



## Saving the Free World Through the Miracle of Risotto, Two Bowls at a Time

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My dad hated rice. That and celery. He was a naval officer during the Korean War and spent a month on an ammunition ship getting ferried across the Pacific to meet his destroyer for much unpleasantness in the Sea of Japan. Rice and celery were mostly all he had to eat for that month.

Rice and celery.

That war had taken us by surprise, or at least my dad, who was on his way to law school in 1950 when he was recalled to active duty following his service in World War II. “I was awfully put out at the time,” he said. He was further discomfited by the necessity of shooting at and being shot at by, as he put it, “otherwise reasonable people. It was quite irritating.”

Ammunition ships were dangerous by definition, and nobody was meant to serve on one for more than six months at a time. The crew my dad sailed with hadn’t been rotated for over two years, and they were edgy.

Their quartermaster took it upon himself to do whatever he could to make life better, buying the best food he could find for the wardroom whenever providence allowed. Often, it wasn’t much. But my dad, raised in dust bowl Kansas, ate fresh pineapple for the first time on that ship and raved about it for the rest of his life.

“You just can’t get pineapple like that anymore,” he’d lament, cursing the ungrateful succeeding generations he’d twice gone to war to defend who somehow failed to provide him proper fruit.

Rice also made an impression, albeit negative because it was present at every meal, and he came to despise it.



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Until one day.

“We got some butter at Wake Island somehow,” he said. “And we had this greasy canned cheese, which I liked.”

The ship’s cook, probably sick of rice himself, managed to produce some memorable cheesy rice casserole for the wardroom, which Dad somehow got into his head was “risotto.”

“It was rice, but the cheese and butter covered it up,” Dad said. He made a point of ordering risotto at restaurants for the rest of his life as certain people do so he could then complain about it: “You just can’t get good risotto anymore.”

One time I snapped back at him with, “I know, Dad — why did you even bother fighting the war?”

He stared at me and declared, “World peace begins in the kitchen!” It was a declaration both startling and enigmatic. I and everyone else in the restaurant that night went home with a fresh metaphysical truth to contemplate.

After much reflection, I at least became convinced that in the interest of defending democracy every freedom-loving American needs to know how to make risotto, that iconic Italian creation. Like all good things, it’s simple. But like all worthy things, it takes practice. And once you’ve practiced enough, you’ll have a go-to dish that will amaze your friends and confound your enemies, who will then become your friends because they want your risotto too — leading, eventually, to world peace.

Yes, it might be just that simple.

### World Peace By Risotto For Two

Ingredients:

- 3 cups broth, chicken or veg, low salt preferred, nothing overpowering
- 2 or 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, maybe more, divided
- 1/3 cup chopped sweet or white onion or a couple of minced shallots. (Some people will add garlic, which I like, but not here.)
- 1/4 cup dry white wine, plus more for the cook as needed
- 1/2 cup proper risotto rice (see below)
- 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese but anything similar can pass: Pecorino Romano, even Gruyère or whatever with a dry, nutty flavor. Dad used American, which has its own idiosyncratic charm.

Anyone who has read any recipe I have written for these pages knows I am cheap, cheap, cheap, except on a date. I have made this with all kinds of rice, even brown rice — the most hated of all the ugly grains — and, yes, American “cheese.” But I am here to tell you that in this case, at least start your journey of discovery with the highest quality short-grain white rice you can find. That means arborio, baldo, carnaroli, vialone nano or roma. For reasons I don’t care about, they all absorb stock well to produce the tender texture that defines risotto. If you’re lazy like me, just mail-order a bunch so it’s always around.

Directions:

Simmer broth and keep on low heat.

Gently melt the butter and sauté onion in a wide pan until tender but not brown with a small pinch of high-quality salt, meaning something that

actually tastes good to you. I use this crazy chunky stuff from Scotland that comes mixed with seaweed for some reason.

Stir in the rice and cook for another few minutes, until the edges become translucent.

Gradually add the wine and stir steadily until it is all absorbed. Might as well absorb some yourself, too. You’re gonna be here a while.

Add broth about 1/2 cup at a time, stirring gently until the liquid is absorbed again. Keep doing that. Relax and absorb some more wine why don’t you?

Start tasting the rice while you’ve still got a cup or so of broth left. Rice should be cooked but firm in the middle. Al dente, they call it, if that helps. Keep at it until the texture is what you want. Some say this takes 20 minutes or so, but I’ve gone as long as 45 depending on the rice, the weather, and the amount of wine I’ve absorbed.

When the texture is right, remove from heat and gently add cheese. I also add more butter by eyeball and sometimes a smattering of fresh herbs if I’ve got them, and then serve it at once. Some people will contaminate their hard-won creation at this point with asparagus or mushrooms or shellfish. Those things are fine on their own plates in their own time but here the rice is the star, so concentrate on that for the sake of the freedom-defending democratic republic that safeguards our right to make it. ■