

## High Martial 79

Chapter 79: Indeed, it's the Chen Family Stronghold

"Finally, we're almost there."

"Yeah, it's been a tough journey. My shoulders are almost numb."

"This Song Family Castle is really big, isn't it? I heard nearly two or three thousand people live here?"

"What does it have to do with us? We're just here to trade and then leave."

"True."

The group chatted, their tones varied from joy, envy, astonishment to indifference.

"Everyone, stay alert and don't let anyone get close."

Chen Guodong turned back, cautioning them.

Soon, Chen Fan saw the people his father had warned them about.

Starting from two or three hundred meters outside the Song Family Castle, many emaciated, barely clothed people lay sprawled on the ground, emitting a foul odor from a distance.

Seeing Chen Fan's group approaching, these people sat up from the grass, staring straight at the prey they carried, drool dripping from their mouths.

"Please, give us some food."

"Sir, have mercy, I haven't eaten for three days."

"Brothers, just a bite of food, I'll do anything for you."

The begging was incessant.

Chen Fan's heart trembled.

Being the first time he witnessed this, he felt a twinge of sympathy.

But the next moment, he steeled himself. Currently, ensuring the survival of his stronghold was his limit.

Some nearby people tried to approach, only to be repelled by members of the group wielding long guns.

The closer they got, the more frequent the vagrants. Some didn't even have a piece of clothing, lying motionless on the ground.

Some knelt and kept bowing, while others stared intently, seemingly plotting something.

The crowd was becoming restless.

"Stay calm!"

"Don't move, or you'll face the consequences!"

The group shouted angrily.

Truth be told, they'd seen this scenario countless times, but today's encounter was unprecedented. A misstep could spell doom for them all.

Chen Fan tightened his grip on the long gun, vigilant.

He felt fortunate that he had taken Uncle Zhang's advice and practiced spear technique.

Perhaps sensing the group's toughness, the crowd's agitation gradually subsided, and the begging reduced.

"Phew, that was close,"

Gao Yang wiped the cold sweat from his forehead, feeling shaken.

"Yeah, if we had shown any weakness, the consequences would've been dire."

"We have another round when we come out, but they shouldn't dare to target us again." The group chatted.

Now, less than a hundred meters from the Song Family Castle, the surroundings visually improved, and occasionally people approached from other directions, some with their faces covered, some uncovered, all quiet.

Chen Fan watched carefully, observing that at least a dozen gazes swept over them. When he noticed, they quickly looked away, pretending indifference.

"Among them, there must be spies from those bandits. But no rush, let's take care of business first."

He withdrew his gaze, surveying the imposing structure before him.

The stone-built walls reached four to five meters high, extending laterally about two kilometers in circumference. Numerous armed guards stood atop the walls.

"What's that?"

Chen Fan's pupils contracted sharply. He saw several dark gun barrels pointed at them atop the gatehouse, evoking a chilling feeling.

"That's the firearm Gu Ze mentioned, which repelled a high-level fierce beast."

He swallowed hard, looking down.

Below the wall were three gates, one large and two small, all guarded by fully armed soldiers.

The left small gate had many people lined up, carrying prey, evidently here to exchange resources like them.

The right gate seemed to be the exit; people handed over a small paper and were allowed to pass.

The central large gate fit three cars side by side, occasionally vehicles passed, mostly empty. Outside the walls, a few vehicles were parked, including a large truck from Zhao Family Castle.

This suggested the large gate was reserved for those with status, not just anyone with a vehicle could pass.

"Let's queue up. Everyone stay quiet; those soldiers are serious about shooting."

Chen Guodong said, glancing specifically at Chen Fan, the only newcomer in the group.

The group lined up at the end, waiting patiently.

Up ahead, conversations could be heard from time to time.

"How many people?"

"Fifteen."

"Entry fee, fifteen yuan or equivalent fierce beast meat. Exit with the paper before 5 PM, or face the consequences. Also, don't cause trouble."

"Yes, thank you, brother."

The group entered the city.

The similar exchanges continued.

"Seems we need to pay an entry fee and leave before nightfall," Chen Fan pondered. It appeared they'd check identities after dark to prevent intruders; likely, residents had identification cards while outsiders didn't.

This was quite profitable.

One yuan per person, hundreds per day, aggregating to a substantial income.

Soon, it was Chen Guodong and the group's turn.

Chen Guodong presented the pre-weighed fierce beast meat, which was verified by the guards.

The person in charge handed a stack of papers, expressionless, "Keep these papers, return them when you leave, exit before dark, and don't cause trouble."

"Understood, thank you."

Chen Guodong quickly took the papers, distributing them among the group.

Chen Fan received his too, a paper card, the size of an ID, with the words "Pass" at the top and the date, November 12th, below.

"Next."

A man's voice sounded behind them.

Chen Fan followed the group into the city, momentarily dazed.

He saw a wide concrete road ahead, lined with many shops, notably a large fierce beast materials store, several times bigger than others. There were also lodging, dining, and massage establishments, bustling with people.

Some spots had street vendors loudly advertising their goods.

Like a marketplace.

Not just Chen Fan but everyone entering gazed around, eyes filled with longing.

"Well," Chen Guodong cleared his throat, "let's first trade our items. That store buys fierce beast materials and sells various weapons. Xiaofan, see if there's anything you want."

"Sure."

Chen Fan's mind stirred.

He'd heard from Uncle Zhang beforehand and now had the chance to check it out.

Then, he'd find the old man selling cultivation techniques.

Finally, they'd handle the bandits, if they were still at the usual spot.

At that moment, a group of people approached, one speaking sarcastically, "No wonder someone looked familiar on the way. Isn't this the Chen Family Stronghold? Why sneak around like thieves?"

Instantly, all eyes focused on Chen Guodong and his group.