# 43

\*\*CHAPTER START\*\*  
  
<h1>Solo Leveling - Chapter 43</h1>  
  
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<p>Chapter 43</p>  
  
<p>From Level 27 to 39, he had risen a whopping 12 levels.</p>  
  
<p>It was the first time since he entered his first Instant Dungeon at Level 1 and came out at Level 17 that his level had skyrocketed like this.</p>  
  
<p>Back then, his level was still low.</p>  
  
<p>But now, that wasn’t the case.</p>  
  
<p>It meant he had cleared a lot of dungeons at an incredible speed.</p>  
  
<p>‘It’s been four days since I started raiding with Yoo Jin-Ho, and we’ve already cleared nine dungeons...’</p>  
  
<p>And those were nine C-rank Dungeons.</p>  
  
<p>C-rank Dungeons, the highest difficulty level that an individual could clear.</p>  
  
<p>It was truly insane speed.</p>  
  
<p>For other Hunters who needed C-rank Dungeons, it was nothing short of a disaster.</p>  
  
<p>Yoo Jin-Ho, who had been watching closely, was amazed at the increasing speed of their dungeon clears.</p>  
  
<p>As his level rose, clearing dungeons became easier.</p>  
  
<p>Nine dungeons, 12 levels gained.</p>  
  
<p>That meant he gained more than one level per dungeon.</p>  
  
<p>There were still 10 raids left.</p>  
  
<p>If he completed all 19 raids he had initially promised Yoo Jin-Ho, he would easily surpass Level 45.</p>  
  
<p>He had defeated a B-rank Hunter when he was in the mid-20s.</p>  
  
<p>Now, it was hard to even gauge how much power he had gained.</p>  
  
<p>‘My heart is racing.’</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo placed his hand near his chest.</p>  
  
<p>He could feel his heart pounding fiercely.</p>  
  
<p>Thump, thump.</p>  
  
<p>Growing stronger day by day was truly a thrilling feeling.</p>  
  
<p>It was something he could never have imagined before.</p>  
  
<p>Entering Gates, clearing dungeons—it was all so exhilarating.</p>  
  
<p>‘Because I can feel myself getting stronger with every moment.’</p>  
  
<p>Every time his level rose.</p>  
  
<p>Every time his stats changed.</p>  
  
<p>He could immediately feel the difference in himself as he hunted Magic Beasts.</p>  
  
<p>‘Hunting...’</p>  
  
<p>Now, he truly felt like a Hunter.</p>  
  
<p>The word “hunting” no longer felt awkward.</p>  
  
<p>They say that for a Hunter, as important as the act of hunting is finding the next hunting ground.</p>  
  
<p>His next destination was already decided.</p>  
  
<p>‘...The Demon Castle Dungeon.’</p>  
  
<p>Was it when he was Level 21?</p>  
  
<p>He had grown nearly 20 levels since he first set foot in the Demon Castle.</p>  
  
<p>He thought that should be enough.</p>  
  
<p>But even now, when he thought about the Gatekeeper Dog Cerberus he had encountered back then, he hesitated to step forward.</p>  
  
<p>‘What if I open the gate and a horde of monsters I can’t handle comes rushing out...’</p>  
  
<p>It sent shivers down his spine.</p>  
  
<p>If he could escape using his Stealth Skill, that would be a blessing, but he couldn’t rule out the possibility that it might not work.</p>  
  
<p>As a Hunter, even if you succeed ten times, one failure could cost you your life.</p>  
  
<p>So, he needed certainty.</p>  
  
<p>The certainty that he could handle even a group of Cerberus-like monsters.</p>  
  
<p>‘Cerberus’ name was red.’</p>  
  
<p>The difficulty of monsters was indicated by the color of their names.</p>  
  
<p>So far, he hadn’t seen any monsters with red names outside of the Demon Castle.</p>  
  
<p>When he entered Instant Dungeons using keys dropped from Random Boxes, most of the monsters that appeared were low-level.</p>  
  
<p>Even the Instant Dungeon at the Mirai Department Store he visited today was like that.</p>  
  
<p>But why?</p>  
  
<p>‘What is it?’</p>  
  
<p>When he thought about how he hadn’t seen any red-named monsters outside of the Demon Castle, he felt a strange unease.</p>  
  
<p>It felt like he was forgetting something.</p>  
  
<p>‘Have I ever encountered a red-named monster outside of the Demon Castle?’</p>  
  
<p>No way.</p>  
  
<p>If he had fought a red-named monster before he faced Cerberus at Level 21, he would have been on the brink of death...</p>  
  
<p>“Ah!”</p>  
  
<p>The sound escaped his lips naturally.</p>  
  
<p>Yes, there was.</p>  
  
<p>A moment when he had encountered a red-named monster and nearly died.</p>  
  
<p>‘The Penalty Quest!’</p>  
  
<p>The centipedes he saw in the desert back then had red names.</p>  
  
<p>[Venom-Fanged Giant Sand Centipede]</p>  
  
<p>Some time had passed, and since he had encountered them unintentionally, the memory of them as monsters had faded in his mind.</p>  
  
<p>That’s why he hadn’t remembered them easily.</p>  
  
<p>‘If I can easily take down those centipedes!’</p>  
  
<p>Then he could confidently tackle the Demon Castle.</p>  
  
<p>Since there wasn’t just one centipede, he could also gauge how well he could handle multiple enemies.</p>  
  
<p>The problem was how to get back there...</p>  
  
<p>‘Do I have to skip the Daily Quest?’</p>  
  
<p>Whether he did the Penalty Quest or the Daily Quest, the stat points he received as a reward were the same.</p>  
  
<p>So, there was no loss.</p>  
  
<p>‘Tomorrow, I’ll head to the Penalty Zone.’</p>  
  
<p>To receive the Penalty Quest, he would have to intentionally skip the Daily Quest.</p>  
  
<p>It was funny when he thought about how he had nearly died to those centipedes the first time.</p>  
  
<p>“Do they even drop experience or items?”</p>  
  
<p>A smile naturally formed on his face.</p>  
  
<p>At that moment.</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo’s senses picked up on the presence of someone approaching from the elevator at the end of the hallway.</p>  
  
<p>The light footsteps of a woman.</p>  
  
<p>It wasn’t unfamiliar.</p>  
  
<p>‘It’s Jin-Ah.’</p>  
  
<p>It was 11 PM.</p>  
  
<p>It was time for his sister to come home.</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo stood up from his seat before Jin-Ah could start rummaging through her pockets for her keys.</p>  
  
<p>Clunk.</p>  
  
<p>“Oh~”</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Ah playfully exclaimed.</p>  
  
<p>The girl who used to get startled every time the door suddenly opened now didn’t even flinch.</p>  
  
<p>Humans truly are adaptable creatures.</p>  
  
<p>“I’m home.”</p>  
  
<p>“Welcome back.”</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Ah greeted him cheerfully and hurried into her room.</p>  
  
<p>As she locked the door and turned around.</p>  
  
<p>“Oppa.”</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Ah peeked her head out from the slightly opened door.</p>  
  
<p>“Do you have any free time this week?”</p>  
  
<p>“Why?”</p>  
  
<p>“My teacher said we need to have a parent-teacher meeting. If you can’t, it’s fine.”</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Ah’s face looked anxious, as if it was some kind of special request from her homeroom teacher.</p>  
  
<p>‘A parent-teacher meeting...’</p>  
  
<p>Since Jin-Ah was in her third year of high school, school must have been busy for her too.</p>  
  
<p>He wanted to make an excuse about not having time, but unfortunately, there was a day when his schedule was free.</p>  
  
<p>‘Anyway, Yoo Jin-Ho, you’re not being helpful.’</p>  
  
<p>After some thought, Jin-Woo answered.</p>  
  
<p>“Thursday.”</p>  
  
<p>“Really? Thanks, Oppa!”</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Ah’s expression brightened instantly.</p>  
  
<p>It looked like she was about to run over and hug him, so Jin-Woo quickly waved his hand to stop her.</p>  
  
<p>“Tch.”</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Ah pouted and closed the door.</p>  
  
<p>A sigh soon escaped Jin-Woo’s lips.</p>  
  
<p>“Haa...”</p>  
  
<p>With non-stop raids, a trip to the Penalty Zone, and now a parent-teacher meeting, it looked like it was going to be a busy week.</p>  
  
<p>8. Job Change Quest</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo left the house early in the morning.</p>  
  
<p>Today’s schedule was packed.</p>  
  
<p>Yoo Jin-Ho had reserved four Gates for them.</p>  
  
<p>It seemed like he was planning to make up for the day off by clearing extra dungeons.</p>  
  
<p>‘Well, considering our recent clearing speed...’</p>  
  
<p>They could easily handle four or five dungeons in a day.</p>  
  
<p>It was just rare for that many C-rank Gates to appear in close proximity at the same time.</p>  
  
<p>So, today was a lucky day.</p>  
  
<p>With light steps, he arrived at the apartment entrance.</p>  
  
<p>But Yoo Jin-Ho’s Bongo, which was always waiting at the entrance, was nowhere to be seen.</p>  
  
<p>On top of that, he sensed something suspicious.</p>  
  
<p>“Tsk.”</p>  
  
<p>If it weren’t for what happened yesterday, he might have overlooked it, but today was different.</p>  
  
<p>‘I clearly warned them...’</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo immediately turned the corner and found a man in a suit hiding there.</p>  
  
<p>The man, who was checking his watch, didn’t seem to notice Jin-Woo’s approach yet.</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo called out to the man from right in front of him.</p>  
  
<p>“Hey.”</p>  
  
<p>The man jumped in surprise.</p>  
  
<p>“S-Sung Jin-Woo Hunter!”</p>  
  
<p>He looked as if he had seen a ghost.</p>  
  
<p>‘Well, I did intentionally suppress my presence and move quietly.’</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo clicked his tongue inwardly.</p>  
  
<p>“You’re from the White Tiger Guild, right?”</p>  
  
<p>“Huh? Oh, yes. I’m Hyun Gi-Chul from the Second Management Division of the White Tiger Guild.”</p>  
  
<p>It seemed this was the subordinate that Section Chief Ahn Sang-Min had brought along yesterday.</p>  
  
<p>“Nice to meet you, Hunter.”</p>  
  
<p>Hyun Gi-Chul cautiously extended his hand.</p>  
  
<p>It seemed like he wanted to shake hands, but Jin-Woo wasn’t in the mood.</p>  
  
<p>As he silently stared, Hyun Gi-Chul’s face turned red, and he withdrew his hand.</p>  
  
<p>“I already told you I have no intention of joining the guild anytime soon, right?”</p>  
  
<p>Hyun Gi-Chul quickly waved his hands.</p>  
  
<p>“Ah, that’s not why I’m here.”</p>  
  
<p>He then extended his other hand, which was holding a tumbler.</p>  
  
<p>“What’s this?”</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo asked, looking at the colorful liquid inside the semi-transparent tumbler.</p>  
  
<p>Hyun Gi-Chul puffed out his chest and said,</p>  
  
<p>“Vegetable juice. I made it myself, so you don’t have to worry about the quality!”</p>  
  
<p>“...”</p>  
  
<p>Hyun Gi-Chul’s hand remained extended.</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo had no choice but to take the tumbler and asked again,</p>  
  
<p>“So, you’ve been waiting here since dawn just to give me this?”</p>  
  
<p>“Yes, Hunter! You need to take care of your health too!”</p>  
  
<p>For a moment, Jin-Woo wondered why the White Tiger Guild was so concerned about his health.</p>  
  
<p>Hyun Gi-Chul bowed his head and then walked away with a bright smile.</p>  
  
<p>“I’ll see you again, Hunter!”</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo waved the tumbler back at Hyun Gi-Chul as he left.</p>  
  
<p>“...Interesting guy.”</p>  
  
<p>After Hyun Gi-Chul disappeared, Jin-Woo stared at the tumbler for a moment.</p>  
  
<p>He had heard stories about insurance agents winning over customers by handing out Yakult, but an employee who personally made vegetable juice was probably a first.</p>  
  
<p>‘Well, I can’t just throw it away since I’ve already received it.’</p>  
  
<p>Even if, by some chance, it was poisoned, he had a detoxification buff, so it wouldn’t be a problem.</p>  
  
<p>So, why not give it a taste?</p>  
  
<p>Slurp.</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo’s eyes widened as he tasted the juice through the straw.</p>  
  
<p>‘It’s good?’</p>  
  
<p>At that moment, a familiar voice called out from behind him.</p>  
  
<p>“Hyung-nim!”</p>  
  
<p>Turning around, he saw Yoo Jin-Ho approaching.</p>  
  
<p>With his usual bright expression, Yoo Jin-Ho gestured with his chin toward the direction Hyun Gi-Chul had disappeared.</p>  
  
<p>“Hyung-nim, who was that? He’s been standing there for a while.”</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo’s answer was simple.</p>  
  
<p>“An insurance salesman.”</p>  
  
<p>“Ah, I see.”</p>  
  
<p>Being the positive person he was, Yoo Jin-Ho accepted it easily.</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo looked around and asked,</p>  
  
<p>“Where’s your car?”</p>  
  
<p>The fact that Yoo Jin-Ho had seen Hyun Gi-Chul standing here meant he had arrived quite a while ago, but strangely, his beloved Bongo was nowhere to be seen.</p>  
  
<p>“I parked it over there, Hyung-nim.”</p>  
  
<p>“Why?”</p>  
  
<p>“There have been a few random murders around here recently, haven’t there? Since I’m not a resident here, people were getting suspicious.”</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo nodded.</p>  
  
<p>It was a case that had been frequently mentioned in the news lately.</p>  
  
<p>The victims were mostly young women.</p>  
  
<p>There had already been two cases this month alone.</p>  
  
<p>In such a situation, a black Bongo parked right at the apartment entrance would naturally make the residents uneasy.</p>  
  
<p>Glug, glug.</p>  
  
<p>The vegetable juice was almost gone.</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo shook the empty tumbler and headed toward where Yoo Jin-Ho had parked the car.</p>  
  
<p>“Let’s go.”</p>  
  
<p>“Yes, Hyung-nim!”</p>  
  
<p>\*\*\*</p>  
  
<p>This time, Lizardmen appeared in the dungeon.</p>  
  
<p>Lizardmen were, as the name suggested, humanoid lizards.</p>  
  
<p>They walked on two legs, wielded weapons, and occasionally used magic.</p>  
  
<p>Lizardman Shamans, who used magic, were fewer in number.</p>  
  
<p>But they were equally troublesome enemies.</p>  
  
<p>Two fireballs formed at the fingertips of the Lizardman Shaman.</p>  
  
<p>‘Magic?’</p>  
  
<p>As Jin-Woo tried to approach, two Lizardmen guarding the Shaman immediately raised their spears.</p>  
  
<p>Their reptilian reflexes were impressive.</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo jumped back, narrowly avoiding the spear tips.</p>  
  
<p>It seemed the fireballs were about to come flying in rapid succession.</p>  
  
<p>Whoosh—</p>  
  
<p>Whoosh—</p>  
  
<p>“Hyung-nim, be careful!”</p>  
  
<p>Yoo Jin-Ho, watching from a distance, shouted with his veins bulging.</p>  
  
<p>Boom!</p>  
  
<p>An explosion rang out, shaking the narrow cave.</p>  
  
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\*\*CHAPTER END\*\*