I took the exam in 1949 and passed. This is my fugu chef licence.’

**01.56–02.39** After World War II, there were many deaths from eating fugu. Many Japanese people were very hungry, and some looked for food in restaurant rubbish. Sometimes they found fugu which had been thrown out. When they cooked and ate the fish, they got sick or died. Eventually, General Douglas MacArthur, who led the US forces in Japan, created strict controls and regulations. Fugu chefs had to get licences for preparing and serving puffer fish. Even with more regulations, fugu killed 2,500 Japanese people between 1945 and 1975.

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Regulations and education have cut the number of deaths to only three annually, but many diners still get sick.

**02.40–02.49** ‘About 70 per cent of the poisonings happen in private homes where people catch and prepare fugu on their own and get poisoned. That’s most common.’

**Part 2**

**02.52–03.01** At the Tokyo University of Fisheries, Yuji Nagashima studies fugu poison carefully. He hopes to develop an anti-toxin, a medicine that will stop people from dying from fugu poisoning.

**03.02–03.15** ‘A tiger fugu has enough toxin to kill 30 people. The toxin itself, to give you an idea, is 1,000 times stronger than cyanide.’

**03.18–03.38** One milligram of the toxin is strong enough to kill a person. It kills by paralysing people’s nerves so that the poisoned person can’t move. It also paralyses the lungs so that they can’t breathe. The only way to save them is to use a respirator. This special machine can breathe for them until the toxin wears off.

**03.39–03.48** ‘This is the heart. These are the gills. They are poison.’

**03.49–04.08** Toxins make about half of the puffer fish impossible to eat. Chef Hayashi throws those parts out and then cuts the remaining flesh very thinly. He then places the fugu on a plate in the shape of a chrysanthemum, a beautiful flower that’s popular in Japan. Appropriately, it’s also a common flower at funerals!

**04.15–04.18** ‘Still breathing?’ ‘I can still breathe!’

**04.20–04.35** A fugu meal is usually eight different dishes, including sake that is topped with a cooked fugu fin … ‘And I still feel fine!’ … And grilled fugu. ‘I think that’s the best.’

**04.37–04.48** The puffer fish may be dangerous, but for some it’s a delicious meal. Luckily, Tom has survived his dangerous dining experience – at least this time!