# 45

\*\*CHAPTER START\*\*  
  
<h1>Solo Leveling - Chapter 45</h1>  
  
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<p>Ahn Sang-Min bowed his head once again.</p>  
<p>He then quickly gave instructions to Hyun Gi-Chul.</p>  
<p>“Deputy Hyun, bring the contract and the seal.”</p>  
<p>“Yes!”</p>  
<p>The preparations were swiftly completed.</p>  
<p>As the two hurriedly left the office, Baek Yoonho quietly asked a male staff member beside him.</p>  
<p>“What’s going on? Why is Section Chief Ahn moving so actively?”</p>  
<p>The male staff member glanced at a female staff member next to him, asking for help with his eyes.</p>  
<p>However, the female staff member also shook her head.</p>  
<p>‘I don’t know.’</p>  
<p>Her eyes seemed to say that.</p>  
<p>‘Oh man...’</p>  
<p>The male staff member, feeling awkward, eventually scratched the back of his head and answered with difficulty.</p>  
<p>“Well... I’m not sure either...”</p>  
<p>He thought the Chairman would explode in anger, but to his surprise, the Chairman said nothing.</p>  
<p>‘He’s hiding something even from his subordinates, isn’t he?’</p>  
<p>Baek Yoonho rubbed his chin thoughtfully.</p>  
<p>Section Chief Ahn Sang-Min was the person who had played a significant role in the growth of the White Tiger Guild to this extent.</p>  
<p>If someone like him was striving so hard...</p>  
<p>‘Is our Section Chief Ahn about to pull off another big move?’</p>  
<p>A smile bloomed on Baek Yoonho’s face.</p>  
  
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<p>‘Why is this coffee so bitter?’</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo frowned.</p>  
<p>The espresso he had ordered, expecting something like vending machine coffee, was closer to bitter herbal medicine than coffee.</p>  
<p>And yet, why was it so expensive?</p>  
<p>‘With 6,000 won, I could buy several canned coffees...’</p>  
<p>As he pondered how many sugar sticks this bitter thing would need to taste like canned coffee,</p>  
<p>\*Ding-dang.\*</p>  
<p>The café door opened, and Ahn Sang-Min and Hyun Gi-Chul entered.</p>  
<p>“Over here.”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo raised his hand.</p>  
<p>Ahn Sang-Min and Hyun Gi-Chul, who had been looking around the café, spotted Jin-Woo and beamed with delight.</p>  
<p>They looked like Heungbu, who had just started cracking open a gourd brought by a swallow.</p>  
<p>“I didn’t expect to see you again so soon.”</p>  
<p>Ahn Sang-Min greeted him and sat across from Jin-Woo, while Hyun Gi-Chul nodded and sat beside Ahn Sang-Min.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo responded with a light nod.</p>  
<p>‘Strike while the iron is hot.’</p>  
<p>As soon as he sat down, Ahn Sang-Min immediately pulled out the contract.</p>  
<p>“Let’s discuss the terms first.”</p>  
<p>It was clear he wanted to seal the deal quickly.</p>  
<p>However, Jin-Woo refused outright.</p>  
<p>“I’m not here today for the contract.”</p>  
<p>Ahn Sang-Min’s hand, which was pulling out the contract, froze.</p>  
<p>Hyun Gi-Chul also looked puzzled.</p>  
<p>Ahn Sang-Min, frozen as if someone had pressed a pause button, asked,</p>  
<p>“Then what brings you to our White Tiger Guild...?”</p>  
<p>His disappointment was as great as his anticipation had been.</p>  
<p>A promising new recruit who had come to the guild on his own had rejected the contract as soon as he saw it.</p>  
<p>Had he changed his mind in the meantime?</p>  
<p>As the confusion grew, Jin-Woo calmly opened his mouth.</p>  
<p>“I came to help the two of you.”</p>  
<p>“Huh?”</p>  
<p>“Huh?”</p>  
<p>Ahn Sang-Min and Hyun Gi-Chul reacted similarly.</p>  
<p>The two looked at each other before turning their gaze back to Jin-Woo.</p>  
<p>In contrast to their flustered state, Jin-Woo continued calmly.</p>  
<p>“You mentioned that your raid party is having trouble training new recruits because we’ve been clearing out all the C-rank Gates.”</p>  
<p>“Yes. It’s hard to reserve C-rank Gates, and we can’t take new recruit Hunters to high-rank dungeons.”</p>  
<p>“That’s why I’m here.”</p>  
<p>Ahn Sang-Min tilted his head in confusion.</p>  
<p>“I don’t follow...”</p>  
<p>Thinking it was about time, Jin-Woo finally got to the point.</p>  
<p>“We want to sell three C-rank Gate conquest permits to the White Tiger Guild.”</p>  
<p>“Ah—”</p>  
<p>Hyun Gi-Chul let out a short gasp.</p>  
<p>Now the two from the White Tiger Guild understood Jin-Woo’s intention.</p>  
<p>Ahn Sang-Min put the contract back and expressed his doubt.</p>  
<p>“If you want to help us, wouldn’t it be better not to reserve them in the first place?”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo shook his head.</p>  
<p>“We’ll need C-rank dungeons steadily for a while, so we can’t do that.”</p>  
<p>“Then why today...?”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo smiled faintly.</p>  
<p>“Naturally, to help the two of you who are in a tough spot.”</p>  
<p>Should they take this at face value?</p>  
<p>Just as Ahn Sang-Min’s mental calculator was about to start spinning, Jin-Woo continued his explanation.</p>  
<p>“Of course, this is a special offer for today only. We can’t keep postponing our work indefinitely. If you miss this opportunity, it’ll be hard to reserve C-rank Gates for a while.”</p>  
<p>His attitude was like that of a home shopping host warning that supplies were running out.</p>  
<p>‘Hmm...’</p>  
<p>Ahn Sang-Min fell into deep thought.</p>  
<p>Gates didn’t just appear in the metropolitan area.</p>  
<p>If things didn’t work out, they could always go to the provinces to train new recruits.</p>  
<p>However, doing so would likely provoke dissatisfaction among the local guilds and raid parties.</p>  
<p>And that wasn’t all.</p>  
<p>It would also give the large guilds from other regions, like the Fame Guild in Honam or the Knight Guild in Yeongnam, a reason to look down on them.</p>  
<p>They could be labeled as a clueless guild that couldn’t even train new recruits in their own territory.</p>  
<p>‘Hmm... Can’t really call it a bad reputation, can I?’</p>  
<p>It was a clear fact, after all.</p>  
<p>What new recruit would want to join a guild that was laughed at by other prestigious guilds?</p>  
<p>This was why a guild’s image was so important.</p>  
<p>“Alright.”</p>  
<p>After a long deliberation, Ahn Sang-Min came to a reasonable conclusion.</p>  
<p>“We’ll buy the permits from you. Three C-rank Gates should be just right. How much will it cost in total?”</p>  
<p>The White Tiger Guild had plenty of money.</p>  
<p>But there was no point in competing with Yoojin Construction in terms of financial power, and more importantly, they didn’t want to risk straining their relationship with Jin-Woo by pushing too hard.</p>  
<p>So if Jin-Woo was willingly handing over the Gates, wasn’t that something to be grateful for?</p>  
<p>Though they weren’t grateful when it came to the price.</p>  
<p>“Let’s say 300 million per Gate, so 900 million in total.”</p>  
<p>“Gasp!”</p>  
<p>Ahn Sang-Min and Hyun Gi-Chul let out a simultaneous groan-like sound.</p>  
<p>“That’s too much.”</p>  
<p>As Hyun Gi-Chul tried to interject, Ahn Sang-Min quickly stopped him.</p>  
<p>It had been the same the last time they met.</p>  
<p>If the price wasn’t right, Jin-Woo would end the conversation without hesitation.</p>  
<p>In a way, they had gotten this opportunity by chance.</p>  
<p>If they missed this opportunity, they’d have to wait a long time to reserve C-rank Gates or, in the worst case, train new recruits in the provinces.</p>  
<p>‘Let’s negotiate once and then wrap it up.’</p>  
<p>It was a pity to end things so quickly.</p>  
<p>But even so, 300 million per Gate was an absurdly high price.</p>  
<p>Lately, the average price at which Yoo Jin-Ho’s team was acquiring permits was around 100 million.</p>  
<p>Asking for three times that amount was unreasonable.</p>  
<p>They knew their opponent was aware of that too.</p>  
<p>‘They’re probably just starting with a high offer to negotiate later.’</p>  
<p>Then again, something Baek Yoonho had said before they left the office came to mind.</p>  
<p>“Whether it’s 100 million or 200 million, just reserve the Gates!”</p>  
<p>This was practically the Chairman’s approval.</p>  
<p>All the staff in the Second Management Division had heard it, so it would be hard to backtrack later.</p>  
<p>Ahn Sang-Min swallowed hard and proposed a compromise.</p>  
<p>“300 million is too much for us. How about 200 million?”</p>  
<p>“Deal.”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo extended his right hand before Ahn Sang-Min could even finish speaking.</p>  
<p>Ahn Sang-Min, caught off guard, shook his hand.</p>  
<p>“Is... Is that it?”</p>  
<p>“Yes. 200 million per C-rank Gate. Deposit it into the account.”</p>  
<p>It felt oddly simple, but for Ahn Sang-Min, it was a relief.</p>  
<p>He shook Jin-Woo’s hand up and down lightly and bowed his head.</p>  
<p>“Thank you.”</p>  
<p>“No need for thanks.”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo also smiled brightly.</p>  
<p>Ahn Sang-Min felt like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders.</p>  
<p>For now, the issue of training new recruits had been resolved, and the relationship with Jin-Woo had improved somewhat.</p>  
<p>‘Deals are built on trust, after all.’</p>  
<p>Right.</p>  
<p>This was how relationships were gradually nurtured.</p>  
<p>Once things started moving, everything would follow naturally.</p>  
<p>No one spits on a smiling face, as the saying goes.</p>  
<p>Ahn Sang-Min clenched his fist inwardly.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo stood up first.</p>  
<p>“Then I’ll see you next time. Oh, and this.”</p>  
<p>He returned the tumbler he had brought inside a shopping bag to its owner.</p>  
<p>“I enjoyed it. It was delicious.”</p>  
<p>“I’m glad it suited your taste.”</p>  
<p>Hyun Gi-Chul blushed slightly as he took the shopping bag.</p>  
<p>Just like that, Jin-Woo left the café.</p>  
  
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<p>After walking a sufficient distance away from Ahn Sang-Min and Hyun Gi-Chul, Jin-Woo contacted Yoo Jin-Ho.</p>  
<p>After a brief cheerful ringtone,</p>  
<p>Yoo Jin-Ho’s excited voice came through the phone.</p>  
<p>“Hyung-nim, the deposit just went through. Did we really get 600 million?”</p>  
<p>“...”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo smiled silently with satisfaction.</p>  
<p>The deal had been successful.</p>  
<p>He had sold the conquest permits, which had almost gone to waste, for double their original purchase price.</p>  
<p>It was a massive profit.</p>  
<p>Yoo Jin-Ho asked curiously,</p>  
<p>“Hyung-nim, how did you manage this? Who did you sell the C-rank Gates to?”</p>  
<p>“Trade secret.”</p>  
<p>“Huh?”</p>  
<p>“Get some rest. See you the day after tomorrow.”</p>  
<p>As Yoo Jin-Ho was left bewildered, Jin-Woo naturally ended the call.</p>  
<p>\*Click.\*</p>  
  
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<p>That evening.</p>  
<p>Second Management Division office.</p>  
<p>Hyun Gi-Chul urgently sought out Ahn Sang-Min.</p>  
<p>“Section Chief! Section Chief!”</p>  
<p>“What is it?”</p>  
<p>Ahn Sang-Min turned his gaze away from the monitor.</p>  
<p>Hyun Gi-Chul hurriedly pointed at his phone screen.</p>  
<p>“Look at this!”</p>  
<p>“What’s this now?”</p>  
<p>Ahn Sang-Min narrowed his eyes as he stared at the phone screen.</p>  
<p>‘What’s this...?’</p>  
<p>The official website of the Hunter Association, accessible only to Hunters, displayed a trading screen showing the locations of newly reported Gates and the real-time sale of conquest permits.</p>  
<p>“What’s this? There are C-rank Gates available in our area?”</p>  
<p>“Yes. All the bid prices are below 10 million won.”</p>  
<p>“Don’t tell me...”</p>  
<p>Ahn Sang-Min realized his mistake too late.</p>  
<p>“Yoo Jin-Ho’s team didn’t reserve any Gates today.”</p>  
<p>Then he remembered Sung Jin-Woo’s words from yesterday.</p>  
<p>“I’ll have time on Thursday.”</p>  
<p>Tomorrow was that Thursday.</p>  
<p>Yoo Jin-Ho’s team had no raid planned for tomorrow from the start.</p>  
<p>Unaware of this, they had ended up buying the permits at an inflated price.</p>  
<p>“Hah...”</p>  
<p>Ahn Sang-Min let out a bitter laugh.</p>  
<p>The clues had been there, but he had realized them too late.</p>  
<p>It was his own mistake. Though, in the end, it had succeeded in deflecting the Chairman’s anger.</p>  
<p>“It seems we’ve been had, Section Chief.”</p>  
<p>Just then, a message arrived.</p>  
<p>\*Ding-dong.\*</p>  
<p>The sender was Sung Jin-Woo.</p>  
<p>[We’ve evened the score now. Let’s consider the matter of you trailing me as water under the bridge.]</p>  
<p>‘You’re not an ordinary guy, really.’</p>  
<p>Ahn Sang-Min swallowed his laughter.</p>  
<p>If this gesture could dissolve any lingering resentment, it wouldn’t be a bad outcome for him or the White Tiger Guild.</p>  
<p>After all, the ultimate goal was to recruit Jin-Woo.</p>  
<p>The amount they had spent today wasn’t a significant sum for the White Tiger Guild.</p>  
<p>“Let’s consider this an investment in Sung Jin-Woo.”</p>  
<p>If the investment paid off, it would be worth it.</p>  
<p>Looking at the message, Ahn Sang-Min smiled and closed the message box.</p>  
  
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<p>After sending the message, Jin-Woo looked around.</p>  
<p>There was no one in sight.</p>  
<p>He was surrounded by forest.</p>  
<p>He had deliberately chosen this remote mountainside to safely proceed with the quest.</p>  
<p>The current time was 5:44 PM.</p>  
<p>It was an unlikely time for hikers, and his current location was a clearing far removed from any hiking trails.</p>  
<p>‘Shall we begin?’</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo opened the message box.</p>  
<p>[Would you like to accept the Job Change Quest?] (Y/N)</p>  
<p>As if it had been waiting, the message appeared before his eyes.</p>  
  
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\*\*CHAPTER END\*\*