Here’s the proofread version of Chapter 18 with improved grammar, flow, and clarity while maintaining the original tone and intent:  
  
---  
  
\*\*CHAPTER START\*\*  
  
<h1>Solo Leveling - Chapter 18</h1>  
  
---  
  
Jin-Woo finished preparing to leave in just one minute and immediately hailed a taxi to head to the promised location.  
  
Nine people who had arrived earlier were waiting for Jin-Woo.  
  
A man who appeared to be the leader waved his hand.  
  
“Over here! This way.”  
  
He was a burly man with a thick beard.  
  
He greeted Jin-Woo with a friendly smile.  
  
“Mr. Sung Jin-Woo, right?”  
  
“Yes.”  
  
“Ah, good. I’m glad you found us. This is fate, so let’s exchange greetings before we start.”  
  
The bearded man briefly introduced the team members.  
  
Eight of them, including himself, were members who usually worked together, and one, like Jin-Woo, had been recruited to fill in the missing numbers.  
  
Jin-Woo exchanged greetings with the team members and assessed their impressions.  
  
Thanks to his heightened sensory stats, he could roughly gauge their abilities.  
  
‘Five people who seem to be of a similar rank. Four who feel below that. Five C-ranks and four D-ranks or lower.’  
  
There are rules for raiding a C-rank Gate.  
  
The minimum number of participants is 10, and more than half must be C-rank or higher Hunters.  
  
Only then will the Association grant permission.  
  
The phrase, “We’ll do the hunting, just come and make up the numbers,” didn’t seem to be just empty words.  
  
“Now that everyone’s introduced, let me briefly explain the key points.”  
  
The bearded man, who introduced himself as the C-rank Tanker Hwang Dong-Seok, had a calm demeanor, likely due to his extensive raid experience.  
  
He succinctly informed everyone about the situation they needed to be aware of for this raid when someone approached him.  
  
“Hey, looks like we’re the leftovers.”  
  
It was a bright-faced young man, the other one Hwang Dong-Seok had brought to fill the numbers.  
  
However, unlike Jin-Woo, he wasn’t a non-combat member. He was a D-rank member who would participate in direct combat.  
  
His name was Yoo Jin-Ho, age 22.  
  
Jin-Woo nodded slightly in greeting to Yoo Jin-Ho and turned his gaze away.  
  
Yoo Jin-Ho, who was about to continue the conversation, scratched the back of his head awkwardly and returned to his seat.  
  
“Hyung, let’s stop and go in.”  
  
“Anyway, we’re the ones who’ll catch everything, so why bother explaining in detail?”  
  
“Exactly, my ears are getting calluses.”  
  
As the complaints from the original members continued, Hwang Dong-Seok laughed heartily and clapped his hands.  
  
“Then let’s stop the explanation here and start heading in.”  
  
Everyone began preparing to enter the Gate.  
  
“Ah, before that, you two need to sign this.”  
  
Hwang Dong-Seok handed a piece of paper to Jin-Woo and Yoo Jin-Ho.  
  
It was a simple contract.  
  
“Just write your name and sign at the end.”  
  
In exchange for not participating in the hunt and not receiving a share, you’ll be paid 2 million won immediately after the hunt ends.  
  
The conditions were the same as what had been discussed over the phone.  
  
But what particularly caught his eye was the last clause.  
  
‘You agree not to hold anyone responsible for any accidents that occur in the dungeon...’  
  
Unlike raids conducted by the Association, in privately participated raids, you couldn’t receive compensation if something went wrong.  
  
That’s why Hunters couldn’t even get insurance.  
  
Your life was your own responsibility.  
  
Only now did it feel real that he had joined a raid party.  
  
While checking the terms, Jin-Woo glanced at Yoo Jin-Ho’s contract.  
  
Unlike his, Yoo Jin-Ho’s contract was set up to receive a share instead of the 2 million won.  
  
Just before signing, Jin-Woo asked Hwang Dong-Seok, “So, what do I do?”  
  
“You don’t have to do anything special, just follow us around and carry some luggage.”  
  
“Luggage...?”  
  
Hwang Dong-Seok pointed to the large backpack his brothers were taking out of the van.  
  
“It’s got lunch, spare clothes, equipment, first aid kits, and all sorts of stuff.”  
  
Wait, a first aid kit for going into a dungeon?  
  
Jin-Woo expressed his doubt.  
  
“Don’t tell me you’re going without a healer?”  
  
“You know how it is, it’s not easy to get a healer-type Hunter in a private raid party. We’ve always done it this way, no big deal.”  
  
Hwang Dong-Seok laughed awkwardly.  
  
Barely meeting the minimum standards with numbers, one supplementary member who seemed to think of the raid as a blind date, and a raid party consisting only of tanks and dealers without a healer.  
  
The supplementary member next to him showed no change in expression even after hearing the explanation that there was no healer.  
  
A sure sign of a complete newbie.  
  
Jin-Woo stifled a laugh internally.  
  
‘What a mess.’  
  
Still, the reason he signed the contract wasn’t because he was stingy about the 2 million won. It was because he now had the confidence to protect himself.  
  
“Here you go.”  
  
“Me too!”  
  
Hwang Dong-Seok checked both of their signatures and, in good spirits, shouted loudly.  
  
“Alright, let’s go!”  
  
---  
  
The group headed to the location where the Gate had formed.  
  
It was a halted apartment construction site.  
  
“They say the economy’s bad these days...”  
  
Hwang Dong-Seok clicked his tongue.  
  
Half-built apartments stood here and there like giant tombstones, giving off a desolate atmosphere.  
  
It felt like a cemetery for giants.  
  
“You know what?”  
  
Yoo Jin-Ho, who had come up beside him, lowered his voice.  
  
“All the employees and investors are in a life-or-death situation now, but the CEO took 90 billion and fled overseas two months ago.”  
  
“...”  
  
Jin-Woo had already given him several hints, but Yoo Jin-Ho seemed reluctant to leave his side.  
  
It seemed difficult for him to fit in, as the other eight members had originally been a team.  
  
“Hyung, are you always this quiet?”  
  
Somehow, the term of address had changed to ‘Hyung.’  
  
Now it was just tiring to ignore.  
  
“... Aren’t you the one who lacks awareness?”  
  
“I’ve never lived with awareness in mind. Hehe.”  
  
Was he cheerful, or just thoughtless?  
  
Jin-Woo scratched the side of his head as he looked at Yoo Jin-Ho’s bright smile.  
  
‘But still...’  
  
It’s true that he becomes more sensitive near Gates.  
  
It’s unavoidable.  
  
For other Hunters, it might just be a way to make money, but for Jin-Woo, every raid was a struggle for survival.  
  
With so many painful memories, it’s only natural to be sensitive.  
  
“We’re here.”  
  
Hwang Dong-Seok stopped walking.  
  
Oh-  
  
The Hunters let out exclamations.  
  
“Hwang Hyung, is this really a C-rank Gate? It’s a bit big, isn’t it?”  
  
“Would the Association lie about it? Investigators came twice.”  
  
A hole floating in the air, like a black hole. That’s what they called a Gate.  
  
The rank was determined based on the mana wave levels inside, and the Association came first to measure and announce it.  
  
Then, individuals or guilds who wanted to raid it could apply according to the procedure.  
  
A-rank or B-rank Gates were usually taken by large guilds.  
  
They were too dangerous for individuals to raid.  
  
Private raid parties mostly handled Gates below that.  
  
So, a C-rank Gate was the highest difficulty that unaffiliated Hunters could raid.  
  
Hwang Dong-Seok stood in front of the Gate and looked back.  
  
“I’ll go first. Everyone, follow closely.”  
  
The Hunters began to enter the Gate one by one, led by him, the tanker.  
  
‘Just in case.’  
  
Jin-Woo loosened up lightly, just in case.  
  
Beside him, Yoo Jin-Ho was taking out equipment one by one.  
  
The sword and shield that came out of his equipment bag were shining brightly.  
  
At a glance, they were high-end equipment.  
  
Not something a rookie Hunter could afford on his own.  
  
‘He said he’s never lived with awareness in mind, so he must be from a wealthy family.’  
  
Jin-Woo looked surprised.  
  
Sensing Jin-Woo’s gaze, Yoo Jin-Ho stepped forward proudly.  
  
“Hyung, you said you’re E-rank, right? I’ll protect you. Stick close to me.”  
  
Jin-Woo scratched the back of his head.  
  
Who was protecting whom?  
  
“...Alright. Thanks for the words.”  
  
“Let’s go in too.”  
  
Regardless of Jin-Woo’s feelings, the two safely entered the Gate.  
  
---  
  
The inside of the dungeon was quiet.  
  
“...”  
  
It was silent and dark.  
  
Hwang Dong-Seok gave the first instruction.  
  
“Gyu-Hwan, turn on the light.”  
  
“Yes.”  
  
A magician-type Hunter, Jo Gyu-Hwan, summoned a ball of light into the air.  
  
The surroundings brightened.  
  
Hwang Dong-Seok lowered his shield and tilted his head.  
  
“What? Why are there no demons here?”  
  
“Right. The lights are off too.”  
  
Usually, dungeons had luminescent stones embedded in the corners of caves to light up the area.  
  
But this dungeon had no such stones. Yoo Jin-Ho whispered to Jin-Woo.  
  
“Hyung, are there dungeons without demons?”  
  
“Shh.”  
  
Jin-Woo gestured for him to be quiet.  
  
Jin-Woo’s ears twitched.  
  
Countless footsteps could be heard in the distance.  
  
Jin-Woo said, “They’re not absent. They’re just not here yet.”  
  
Yoo Jin-Ho gulped.  
  
Thud thud thud-  
  
Soon, the party could hear the sound Jin-Woo had heard earlier.  
  
Only then did Hwang Dong-Seok sense something was off.  
  
If this dungeon had no luminescent stones...?  
  
“What moves in swarms, lives in darkness, and rushes toward light?”  
  
Oops!  
  
The expressions of Hwang Dong-Seok and his brothers darkened all at once.  
  
“Insects!”  
  
“It’s insects!”  
  
“Damn it, why did it have to be insects!?”  
  
Hwang Dong-Seok shouted.  
  
“Everyone, take your positions! They’re coming! Straight ahead!”  
  
From the other end of the single path, something was rushing toward them in large numbers.  
  
“Is this an ant nest?”  
  
“Don’t jinx it.”  
  
Among the various types of demons, insect-types were especially troublesome.  
  
They were hard to kill, always moved in swarms, and it wasn’t like individual entities were weak either.  
  
Among them, ants were arguably the worst.  
  
Many Hunters had lost their lives after mistakenly stepping into an ant nest.  
  
Thud thud thud thud thud-  
  
The sound of insect legs scraping against the floor was loud.  
  
It meant they were close.  
  
Hwang Dong-Seok raised his shield up to his chin.  
  
But the insects were nowhere to be seen.  
  
The brothers behind him started talking.  
  
“What? Why can’t see them?”  
  
“But the sound’s close?”  
  
“Dong-Seok Hyung, can you see anything up front?”  
  
Jin-Woo shouted.  
  
“Above!”  
  
‘What?’  
  
Hwang Dong-Seok reflexively looked up.  
  
Thud thud thud-  
  
Giant insects were rushing down from above.  
  
Had he been any slower in noticing, they would have fallen right on top of his head.  
  
When fighting swarming demons like insects, once the formation collapses, it’s all over.  
  
‘If I’d noticed just a bit later...’  
  
Hwang Dong-Seok felt a chill.  
  
At least, among the many types of insects, not a single ant was in sight.  
  
He shouted at the top of his lungs.  
  
“Shoot! Shoot them down! I’ll grab their aggro if they come down!”  
  
Arrows and spells flew toward the insects.  
  
Swish, thud!  
  
Boom!  
  
Squeak-  
  
Squeak-  
  
A few of them fell from the Hunters’ attacks, and the remaining ones all descended to the ground. They were ready to fight the Hunters.  
  
Now, the tanker’s skill was crucial. Hwang Dong-Seok used a taunt skill to draw the demons’ attention.  
  
The demons, as if they’d agreed on it, all turned to look at Hwang Dong-Seok.  
  
“Over here, you bugs!”  
  
Squeaaaaaak!  
  
Dozens of demons charged at Hwang Dong-Seok.  
  
Clang! Clang!  
  
Crash! Crash! Clang!  
  
His shield blocked all the insects’ attacks.  
  
Not even the strong jaws and claws of the insects could tear through the shield.  
  
The tanker, Hwang Dong-Seok, held the front line steadily.  
  
“Wait, wait, wait!”  
  
Hwang Dong-Seok timed his next move.  
  
---  
  
\*\*CHAPTER END\*\*  
  
---  
  
Let me know if you’d like further adjustments or additional chapters proofread!