# 22docx

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\*\*CHAPTER START\*\*  
  
<h1>Solo Leveling - Chapter 22</h1>  
  
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<p>Jin-Woo, who had been thirsty, tilted his head in confusion but accepted the thermos lid.</p>  
<p>\*Gulp, gulp.\*</p>  
<p>The cool liquid slid down his throat refreshingly.</p>  
<p>“Hyung-nim, how is it?”</p>  
<p>Come to think of it, the way he addressed Jin-Woo had already changed to ‘Hyung-nim.’</p>  
<p>“Hmm—it’s refreshing.”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo shared his thoughts as he handed the lid back.</p>  
<p>“And about what you saw here…”</p>  
<p>Before Jin-Woo could even finish, Yoo Jin-Ho cut him off with a tone that said not to worry.</p>  
<p>“Of course! I’ll take it to my grave. I won’t say a word.”</p>  
<p>“Well, it doesn’t have to go that far.”</p>  
<p>“How could I not? It’s a promise with you, Hyung-nim.”</p>  
<p>“Alright, if you say so.”</p>  
<p>“Don’t worry, Hyung-nim.”</p>  
<p>Even if an E-rank Hunter had defeated a C-rank Gate’s Boss, no one would believe it anyway.</p>  
<p>Still, it was a relief that Jin-Ho promised to keep his mouth shut.</p>  
<p>‘I thought he was clueless, but he’s surprisingly sharp about these things.’</p>  
<p>“Is there anything else you’d like to say, Hyung-nim?”</p>  
<p>“…No.”</p>  
<p>Something felt off.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo observed Jin-Ho’s overly respectful attitude and came to his own conclusion.</p>  
<p>‘Well, from Jin-Ho’s perspective, I’m his lifesaver.’</p>  
<p>It’s only natural to be polite to someone who saved your life.</p>  
<p>Thinking that way, it made sense.</p>  
<p>Though the reality was slightly different.</p>  
<p>\*Kugugung—\*</p>  
<p>The Dungeon shook slightly before stopping again.</p>  
<p>This vibration was a signal that the Gate would close soon.</p>  
<p>The shaking would intensify over time, and just before the Gate closed, it would feel almost like an earthquake.</p>  
<p>“Let’s go.”</p>  
<p>“Yes, Hyung-nim.”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo started walking toward the entrance.</p>  
<p>But then, a flash of light appeared at the entrance, and a pile of rocks collapsed.</p>  
<p>\*Boom—\*</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok and his group rushed in.</p>  
<p>They looked at the spider lying behind Jin-Woo with disbelief.</p>  
<p>“What? It’s really dead?”</p>  
<p>“Did the two of you kill that?”</p>  
<p>“That spider was just big, but it wasn’t much, huh?”</p>  
<p>“A D-rank and an E-rank took it down? That says it all.”</p>  
<p>“Hyung, what do we do now?”</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok scratched his chin as he looked at Jin-Woo and Jin-Ho.</p>  
<p>Since the spider was dead, the Gate would close soon.</p>  
<p>It was too late to start mining Mana Crystals now.</p>  
<p>They hadn’t even finished preparing, and there was less than an hour left.</p>  
<p>It was time to change plans.</p>  
<p>So, he called out to Jin-Ho loudly.</p>  
<p>“Yoo Jin-Ho!”</p>  
<p>Jin-Ho flinched and took a step back.</p>  
<p>His face was filled with tension.</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok smirked.</p>  
<p>“I did a little search on your equipment, and it turns out you’re the son of a very important person, huh? Yoo Myung-Han, the Chairman of Yoojin Construction.”</p>  
<p>“S-so what?”</p>  
<p>“We’ll give you a chance. We have something to discuss with your father. But if word gets out about what happened here, it’ll be troublesome for us. So, if you want to live, you’ll have to become an accomplice.”</p>  
<p>“An accomplice?”</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok pointed at Jin-Woo with his chin.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo’s brow twitched momentarily under that unpleasant gaze.</p>  
<p>“Kill Sung Jin-Woo.”</p>  
<p>“What?”</p>  
<p>Jin-Ho was shocked.</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok laughed, amused by his expression.</p>  
<p>Originally, he had planned to kill Jin-Ho along with Jin-Woo.</p>  
<p>But after searching on his phone outside, he found out that Jin-Ho’s father was the owner of one of the country’s top construction companies.</p>  
<p>That’s when a devious idea popped into his head.</p>  
<p>What if he filmed Jin-Ho killing Jin-Woo and used it as leverage to extort money from Yoo Myung-Han?</p>  
<p>‘Yoo Myung-Han’s known assets are around 10 trillion won.’</p>  
<p>He might be able to make several times the money he would’ve earned from mining Mana Crystals.</p>  
<p>“That’s the only way you’ll live. Kill Sung Jin-Woo with your own hands, and I’ll let you live. Otherwise, both of you will die by our hands.”</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok’s eyes turned menacing.</p>  
<p>“What are you hesitating for? No one will know what happened in this Dungeon. Are you really going to let a D-rank push you around?”</p>  
<p>Jin-Ho glanced to the side.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo shrugged his shoulders as if to say, ‘Do as you please.’</p>  
<p>Jin-Ho pulled out the knife at his side with a determined expression.</p>  
<p>‘He’s finally made up his mind, huh?’</p>  
<p>A smile spread across Hwang Dong-Seok’s face.</p>  
<p>But the result was different from what he expected.</p>  
<p>Jin-Ho stood next to Jin-Woo, holding his sword.</p>  
<p>“Oh? You’re siding with him and planning to fight us?”</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok muttered to himself.</p>  
<p>This rich kid must’ve gotten cocky after luckily taking down a C-rank Boss.</p>  
<p>Jo Gyu-Hwan whispered from the side.</p>  
<p>“Hyung, what should we do?”</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok spoke softly so Jin-Woo and Jin-Ho couldn’t hear.</p>  
<p>“Let’s deal with Sung Jin-Woo first. We’ll keep the money source alive. We’ve already suffered too much today.”</p>  
<p>“Alright, then.”</p>  
<p>A bright light appeared in Jo Gyu-Hwan’s hands.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo’s eyes narrowed.</p>  
<p>‘So, they’re really going for it.’</p>  
<p>This was his first time fighting other Hunters.</p>  
<p>But he had no intention of showing mercy to those who had repeatedly threatened his life.</p>  
<p>But then—</p>  
<p>\*Ding.\*</p>  
<p>A mechanical sound rang out.</p>  
<p>[An Emergency Quest has occurred.]</p>  
<p>‘Emergency Quest?’</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo looked up.</p>  
<p>Without even saying anything, the quest window automatically opened before his eyes.</p>  
<p>This was a first.</p>  
<p>[Emergency Quest: Defeat the Enemies!]</p>  
<p>There are those around you who harbor killing intent toward the ‘Player.’ Defeat them all to ensure your safety. Failure to comply will result in a corresponding penalty.</p>  
<p>Number of Enemies to Defeat: 8</p>  
<p>Number of Enemies Defeated: 0</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo’s eyes widened.</p>  
<p>‘The quest completion condition is the death of Hwang Dong-Seok and his entire group?’</p>  
<p>Suddenly, a flash of light appeared before his eyes.</p>  
<p>A light arrow shot from Jo Gyu-Hwan’s hand struck Jin-Woo.</p>  
<p>\*Boom—\*</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo was thrown back at an incredible speed, slamming into the wall.</p>  
<p>\*Crash!\*</p>  
<p>Part of the wall collapsed, burying Jin-Woo.</p>  
<p>\*Rumble.\*</p>  
<p>“Hyung-nim!”</p>  
<p>Jin-Ho rushed toward Jin-Woo, but Hwang Dong-Seok stopped him first.</p>  
<p>“Yoo Jin-Ho!”</p>  
<p>Jin-Ho froze in shock.</p>  
<p>“Don’t worry about the dead guy. Come here.”</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok clicked his tongue.</p>  
<p>Jin-Ho looked back at where Jin-Woo was.</p>  
<p>As Hwang Dong-Seok had said, Jin-Woo was buried under the rocks, unmoving.</p>  
<p>“You… you murderers…”</p>  
<p>Tears welled up in Jin-Ho’s eyes.</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok and his brothers laughed at the blatant accusation.</p>  
<p>Because it was true.</p>  
<p>How many lives had they taken in Dungeons so far?</p>  
<p>As they laughed at Jin-Ho, Jin-Woo, buried under the rubble, was in disbelief.</p>  
<p>The quest details visible through the cracks were changing.</p>  
<p>[Emergency Quest: Defeat the Enemies!]</p>  
<p>Those who harbor killing intent toward ‘&amp;\*@##’ are around you. Defeat them all to ensure your safety. Failure to comply will result in #$% ^%@$ #$%#^!&amp;\*#$%^$.</p>  
<p>Number of Enemies to Defeat: 8</p>  
<p>Number of Enemies Defeated: 0</p>  
<p>A few words were garbled before the text smoothly transformed.</p>  
<p>[Emergency Quest: Defeat the Enemies!]</p>  
<p>Those who harbor killing intent toward you are around you. Defeat them all to ensure your safety. Failure to comply will result in your heart stopping.</p>  
<p>Number of Enemies to Defeat: 8</p>  
<p>Number of Enemies Defeated: 0</p>  
<p>It was a clear threat.</p>  
<p>‘Kill or be killed.’</p>  
<p>The content was shocking, but Jin-Woo’s confusion didn’t last long.</p>  
<p>His confusion quickly turned into relief.</p>  
<p>As hard as it was to believe, it was true.</p>  
<p>The worry that had lingered in his mind ever since the quests started and his stats became visible.</p>  
<p>-What if this phenomenon suddenly ends?</p>  
<p>If all of this was just a coincidence, couldn’t it end abruptly at any moment?</p>  
<p>That anxiety had always followed him.</p>  
<p>But this Emergency Quest made it clear.</p>  
<p>This was neither a coincidence nor a favor.</p>  
<p>If it were a favor, the quest would’ve just told him to escape the danger, not threaten to take his life as a penalty.</p>  
<p>The System had a purpose.</p>  
<p>Not ‘to make Sung Jin-Woo stronger,’ but ‘a strong Sung Jin-Woo is needed.’</p>  
<p>‘Even if it means killing fellow Hunters without hesitation…’</p>  
<p>That intention was evident in the quest.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo felt relieved again.</p>  
<p>‘Thank goodness.’</p>  
<p>Because it wasn’t a coincidence.</p>  
<p>Because the purpose was clear.</p>  
<p>He had always wanted to grow stronger whenever he faced danger.</p>  
<p>He had always wanted to escape the precarious life that felt like hanging on the edge of a cliff.</p>  
<p>And on that day, during the most dangerous moment, an opportunity had come.</p>  
<p>The System’s purpose aligned perfectly with Jin-Woo’s desire.</p>  
<p>‘The System uses me, and I use the System.’</p>  
<p>That’s all that mattered.</p>  
<p>As long as there was a purpose, this phenomenon wouldn’t suddenly disappear.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo stood up from the pile of rocks.</p>  
<p>[Health: 1360 / 2600]</p>  
<p>It was indeed a C-rank Hunter’s magic.</p>  
<p>Just one hit had reduced his health by half.</p>  
<p>There was no room for complacency now.</p>  
<p>A sharp glint appeared in Jin-Woo’s eyes.</p>  
<p>He took a step toward Hwang Dong-Seok.</p>  
<p>“Huh?”</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok’s group, who had surrounded the terrified Jin-Ho, noticed Jin-Woo approaching belatedly.</p>  
<p>“What? He’s alive?”</p>  
<p>“Even Gyu-Hwan’s attack didn’t finish him?”</p>  
<p>“What a disgrace, losing to an E-rank.”</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok scratched his chin again.</p>  
<p>“Gyu-Hwan, what’s going on? You didn’t do it properly, did you?”</p>  
<p>Jo Gyu-Hwan’s face turned red.</p>  
<p>“T-that’s not it.”</p>  
<p>But it was.</p>  
<p>He had definitely used his full power in that spell.</p>  
<p>He had poured a third of his mana into it. How did he get up? Did it miss? No, if it had missed, it wouldn’t have made such a loud noise.</p>  
<p>Many questions arose, but there was no time to ask them.</p>  
<p>Because Jin-Woo spoke first.</p>  
<p>“You’ve been playing with people’s lives.”</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok’s group focused their attention on Jin-Woo.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo stopped walking in front of them.</p>  
<p>Jin-Ho was startled, but the other Hunters’ reactions were minimal.</p>  
<p>Some even sneered.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo continued in a dry voice.</p>  
<p>“You’re prepared for the consequences, right?”</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok scoffed at that.</p>  
<p>“What’s this guy talking about?”</p>  
<p>“Hyung, I’ll handle it.”</p>  
<p>A narrow-eyed Hunter approached and slung his arm around Jin-Woo’s neck.</p>  
<p>“You don’t seem to understand the situation, buddy.”</p>  
<p>The narrow-eyed Hunter’s expression gradually changed as he tried to apply force.</p>  
<p>‘…What’s going on? Why isn’t he budging?’</p>  
<p>He was trying to put Jin-Woo in a headlock, but no matter how much force he applied, Jin-Woo’s upper body wouldn’t bend.</p>  
<p>Wasn’t this guy supposed to be an E-rank?</p>  
<p>Cold sweat formed on the narrow-eyed Hunter’s forehead.</p>  
<p>‘What kind of strength is this…’</p>  
<p>Then—</p>  
<p>\*Slice.\*</p>  
<p>The narrow-eyed Hunter’s head fell to the ground.</p>  
<p>\*Thud.\*</p>  
<p>“J-Jun-Tae!”</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok’s pupils trembled.</p>  
<p>“W-what?!”</p>  
<p>“When did that bastard pull out a knife?!”</p>  
<p>“Where did it come from?!”</p>  
<p>Hwang Dong-Seok’s group quickly drew their weapons and took a few steps back. In Jin-Woo’s hand was ‘Kasaka’s Venom Fang,’ which had been summoned at some point.</p>  
<p>Blood dripped from the tip of the dagger.</p>  
<p>\*Ding.\*</p>  
<p>[Number of Enemies to Defeat: 7]</p>  
<p>[Number of Enemies Defeated: 1]</p>  
<p>‘Seven left.’</p>  
  
\*\*CHAPTER END\*\*