# 49

\*\*CHAPTER START\*\*  
  
<h1>Solo Leveling - Chapter 49</h1>  
  
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<p>Chapter 49</p>  
<p>For the first time, an item with an S-rank Acquisition Difficulty had appeared.</p>  
<p>Even a 15% damage reduction would have been more than enough, but it also came with an incredible option of +20 to both Stamina and Strength stats.</p>  
<p>Just looking at the options made his heart race.</p>  
<p>‘It’s incomparable to the A-rank items I’ve obtained so far.’</p>  
<p>He had obtained A-rank items twice before.</p>  
<p>The first was the ‘Kasaka’s Venom Sac’ obtained from defeating Kasaka, and the second was the ‘Gatekeeper’s Necklace’ from Cerberus.</p>  
<p>Both items were good enough.</p>  
<p>The Venom Sac had the penalty of reducing Strength, but it also had the option of reducing physical damage by a whopping 20%.</p>  
<p>And what about the Gatekeeper’s Necklace?</p>  
<p>It was the best item, increasing both Agility and Senses stats by 20 each, stats that became more important as time went on.</p>  
<p>But the ‘Crimson Knight's Helmet’ that appeared this time had options similar to combining those two items.</p>  
<p>And without any penalties.</p>  
<p>‘It’s undoubtedly the best.’</p>  
<p>Even though he knew he was standing in the middle of the Dungeon’s Boss Room, he couldn’t help but smile.</p>  
<p>To add one more thing, he also loved the design.</p>  
<p>‘It’s too good to hide.’</p>  
<p>The blood-red helmet and the long mane attached to it exuded an artistic elegance.</p>  
<p>Even if it was only for a brief moment, he felt the urge to try on a full set of armor if it existed.</p>  
<p>However.</p>  
<p>‘Unfortunately...’</p>  
<p>Igris’s other armor pieces didn’t shine like items.</p>  
<p>The only armor piece allowed was the helmet.</p>  
<p>Pushing aside a slight disappointment, Jin-Woo carefully put on the helmet.</p>  
<p>\*Swoosh\*</p>  
<p>As always, the helmet disappeared in an instant.</p>  
<p>Though he couldn’t show off its appearance, the helmet caused his stats to skyrocket.</p>  
<p>[Stats]</p>  
<p>Strength: 128 (+20) Stamina: 87 (+20) Agility: 107 Intelligence: 66 Senses: 89</p>  
<p>Physical Damage Reduction: 46% (+15%)</p>  
<p>The numbers in brackets were the stats increased by wearing the helmet.</p>  
<p>Not only Strength and Stamina, but even the hard-to-increase Physical Damage Reduction stat had risen significantly.</p>  
<p>It was truly satisfying.</p>  
<p>Seeing the effects with his own eyes made his heart pound fiercely.</p>  
<p>‘No.’</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo shook his head.</p>  
<p>‘The quest isn’t over yet. I shouldn’t get too excited.’</p>  
<p>There were still more items to check.</p>  
<p>Still feeling the lingering excitement, Jin-Woo shifted his gaze to the other items.</p>  
<p>[Rune Stone: Dominator's Touch]</p>  
<p>[Item: Instant Return Stone]</p>  
<p>Two stones.</p>  
<p>Among the two stones slightly larger than walnuts, Jin-Woo’s eyes were first drawn to the ‘Instant Return Stone.’</p>  
<p>‘I know about Rune Stones, but...’</p>  
<p>What is an Instant Return Stone?</p>  
<p>His curiosity was soon satisfied.</p>  
<p>Information about the Instant Return Stone quickly came to mind.</p>  
<p>\*Ding\*</p>  
<p>[Item: Instant Return Stone]</p>  
<p>Grade: ??</p>  
<p>Category: Consumable</p>  
<p>This is an exclusive item for the Job Change Quest. Breaking the Return Stone will immediately transport you outside the dungeon. However, it will automatically be destroyed once the Job Change Quest is completed. Cannot be stored in the inventory.</p>  
<p>The usage was similar to the Rune Stone.</p>  
<p>But instead of acquiring a skill, the effect was escaping the dungeon.</p>  
<p>‘Wait, wasn’t the Job Change Quest already over?’</p>  
<p>If so, this item should have already disappeared as described.</p>  
<p>The fact that it was still here meant...</p>  
<p>For some reason, a chill ran down his spine.</p>  
<p>It was strange.</p>  
<p>He had obtained the best item to escape the dungeon immediately, so why did he feel a sense of foreboding?</p>  
<p>If this could be used in a ‘real dungeon’ rather than one created by the System, anyone would want to buy it.</p>  
<p>This single stone was worth a life, so who would spare any expense?</p>  
<p>He was no different.</p>  
<p>This greatly reduced the burden of the Job Change Quest.</p>  
<p>‘If I want to...’</p>  
<p>I can escape at any time.</p>  
<p>But the unease lingering in his heart wouldn’t go away.</p>  
<p>As expected!</p>  
<p>As if it had been waiting, the System’s warning sound rang out.</p>  
<p>\*Ding\*</p>  
<p>[The ‘Player’ has acquired the Instant Return Stone.]</p>  
<p>[The Job Change Quest will now begin.]</p>  
<p>Oh no!</p>  
<p>So this was the quest-starting item!</p>  
<p>For a moment, he felt dizzy.</p>  
<p>It was like realizing too late that he had stepped on something he shouldn’t have.</p>  
<p>‘If I had known this would happen, I would have taken a little rest.’</p>  
<p>But what’s the use of regretting now?</p>  
<p>No matter how much he predicted based on experience and knowledge, he couldn’t accurately foresee the future.</p>  
<p>Cold sweat formed on Jin-Woo’s forehead.</p>  
<p>\*Glance\*</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo internally called up the ‘Status Window’ to check his remaining HP and Fatigue.</p>  
<p>[HP: 4161 / 10270]</p>  
<p>[MP: 390 / 850]</p>  
<p>[Fatigue: 61]</p>  
<p>‘The Fatigue is a bit high, but it’s still manageable.’</p>  
<p>Thanks to the helmet’s options, his Stamina stat had increased significantly, which also increased his total health, and in turn, his remaining health.</p>  
<p>That was at least a relief.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo encouraged himself by clenching his fists repeatedly.</p>  
<p>‘I can do it. For now.’</p>  
<p>Of course, his life itself wasn’t in danger.</p>  
<p>After all, he had the Instant Return Stone in his hand.</p>  
<p>But no matter how he thought about it, this Instant Return Stone symbolized ‘giving up on the quest.’</p>  
<p>Otherwise, it wouldn’t have been the starting item.</p>  
<p>‘If I give up on the quest...’</p>  
<p>It’s no different from losing the chance to change jobs.</p>  
<p>The cold sweat on his forehead ran down his temple and fell under his chin.</p>  
<p>\*Gulp\*</p>  
<p>As Jin-Woo swallowed dryly, the System’s next message appeared.</p>  
<p>\*Ding\*</p>  
<p>[A Dimensional Gate will be randomly generated in 10 seconds.]</p>  
<p>‘Dimensional Gate?’</p>  
<p>Without resolving his confusion, a large number appeared in the air.</p>  
<p>[00:00:10]</p>  
<p>It was easy to understand.</p>  
<p>It probably meant a countdown.</p>  
<p>The message continued.</p>  
<p>[The ‘Player’ can choose.]</p>  
<p>[Use the ‘Instant Return Stone’ to leave the dungeon.]</p>  
<p>...8, 7, 6.</p>  
<p>Even at that moment, the time continued to decrease.</p>  
<p>[Or endure for as long as possible to collect the promotion points needed to advance to a higher class.]</p>  
<p>“Endure? Endure what?”</p>  
<p>Frustrated, he spoke loudly.</p>  
<p>But Jin-Woo already had ‘Kasaka’s Venom Fang’ summoned from his inventory in his hand.</p>  
<p>He stored the Rune Stone in the inventory and tucked the Instant Return Stone, which couldn’t be stored, into his back pocket.</p>  
<p>Even with his heart pounding fiercely, he was already prepared for battle.</p>  
<p>That was Sung Jin-Woo.</p>  
<p>[The Job Change Quest will begin shortly.]</p>  
<p>...4, 3, 2.</p>  
<p>As he anxiously watched the decreasing time, Jin-Woo began to look around.</p>  
<p>His head and gaze quickly turned in all directions.</p>  
<p>Something was about to start.</p>  
<p>The surrounding space began to distort and twist.</p>  
<p>[00:00:01]</p>  
<p>[Good luck.]</p>  
<p>What?</p>  
<p>For the first time, the System expressed emotion.</p>  
<p>But there was no time to be surprised.</p>  
<p>The moment the timer hit 0 seconds, Gates began to appear everywhere.</p>  
<p>\*Whoosh\*</p>  
<p>\*Whoosh\*</p>  
<p>There weren’t just one or two.</p>  
<p>There were at least six around him.</p>  
<p>And the number was increasing rapidly.</p>  
<p>At the same time, the timer started counting down again.</p>  
<p>[00:00:02]</p>  
<p>The countdown had begun again.</p>  
<p>Time would become promotion points.</p>  
<p>He could somewhat understand what the System was saying, though not entirely.</p>  
<p>‘The longer I endure, the stronger I become.’</p>  
<p>No, more accurately, he could obtain a stronger class.</p>  
<p>He couldn’t let this opportunity go to waste.</p>  
<p>He still had enough HP and MP.</p>  
<p>‘Let’s endure as long as possible.’</p>  
<p>[00:00:03]</p>  
<p>Exactly 3 seconds later, unarmed knights began pouring out of the nearby Gates.</p>  
<p>\*Thud thud thud\*</p>  
<p>The knights clad in iron armor formed a silver wave, shaking the ground.</p>  
<p>It was a situation that could overwhelm anyone, but a smile appeared on Jin-Woo’s face.</p>  
<p>‘I can handle these guys even in this state!’</p>  
<p>In a way, they were grateful opponents.</p>  
<p>If something as vicious as Igris had come out, it would have been difficult to endure even for a few seconds.</p>  
<p>‘Stealth!’</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo used Stealth with his remaining Mana.</p>  
<p>Current Mana: 390.</p>  
<p>Stealth cost 200 Mana.</p>  
<p>That left 190 Mana.</p>  
<p>‘Stealth consumes 1 Mana per second.’</p>  
<p>In other words, he could gain about 3 minutes of time by moving around in Stealth.</p>  
<p>\*Swoosh\*</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo’s form began to blur.</p>  
<p>As expected, the knights charging toward him stopped in their tracks.</p>  
<p>But then.</p>  
<p>[A Mage uses ‘Skill: Gaze of Detection.’]</p>  
<p>A \*ding\* sound, a warning.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo’s head turned toward the direction of the sound.</p>  
<p>‘What?’</p>  
<p>A Mage who had emerged from a Gate was muttering a spell.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo noticed an eye-shaped mark floating above the Mage’s head.</p>  
<p>The moment the eye flashed!</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo’s Stealth was instantly dispelled.</p>  
<p>‘Damn it!’</p>  
<p>His calculations had been wrong from the start.</p>  
<p>\*Whoosh\*</p>  
<p>\*Whoosh\*</p>  
<p>The knights, who had been standing like telephone poles, all turned their heads toward Jin-Woo.</p>  
<p>It was like a scene from a horror movie.</p>  
<p>Soon, a silver wave rushed toward him.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo widened his eyes and gritted his teeth.</p>  
<p>\*Bang!\*</p>  
<p>With a single punch, the head of one knight flew off.</p>  
<p>The knight died on the spot.</p>  
<p>[You have defeated a Knight.]</p>  
<p>A glint flashed in Jin-Woo’s eyes.</p>  
<p>‘Killing Intent!’</p>  
<p>[Skill: ‘Killing Intent’ has been activated.]</p>  
<p>[Effect: ‘Fear’ has been triggered.]</p>  
<p>[All stats of the targets are reduced by 50% for 1 minute.]</p>  
<p>Many monsters slowed down due to the Fear effect, but his Mana dropped to 90% after just one use.</p>  
<p>Killing Intent consumed 100 Mana.</p>  
<p>He couldn’t use it twice.</p>  
<p>‘But I’ve bought 1 minute.’</p>  
<p>While the monsters’ stats were reduced, Jin-Woo began taking them down one by one.</p>  
<p>\*Bang!\*</p>  
<p>\*Crash!\*</p>  
<p>\*Bang!\*</p>  
<p>\*Smash!\*</p>  
<p>He crushed the knights with terrifying force.</p>  
<p>\*Bang!\*</p>  
<p>\*Bang!\*</p>  
<p>\*Crash!\*</p>  
<p>But the speed at which the knights were coming out of the Gates was faster than the speed at which he was taking them down.</p>  
<p>\*Thud thud thud\*</p>  
<p>Even while fighting frantically, Jin-Woo checked the time.</p>  
<p>[00:03:19]</p>  
<p>3 minutes and 19 seconds.</p>  
<p>How many points would that convert to?</p>  
<p>Should he leave now?</p>  
<p>But there was no time to think.</p>  
<p>At that very moment, knights were pouring in relentlessly.</p>  
<p>He had defeated countless knights, but their numbers were overwhelming.</p>  
<p>"Ughhh—!"</p>  
<p>Eventually, Jin-Woo was buried under the knights.</p>  
<p>[Tenacity Passive has been activated.]</p>  
<p>[Tenacity Passive has been activated.]</p>  
<p>His HP, which had been dropping vertically, finally began to hit rock bottom.</p>  
<p>[HP: 1036 /10270]</p>  
<p>‘Time...?’</p>  
<p>[00:05:08]</p>  
<p>5 minutes and 8 seconds.</p>  
<p>He had endured enough.</p>  
<p>‘...Let’s get out.’</p>  
<p>Trapped among the knights, Jin-Woo struggled in the suffocating prison of silver armor and fumbled for his back pocket.</p>  
<p>But then.</p>  
<p>\*Thud\*</p>  
<p>The Instant Return Stone slipped from his fingertips.</p>  
<p>\*Roll roll roll\*</p>  
<p>The round Return Stone hit a knight’s heel and rolled away.</p>  
<p>"No!"</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo desperately reached for it but was blocked by the knights.</p>  
<p>Soon, knights from above also descended upon him.</p>  
<p>He was suffocating.</p>  
<p>It was becoming difficult to breathe.</p>  
<p>[Tenacity Passive has been activated.]</p>  
<p>[Tenacity Passive has been activated.]</p>  
<p>His consciousness was fading.</p>  
<p>\*Thud! Thud!\*</p>  
<p>As he was tossed around by the knights, he heard a mocking laugh from somewhere.</p>  
<p>-It’s all your fault, isn’t it?</p>  
<p>‘...’</p>  
<p>-Why take risks when there’s a safe path? Isn’t it already a great fortune for an E-rank Hunter to become B-rank or C-rank?</p>  
<p>‘...’</p>  
<p>-You were just that much after all.</p>  
<p>‘...Shut up.’</p>  
<p>-You’re the one who caused your own death.</p>  
<p>Shut up!</p>  
<p>\*Crash!\*</p>  
<p>The knights surrounding Jin-Woo were all thrown back at once.</p>  
<p>Even after narrowly escaping death, Jin-Woo’s eyes were still alive.</p>  
<p>His eyes were filled with killing intent.</p>  
<p>‘I can’t end like this.’</p>  
<p>This was an opportunity he had worked so hard for.</p>  
<p>Absolutely not.</p>  
<p>Because he had been at the very bottom, he longed for the highest place.</p>  
<p>He knew the pain of being the weakest better than anyone.</p>  
<p>He had resorted to evil to survive, and even after surviving, he was pointed at.</p>  
<p>-What good is an E-rank?</p>  
<p>-The Association too. They should send someone who’s actually useful, not that guy... Ugh.</p>  
<p>-That guy always hides behind his teammates to survive, right?</p>  
<p>He had always been forced to watch from afar, but now he had a ladder to climb up. And he was supposed to just watch?</p>  
<p>No way.</p>  
<p>‘...I remember.’</p>  
<p>It was probably a voice in his head.</p>  
<p>It was their voices.</p>  
<p>The voices that always chattered behind his back.</p>  
<p>Yeah, laugh all you want.</p>  
<p>I’ll struggle to the very end.</p>  
<p>Even if my health is 10. No, even if it’s 1.</p>  
<p>I’ll fight until the very last moment.</p>  
<p>I’ll fight until I can’t move anymore.</p>  
<p>"Ughhh—!"</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo lunged forward.</p>  
<p>\*Crash!\*</p>  
<p>His fist.</p>  
<p>The knight’s breastplate caved in, and he flew backward, knocking over other knights.</p>  
<p>The knights began to charge again.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo’s movements became even more intense.</p>  
<p>\*Bang! Bang! Bang!\*</p>  
<p>Whether it was his fists, elbows, knees, or feet, any knight that came into contact with Jin-Woo’s body was crushed like a paper doll.</p>  
<p>[Fatigue has exceeded 70.]</p>  
<p>[Movement is restricted.]</p>  
<p>As if warning him, his movements began to slow.</p>  
<p>But the killing intent in Jin-Woo’s eyes didn’t weaken at all.</p>  
<p>One by one, knights who didn’t fall with a single blow collided with him.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo struck them three, four times more to ensure they were destroyed.</p>  
<p>\*Crash!\*</p>  
<p>[...8, 7, 6, 5]</p>  
<p>Meanwhile, some kind of countdown was progressing.</p>  
<p>He hadn’t noticed it until it reached single digits because he was so focused on the fight.</p>  
<p>‘What is it? Is the quest ending?’</p>  
<p>For a moment, he held onto hope, but it was in vain.</p>  
<p>[00:06:27]</p>  
<p>The timer was still running properly.</p>  
<p>Separate from the timer, some kind of count was decreasing by 1 second.</p>  
<p>[4, 3, 2]</p>  
<p>‘Is it telling me when I’ll die?’</p>  
<p>Come to think of it, the System had said it at the beginning.</p>  
<p>If you don’t agree to become a Player, you’ll die in 0.02 seconds.</p>  
<p>Fine.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo’s eyes widened.</p>  
<p>‘I’ll use every last second to the fullest.’</p>  
<p>\*Bang! Crash!\*</p>  
<p>Two more knights were shattered.</p>  
<p>But despite Jin-Woo’s fierce will, his body was already in tatters.</p>  
<p>The strength in his shoulders weakened.</p>  
<p>His slowed punches were no longer enough to stop the knights’ charges.</p>  
<p>One from the front, one from the back.</p>  
<p>\*Thud!\*</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo, colliding with the knights from both sides, let out a low groan from the terrible impact.</p>  
<p>"Ugh!"</p>  
<p>The knights didn’t miss the opportunity and immediately surrounded Jin-Woo from all sides.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo was completely trapped by the knights, unable to move a single finger.</p>  
<p>\*Thud thud thud\*</p>  
<p>Even at that moment, the number of knights covering Jin-Woo continued to increase.</p>  
<p>The silver wave had now turned into a silver mountain.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo gasped for breath.</p>  
<p>"Huff, huff...!"</p>  
<p>It felt like he would suffocate.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo’s hand, barely sticking out from among the knights, reached meaninglessly toward the sky.</p>  
<p>HP: 93/ 10270</p>  
<p>The situation was desperate.</p>  
<p>Yet, Jin-Woo didn’t give up until the very end.</p>  
<p>‘Still, just a little more...’</p>  
<p>As Jin-Woo’s hand, reaching toward the sky, barely managed to clench into a fist, the mysterious countdown that had been ongoing finally announced its end.</p>  
<p>[...1, 0]</p>  
<p>[You have failed to complete the Daily Quest.]</p>  
<p>[You will be moved to the Penalty Zone.]</p>  
  
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\*\*CHAPTER END\*\*