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20

\*\*CHAPTER START\*\*  
  
<h1>Solo Leveling - Chapter 20</h1>  
  
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<p>Chapter 20</p>  
<p>As the Hunters all prepared to leave together, Yoo Jin-Ho asked with a puzzled expression.</p>  
<p>“Is it just me and Jin-Woo hyung in the Boss Room?”</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok smiled with a sly grin and replied.</p>  
<p>“That thing hasn’t woken up even with all this noise. Do you really think something’s going to happen? I’ve got some things to discuss with the others, and I’ll smoke a cigarette while we’re at it. We’ll be back soon.”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo listened to Hwang Dong-Seok’s lengthy explanation and let out a small chuckle internally.</p>  
<p>‘Finally showing your true colors, huh? But sending everyone away? You’re really underestimating us.’</p>  
<p>They must be looking down on him because of his low rank.</p>  
<p>Just as expected, Hwang Dong-Seok began to move.</p>  
<p>It was slightly different from what Jin-Woo had anticipated, though.</p>  
<p>It had already been four years since Jin-Woo started working as a Hunter, and he had met many Hunters during that time.</p>  
<p>One of them was Mr. Oh.</p>  
<p>He was a Hunter who had given up his long freelance life and occasionally helped out with Association work.</p>  
<p>“Be wary of lizards,” Mr. Oh would often say.</p>  
<p>During Raids, there comes a moment of peril.</p>  
<p>At such times, some unscrupulous Hunters would deliberately sacrifice their comrades, either because they weren’t part of the original team or because they were weaker.</p>  
<p>All to buy time for their own safe escape.</p>  
<p>Just like a lizard shedding its tail to run away.</p>  
<p>‘Tail-cutting...’</p>  
<p>Mr. Oh called such Hunters “lizards” and their actions “tail-cutting.”</p>  
<p>According to regulations, a C-rank Gate requires a minimum of 10 members to clear.</p>  
<p>However, Hwang Dong-Seok’s team only had eight regular members.</p>  
<p>“You know how hard it is to get a Healer-type Hunter for a private Raid party. We’ve always done it this way, so don’t worry.”</p>  
<p>Despite often going in and out of C-rank Gates, they said they always did it this way.</p>  
<p>‘Of course, they didn’t need to fill those two empty slots.’</p>  
<p>They always needed tails they could cut off.</p>  
<p>They accepted anyone, whether they were E-rank Hunters or Rookie Hunters, for a reason.</p>  
<p>And now.</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok had decided to abandon Sung Jin-Woo and Yoo Jin-Ho for a slightly different reason than usual.</p>  
<p>‘This works out well for me.’</p>  
<p>Although Jin-Woo had figured out Hwang Dong-Seok’s intentions, he didn’t show it.</p>  
<p>In fact, it was exactly what he wanted.</p>  
<p>But while Jin-Woo was confident in his abilities, Yoo Jin-Ho, who was starting as a Hunter for the first time today, was in a different situation.</p>  
<p>Yoo Jin-Ho spoke in a voice tinged with anxiety.</p>  
<p>“No, but still... wouldn’t it be better if we all went together?”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo noticed one of the Hunters behind them reaching for their waist.</p>  
<p>So he placed a hand on Yoo Jin-Ho’s shoulder and said.</p>  
<p>“Go ahead. We’ll hold the fort here.”</p>  
<p>The Hunter’s hand, which was moving toward their waist, stopped.</p>  
<p>“Hyung...?”</p>  
<p>Yoo Jin-Ho looked puzzled, but Jin-Woo didn’t say anything and just shook his head slightly.</p>  
<p>Though he was a bit noisy, Jin-Woo couldn’t let him die like this.</p>  
<p>Earlier, even though it was a loss for him, Yoo Jin-Ho had insisted on carrying Jin-Woo’s contract to include it in the distribution.</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok smiled at the two of them.</p>  
<p>“The car is parked right outside, so it won’t take long. See you.”</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok and the other eight members left the Boss Room.</p>  
<p>The sound of their footsteps quickly faded away.</p>  
<p>Yoo Jin-Ho turned to Jin-Woo and demanded answers.</p>  
<p>“Hyung, why did you say that? What if that thing wakes up? What are we going to do?”</p>  
<p>He seemed genuinely terrified of the spider.</p>  
<p>‘He’s completely clueless about the situation, huh?’</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo clicked his tongue internally.</p>  
<p>Explaining everything step by step would be too much of a hassle.</p>  
<p>Instead of answering, Jin-Woo began to slowly stretch his body.</p>  
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<p>It was at that moment that Hwang Dong-Seok turned back toward the Boss Room.</p>  
<p>The Hunters following him also stopped.</p>  
<p>They had come quite a distance from the Boss Room.</p>  
<p>At this distance, no voices could be heard.</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok, with a smile on his face, motioned with his chin to Jo Gyu-Hwan, who was standing beside him.</p>  
<p>“Gyu-Hwan, block the entrance to the Boss Room.”</p>  
<p>“Should I blow it up to collapse it?”</p>  
<p>“Yeah, but don’t overdo it. We’ll need to go back in later.”</p>  
<p>Lee Cheol-Jin asked.</p>  
<p>“Hwang hyung, why are we going through all this trouble? Why don’t we just kill them there and then start?”</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok’s expression immediately darkened, and he glared at Lee Cheol-Jin.</p>  
<p>There was no need to keep up the facade now.</p>  
<p>That, at least, was a relief.</p>  
<p>“S-sorry.”</p>  
<p>Lee Cheol-Jin lowered his eyes, seemingly frightened.</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok clicked his tongue.</p>  
<p>“What if the spider wakes up while we’re fighting there? When are we supposed to mine the Mana Crystals?”</p>  
<p>“Sorry.”</p>  
<p>Jo Gyu-Hwan interjected.</p>  
<p>“Hwang hyung, since we’re talking about the spider... is it possible it might wake up while we’re mining the Mana Crystals? That could lead to a lot of damage.”</p>  
<p>That terrifying Insect-type Magic Beast, which fed on other monsters, was no small threat.</p>  
<p>If they were caught off-guard during the mining process, they could suffer significant losses.</p>  
<p>“Exactly.”</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok smirked.</p>  
<p>“That’s why we’re going to use those two as bait.”</p>  
<p>“Ah—.”</p>  
<p>Jo Gyu-Hwan nodded in understanding.</p>  
<p>There was no telling when the spider would wake up.</p>  
<p>It could be in 10 hours, an hour, or even a minute.</p>  
<p>So the plan was to wake the spider up and feed it first.</p>  
<p>The shock from collapsing the entrance would be enough to wake even the most sluggish Magic Beast.</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok continued.</p>  
<p>“We can mine the Mana Crystals once the spider is full and goes back to sleep.”</p>  
<p>The time permitted by the Association was five days.</p>  
<p>There were still four and a half days left.</p>  
<p>If the spider didn’t go back to sleep within that time, they would just kill it, mine as many Mana Crystals as they could before the Gate closed, and leave.</p>  
<p>They wouldn’t be able to mine everything in an hour, but with Sung Jin-Woo and Yoo Jin-Ho’s shares reduced, they could recover some of the losses.</p>  
<p>Wasn’t that better than working in constant fear?</p>  
<p>Safety first, after all.</p>  
<p>‘Of course, that’s the worst-case scenario...’</p>  
<p>If they were lucky, they could reduce those two’s shares, mine all the Mana Crystals, and even keep the spider for themselves.</p>  
<p>The expensive equipment Yoo Jin-Ho was carrying would just be a bonus.</p>  
<p>‘That sword and shield alone must be worth at least a few billion won.’</p>  
<p>It was a deal with no losses.</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok’s lips curled into a smile.</p>  
<p>“Block the entrance, and let’s go smoke a cigarette.”</p>  
<p>“Yes, hyung.”</p>  
<p>Jo Gyu-Hwan, with a brief but powerful gesture, gathered radiant light at his fingertips.</p>  
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<p>“...”</p>  
<p>Yoo Jin-Ho’s gaze was fixed on the spider.</p>  
<p>He was even careful with his breathing.</p>  
<p>With a frightened expression, Yoo Jin-Ho asked.</p>  
<p>“That spider... it’s not going to wake up, is it?”</p>  
<p>“Who knows.”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo was sparing with his words.</p>  
<p>He had a rough idea of what was coming next, but if he told the truth, Yoo Jin-Ho might faint on the spot.</p>  
<p>‘Now that I think about it...’</p>  
<p>That was the first thing Yoo Jin-Ho had said in the last five minutes.</p>  
<p>He seemed genuinely terrified.</p>  
<p>The guy who usually had so much to say.</p>  
<p>It was at that moment.</p>  
<p>\*BOOM—\*</p>  
<p>A loud explosion echoed, and the entrance to the Boss Room crumbled.</p>  
<p>“Wh-what? What’s going on?!”</p>  
<p>Yoo Jin-Ho quickly ran toward the entrance.</p>  
<p>But the pile of rubble had completely blocked the entrance. He pushed with all his might, but the stones didn’t budge an inch.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo also slowly walked over.</p>  
<p>“Ugh—! Hyung, help me push!”</p>  
<p>Yoo Jin-Ho was still desperately trying to move the pile of rocks.</p>  
<p>‘Was his name Jo Gyu-Hwan?’</p>  
<p>Before the explosion, Jin-Woo had seen a flash of light.</p>  
<p>A C-rank Mage who wielded light.</p>  
<p>It was definitely his doing.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo placed his hand gently on the pile of rubble.</p>  
<p>‘If I wanted to, I could get out easily.’</p>  
<p>The weight of the stones pressed against his arm.</p>  
<p>It wasn’t as heavy as he thought.</p>  
<p>With a slight push, he could feel the rock wall shaking slightly.</p>  
<p>But he had no intention of leaving.</p>  
<p>“Ah!”</p>  
<p>Yoo Jin-Ho suddenly stopped pushing and let out a shout of realization.</p>  
<p>His face turned red as he turned to Jin-Woo.</p>  
<p>“Those bastards are trying to kill us! They blocked the entrance so the spider would kill us because they didn’t want to share the Mana Crystals!”</p>  
<p>‘He figured it out pretty fast.’</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo sighed internally but played along.</p>  
<p>“Exactly. This is bad.”</p>  
<p>“Gasp!”</p>  
<p>In an instant, the color drained from Yoo Jin-Ho’s face, turning it from red to pale white.</p>  
<p>It was as if all the blood had been sucked out of him.</p>  
<p>He didn’t need to ask to know the reason.</p>  
<p>The reflection of a massive Magic Beast was visible in Yoo Jin-Ho’s pupils.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo turned around.</p>  
<p>“Gurgle, gurgle.”</p>  
<p>The spider, awakened by the shock, slowly began to rise on its eight massive legs.</p>  
<p>Its body was as large as a house.</p>  
<p>Dozens of eyes.</p>  
<p>A grotesque mouth.</p>  
<p>Long, spindly legs.</p>  
<p>Seeing it move alive was far more terrifying than when it was lying still.</p>  
<p>“Ugh...”</p>  
<p>Yoo Jin-Ho let out a groan.</p>  
<p>His entire body stiffened like a rock.</p>  
<p>Meanwhile, Jin-Woo calmly summoned ‘Kasaka’s Venom Fang’ from his inventory without taking his eyes off the spider.</p>  
<p>‘That’s mine.’</p>  
<p>This was a good opportunity to test his increased stats.</p>  
<p>‘Kasaka’s Venom Fang’ appeared in his right hand as if it had been there all along.</p>  
<p>\*Swoosh—\*</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo tightly gripped the dagger’s handle.</p>  
<p>The reason Hunters are called Hunters!</p>  
<p>The real hunt was about to begin.</p>  
<p>“W-wait, hyung!”</p>  
<p>But just as Jin-Woo was about to move toward the spider, Yoo Jin-Ho quickly grabbed his sleeve.</p>  
<p>“W-what are you planning to do?”</p>  
<p>Yoo Jin-Ho’s fingertips were trembling.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo pointed over his shoulder with his left thumb.</p>  
<p>“I’m going to kill that thing.”</p>  
<p>This was the exact reason Jin-Woo had followed Hwang Dong-Seok’s group all this time.</p>  
<p>If Hwang Dong-Seok tried to cut him off, he could take all the monsters in the dungeon for himself.</p>  
<p>It was a perfect opportunity to monopolize the Experience Points and Mana Crystals.</p>  
<p>‘If only the Boss hadn’t eaten all the other monsters...’</p>  
<p>There would have been even more to gain.</p>  
<p>That was the only regret.</p>  
<p>But Yoo Jin-Ho, unaware of Jin-Woo’s reasoning, looked at him with disbelief.</p>  
<p>‘What is this hyung even saying right now?’</p>  
<p>He had heard somewhere before.</p>  
<p>Sometimes, when people face mental shocks they can’t handle, they lose their grip on reality.</p>  
<p>An E-rank Hunter was planning to take on a C-rank dungeon Boss alone.</p>  
<p>If that wasn’t madness, what was?</p>  
<p>Yoo Jin-Ho, with a dazed expression, asked again.</p>  
<p>“You’re going to kill that thing?”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo scratched the top of his head as if he found it troublesome and shot back.</p>  
<p>“Then, do you want to kill it?”</p>  
<p>Yoo Jin-Ho didn’t have a chance to respond before Jin-Woo turned away.</p>  
<p>There was no need to hear the answer.</p>  
<p>Yoo Jin-Ho was barely standing on trembling legs.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo had never expected anything from him in the first place.</p>  
<p>It was better if he didn’t interfere.</p>  
<p>‘He’d just get in the way.’</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo slowly approached the spider.</p>  
<p>The spider, having noticed him, used its eight legs to turn in his direction.</p>  
<p>It was coming closer.</p>  
<p>The spider wasn’t in a hurry, perhaps intrigued by the unfamiliar prey. It used its long, thick legs to push against the ground, slowly closing the distance.</p>  
<p>“Huu—.”</p>  
<p>The massive body gradually filled his vision, making it hard to breathe.</p>  
<p>His heart began to beat faster.</p>  
<p>\*Thump, thump.\*</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo tried to calm his breathing and suppress his excitement.</p>  
<p>He needed to stay composed.</p>  
<p>As he did, he recalled the feeling he had when he first stood at the end of the second floor of the Hapjeong Station Dungeon.</p>  
<p>The Blue Venom Fang Kasaka.</p>  
<p>But the spider in front of him didn’t give off the same level of pressure as that time.</p>  
<p>That meant it was manageable.</p>  
<p>If he had thought the Boss was impossible to defeat, he wouldn’t have stayed here in the first place.</p>  
<p>“Gurgle, gurgle.”</p>  
<p>The spider’s glossy black eyes reflected Jin-Woo’s face as the distance between them closed.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo’s eyes narrowed.</p>  
  
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\*\*CHAPTER END\*\*