# 3docx

3docx

3

\*\*CHAPTER START\*\*  
  
<h1>Solo Leveling - Episode 3</h1>  
  
---  
  
<p>Episode 3</p>  
<p>Joo-Hee’s complexion was so pale that even Jin-Woo was startled.</p>  
<p>“What’s wrong? Are you sick?”</p>  
<p>“Th-there…”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo’s gaze followed the direction of Joo-Hee’s trembling finger.</p>  
<p>A massive Divine Statue.</p>  
<p>Joo-Hee was pointing at its face.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo tilted his head in confusion, as the statue looked exactly the same as when he first saw it.</p>  
<p>“...?”</p>  
<p>Joo-Hee stammered.</p>  
<p>“Th-the pupils... the statue’s pupils just moved toward us.”</p>  
<p>“Huh?”</p>  
<p>No matter how many times he looked, the statue remained the same.</p>  
<p>“Ah... it must’ve been your imagination.”</p>  
<p>But Joo-Hee seemed to no longer hear Jin-Woo’s words. With her head bowed, she clung to his arm, trembling uncontrollably.</p>  
<p>‘Wait.’</p>  
<p>Suddenly, Jin-Woo also sensed an ominous aura.</p>  
<p>The surroundings were unnervingly quiet.</p>  
<p>‘The sound...?’</p>  
<p>The crackling sound of the torches, which had been burning brightly, had vanished without a trace.</p>  
<p>“First.”</p>  
<p>Amidst the eerie silence, Mr. Song’s voice echoed as he read from the Stone Tablet.</p>  
<p>“Worship the God. Second, praise the God. Third, prove your faith. Those who fail to follow these commandments shall not return alive.”</p>  
<p>It was then.</p>  
<p>\*Boom!\*</p>  
<p>A sudden noise erupted, startling everyone.</p>  
<p>“Wh-what was that?”</p>  
<p>“What’s that sound all of a sudden?”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo was the first to notice the abnormality.</p>  
<p>With his heightened senses, he quickly identified the source of the noise.</p>  
<p>“The door! The door’s closed!”</p>  
<p>At Jin-Woo’s shout, everyone looked toward the door.</p>  
<p>The door that had been left open was now firmly shut.</p>  
<p>“Damn it! I can’t take this anymore!”</p>  
<p>The man who had opposed entering the Double Dungeon from the start cursed and stomped toward the door.</p>  
<p>“I’m going back. You all can deal with the boss and the treasure yourselves.”</p>  
<p>He shot Mr. Song a defiant glare, then grabbed the door handle with a forceful yank.</p>  
<p>At that moment.</p>  
<p>Mr. Song’s eyes widened.</p>  
<p>“No!”</p>  
<p>\*Crunch!\*</p>  
<p>The man’s head disappeared above his neck.</p>  
<p>His headless body collapsed backward lifelessly.</p>  
<p>\*Thud!\*</p>  
<p>“Aaaah!”</p>  
<p>“Wh-what the hell!”</p>  
<p>The Hunters screamed in horror.</p>  
<p>The statue, which had crushed the man’s head with a mace, stood back in its original position beside the door, drenched in blood as if nothing had happened.</p>  
<p>“It... it moved!”</p>  
<p>“What? Does that mean all the statues here can move?”</p>  
<p>“Are we supposed to fight these things?”</p>  
<p>“I couldn’t even see the mace swinging!”</p>  
<p>But Jin-Woo knew.</p>  
<p>This tragedy wasn’t over.</p>  
<p>Joo-Hee had just said it earlier.</p>  
<p>“Th-the pupils... the statue’s pupils just moved toward us.”</p>  
<p>‘If that’s really true...’</p>  
<p>A chill ran down his spine.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo forced his stiff neck to turn and look behind him.</p>  
<p>“Ah...”</p>  
<p>The Divine Statue was staring down at him.</p>  
<p>3. The Attack Begins</p>  
<p>At that moment, the statue’s massive eyes turned red.</p>  
<p>A Hunter’s intuition?</p>  
<p>No, it was a primal instinct warning him of danger.</p>  
<p>Something was coming.</p>  
<p>Something he couldn’t handle!</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo turned to the other Hunters and shouted at the top of his lungs.</p>  
<p>“Duck!”</p>  
<p>Almost simultaneously, red beams of light shot out from the statue’s eyes.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo threw himself over Joo-Hee, shielding her.</p>  
<p>\*Zzzzzzz!\*</p>  
<p>The beams grazed past where Jin-Woo had been standing.</p>  
<p>One-tenth of a second.</p>  
<p>No, one-hundredth of a second.</p>  
<p>It was a hair’s breadth escape.</p>  
<p>But not all the Hunters were as fortunate as Jin-Woo.</p>  
<p>“Aaaah!”</p>  
<p>“Aaaah!”</p>  
<p>The Hunters hit by the beams vanished instantly.</p>  
<p>All that remained were their charred remnants where the beams had passed.</p>  
<p>The screams didn’t come from them but from the other Hunters who witnessed their gruesome end.</p>  
<p>“Wh-what is this?”</p>  
<p>“Ugh...”</p>  
<p>“Why is this happening...?”</p>  
<p>The Hunters were in shock.</p>  
<p>Out of the 16, only 11 remained.</p>  
<p>Such a terrifying attack was something they had never experienced before.</p>  
<p>‘We barely survived because of that shout.’</p>  
<p>‘If Mr. Sung hadn’t yelled just now...’</p>  
<p>The Hunters swallowed hard as they looked at Jin-Woo.</p>  
<p>He had been their savior.</p>  
<p>If it weren’t for Jin-Woo, they would have been doomed.</p>  
<p>“...”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo glared at the Divine Statue while lying flat on the ground.</p>  
<p>The statue’s eyes still glowed red, but no further attacks came.</p>  
<p>‘Is the attack... over?’</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo looked down.</p>  
<p>Joo-Hee trembled in his arms, paralyzed with fear.</p>  
<p>Despite being a B-rank Hunter, she worked for the Hunter Association instead of a major guild, only participating in simple raids because of this very fear.</p>  
<p>Her breathing grew heavier.</p>  
<p>He couldn’t leave her like this.</p>  
<p>As Jin-Woo tried to get up to help her, someone grabbed his shoulder and forcefully pushed him back down.</p>  
<p>“Don’t get up.”</p>  
<p>It was Mr. Song, who had approached silently.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo, though startled, obediently followed his words. Mr. Song shouted to the other Hunters.</p>  
<p>“Don’t move! Stay exactly where you are!”</p>  
<p>Mr. Song glanced around before turning back to Jin-Woo.</p>  
<p>“Only those who moved were attacked. Those who ducked survived.”</p>  
<p>“I see.”</p>  
<p>Mr. Song tilted his head.</p>  
<p>“You knew and shouted?”</p>  
<p>“I just felt something dangerous...”</p>  
<p>A glint appeared in Mr. Song’s eyes.</p>  
<p>‘This kid has good instincts. Was he really E-rank? If only his stats were a bit higher...’</p>  
<p>While Mr. Song looked at Jin-Woo with a mix of regret and admiration, Jin-Woo also had the chance to observe Mr. Song’s condition.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo’s eyes widened as he noticed something.</p>  
<p>“Ah, sir... your arm?”</p>  
<p>“It’s fine. I can handle it.”</p>  
<p>“But still...”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo swallowed hard.</p>  
<p>The arm that Mr. Song was using to push Jin-Woo down was intact, but his other arm—his left arm—was missing.</p>  
<p>“...”</p>  
<p>Without a word, Mr. Song tore off a piece of his shirt and wrapped it tightly around the stump of his left arm, hiding the severe pain behind a stoic expression.</p>  
<p>“Can you tie the end for me? It’s hard with one hand.”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo nodded.</p>  
<p>After a quick bandage job, Mr. Song let out a long sigh instead of a scream or groan.</p>  
<p>It was the sigh of a man with a decade of Hunter experience.</p>  
<p>“\*Sigh\*.”</p>  
<p>Once the first aid was done, Mr. Song scanned the surroundings with sharp eyes.</p>  
<p>Though the statue had stopped attacking, the situation hadn’t improved.</p>  
<p>Time slowly passed.</p>  
<p>“\*Sob\*... Why are we going through this...?”</p>  
<p>Some Hunters began to cry.</p>  
<p>“We can’t stay like this forever!”</p>  
<p>The Hunters’ patience was wearing thin.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo felt the same.</p>  
<p>‘We can’t stay like this forever.’</p>  
<p>But what could they do?</p>  
<p>If Mr. Song’s guess was right, moving would provoke an attack.</p>  
<p>Even if they managed to escape to the door, the Gatekeeper statues stood on either side.</p>  
<p>They were the problem.</p>  
<p>The Gatekeeper’s movements earlier had been so fast they were practically invisible.</p>  
<p>Could they open the door and escape before the statues attacked?</p>  
<p>It seemed impossible.</p>  
<p>In other words, the Hunters’ annihilation was only a matter of time.</p>  
<p>‘Wait... a matter of time?’</p>  
<p>As the thought crossed his mind, a strong sense of unease washed over him.</p>  
<p>Something that shouldn’t happen had occurred.</p>  
<p>But no one had noticed yet.</p>  
<p>‘There’s something... something I’m missing.’</p>  
<p>The answer likely lay within that.</p>  
<p>It was then.</p>  
<p>“Don’t move!”</p>  
<p>Mr. Song shouted at Mr. Joo, who was far away.</p>  
<p>But Mr. Joo bared his teeth in defiance.</p>  
<p>“Shut up! Who knows when that thing will attack again? I’m not staying here waiting for death!”</p>  
<p>Mr. Joo was a combat-type Hunter.</p>  
<p>Combat-types excelled in physical abilities, far surpassing ordinary humans.</p>  
<p>Moreover, Mr. Joo was on the verge of signing a contract with a major guild, his skills highly recognized.</p>  
<p>“I won’t die like this.”</p>  
<p>Mr. Joo crouched low, power gathering in his legs.</p>  
<p>His target: the door.</p>  
<p>His leg muscles bulged with tension.</p>  
<p>“This is bad...”</p>  
<p>Mr. Song muttered under his breath.</p>  
<p>In an instant, Mr. Joo sprang forward.</p>  
<p>\*Tap tap tap!\*</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo turned his gaze toward the Divine Statue.</p>  
<p>As expected, the statue’s pupils were now fixed on Mr. Joo.</p>  
<p>Soon, a sinister beam of light shot from its eyes.</p>  
<p>\*Zzzzzz!\*</p>  
<p>The beam struck Mr. Joo’s back.</p>  
<p>“Aaaah!”</p>  
<p>A female Hunter screamed hysterically.</p>  
<p>She had fainted, a puddle of yellow liquid spreading beneath her.</p>  
<p>The male Hunters’ faces turned pale.</p>  
<p>“Oh my god...”</p>  
<p>Where the beam had passed, Mr. Joo was gone.</p>  
<p>Only his severed ankles remained.</p>  
<p>A man with a weak stomach vomited violently.</p>  
<p>“\*Puke\*... \*Gag\*!”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo also furrowed his brow.</p>  
<p>These statues could wipe out the Hunters at any moment if they wished.</p>  
<p>It seemed as easy as stepping on an ant.</p>  
<p>‘But why... don’t they?’</p>  
<p>They could kill but chose not to.</p>  
<p>Unlike the Magic Beasts that attacked Hunters on sight, these statues followed a certain pattern.</p>  
<p>They only moved when specific conditions were met.</p>  
<p>The Gatekeeper attacked those who approached the door. The Divine Statue’s eyes shot beams when someone moved.</p>  
<p>It was like a game with rules.</p>  
<p>‘Could there be... rules in this room?’</p>  
<p>Suddenly, a puzzle piece clicked into place in Jin-Woo’s mind.</p>  
<p>He remembered the words Mr. Song had read from the Stone Tablet.</p>  
<p>‘The Commandments of Karthenon Temple.’</p>  
<p>Rules were commandments.</p>  
<p>If there was any way to survive their grasp, the warning on that tablet was the only key.</p>  
<p>“...Bow to the divine.”</p>  
<p>That was the first commandment.</p>  
<p>“Huh? What did you just say?”</p>  
<p>Mr. Song turned to Jin-Woo.</p>  
<p>Instead of answering, Jin-Woo pressed a finger to his lips.</p>  
<p>A gesture asking for time to think.</p>  
<p>‘If I’m right...’</p>  
<p>Slowly, Jin-Woo began to rise.</p>  
<p>Mr. Song quickly tried to stop him, but Jin-Woo shook his head with a resolute expression.</p>  
<p>‘...He doesn’t look like he’s given up.’</p>  
<p>Mr. Song nodded.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo stood up cautiously, keeping his eyes locked on the Divine Statue.</p>  
<p>Immediately, the statue’s pupils turned toward him.</p>  
<p>\*Zzzzzz!\*</p>  
<p>A beam shot out.</p>  
<p>If he had been a split-second slower, it wouldn’t have been a few strands of hair but his entire face that vanished!</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo lay flat on the ground, breathing heavily.</p>  
<p>“\*Pant\*... \*pant\*... \*pant\*...”</p>  
<p>He had nearly died.</p>  
<p>The moment he met the statue’s gaze, he thought he was done for.</p>  
<p>He had barely dodged it, but his legs were still trembling.</p>  
<p>‘Still...’</p>  
<p>He had gained something.</p>  
<p>‘It doesn’t attack just because something moves.’</p>  
<p>As long as he stayed crouched, the pupils wouldn’t move no matter how much he changed his posture.</p>  
<p>But the moment he tried to stand up, the beams would start shooting without fail.</p>  
<p>‘It attacks when something reaches a certain height.’</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo had just risked his life to confirm it.</p>  
<p>And now he was certain.</p>  
<p>He understood the meaning of the first commandment!</p>  
  
\*\*CHAPTER END\*\*