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\*\*CHAPTER START\*\*  
  
<h1>Solo Leveling - Chapter 1</h1>  
  
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<p>Chapter 1</p>  
<p>1. E-rank Hunter</p>  
<p>E-rank Hunter Sung Jin-Woo.</p>  
<p>It was a title that followed Jin-Woo like a shadow, no matter what he did.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo’s abilities were almost on par with an ordinary person’s.</p>  
<p>Aside from being slightly more durable and recovering a bit faster, there wasn’t much that set him apart from a regular person.</p>  
<p>Because of this, he was always getting injured.</p>  
<p>He had narrowly escaped death multiple times.</p>  
<p>Of course, Jin-Woo wasn’t a Hunter by choice.</p>  
<p>The job was dangerous, he was constantly looked down upon, and the pay wasn’t even worth it.</p>  
<p>If it weren’t for the medical subsidies provided to Hunters affiliated with the Hunters Association, he would’ve returned his Hunter License long ago and lived as an ordinary person.</p>  
<p>But Jin-Woo, who was only in his mid-20s and had no special skills, had no other way to cover his mother’s monthly hospital bills, which cost hundreds of thousands of won.</p>  
<p>Could it be said that he had no choice?</p>  
<p>So, that day, Jin-Woo reluctantly participated in a raid organized by the Association.</p>  
  
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<p>Hunters who operated in the same area usually knew each other well.</p>  
<p>This was because whenever a Gate opened, all the Hunters in the area would gather.</p>  
<p>The Hunters who arrived early sipped on the warm coffee handed out by the Association staff and exchanged greetings.</p>  
<p>“Hey, Mr. Kim. Over here.”</p>  
<p>“Oh, Mr. Park! What brings you here? I thought you quit being a Hunter?”</p>  
<p>“Well… my wife suddenly got pregnant with our second child.”</p>  
<p>“Hahaha! Well, there’s no better way for Hunters to make a quick buck than a raid.”</p>  
<p>As Mr. Kim burst into hearty laughter, Mr. Park awkwardly laughed along and then asked, “But lately, the Association’s call-ups have been rare. Has the number of Gates appearing decreased?”</p>  
<p>“Nah, it’s just that the Guilds are more active these days. With big money on the line, the Guilds are going all out.”</p>  
<p>“So, does that mean this raid organized by the Association is safe?”</p>  
<p>Mr. Park, starting to feel uneasy, glanced around.</p>  
<p>If the Guilds weren’t involved, it meant there wasn’t much money to be made, and Gates without big rewards usually had significantly lower difficulty levels.</p>  
<p>But nothing in life was 100% certain.</p>  
<p>Not just Mr. Park, but the other Hunters were also looking around with uneasy expressions.</p>  
<p>“Well…”</p>  
<p>Mr. Kim, avoiding a direct answer as he finished his coffee, spotted someone approaching from a distance and waved enthusiastically.</p>  
<p>“Oh, there he is! Mr. Sung! Mr. Sung!”</p>  
<p>The other Hunters also brightened up upon seeing him.</p>  
<p>“Hello.”</p>  
<p>The owner of the voice was Sung Jin-Woo.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo nodded lightly to Mr. Kim, who greeted him warmly, and walked past him.</p>  
<p>After confirming that Jin-Woo had passed by, Mr. Kim chuckled and confidently declared, “Jin-Woo’s here. That means this place is safe.”</p>  
<p>Mr. Park, wide-eyed, leaned closer to Mr. Kim. “What? Is this Sung Jin-Woo guy that strong?”</p>  
<p>“Ah, you wouldn’t know, Mr. Park. He started coming around not long after you left. There’s no Hunter here who doesn’t know Sung Jin-Woo.”</p>  
<p>“Is he that famous? But why does he work for the Association? Why not join a big Guild or go freelance?”</p>  
<p>Mr. Kim, who had been grinning, rolled his eyes. “Do you know what his nickname is?”</p>  
<p>“How would I know? Stop beating around the bush and just tell me.”</p>  
<p>“Humanity’s Weakest Weapon.”</p>  
<p>“…Weakest Weapon? Not the Ultimate Weapon?”</p>  
<p>“You idiot. That’s the nickname of the S-rank Hunter Choi Jong-In. This guy is the Weakest Weapon. He’s probably the weakest Hunter in South Korea.”</p>  
<p>“What?”</p>  
<p>Mr. Park frowned.</p>  
<p>If Sung Jin-Woo was that weak, why did everyone welcome him so warmly?</p>  
<p>In an emergency, they’d have to rely on him to watch their backs.</p>  
<p>He couldn’t understand the other Hunters’ reactions.</p>  
<p>As Mr. Park tilted his head in confusion, Mr. Kim laughed and elbowed him in the side. “Hey! That’s exactly why raids where Sung Jin-Woo shows up are bound to be low difficulty. The Association would never assign him anything dangerous. Who’d want to see someone die?”</p>  
<p>Only then did Mr. Park’s face brighten. “Oh, really?”</p>  
<p>It had been a while since his last raid, and his wife had been worried sick.</p>  
<p>Truth be told, he had been feeling uneasy himself.</p>  
<p>But after hearing Mr. Kim’s explanation, he felt much more at ease.</p>  
<p>Mr. Kim continued, “There’s even a rumor that this guy got injured in an E-rank Gate and was hospitalized for a week.”</p>  
<p>“A Hunter got injured in an E-rank Gate?”</p>  
<p>“That’s what I heard. Apparently, no one expected anyone to get hurt in an E-rank Gate, so they didn’t even bring a Healer-type Hunter.”</p>  
<p>“And he ended up in the hospital for a week? Pfft, hahaha!”</p>  
<p>As Mr. Park laughed too loudly, Mr. Kim gave him a warning look. “Hey, keep it down. Mr. Sung might hear you.”</p>  
<p>“Oh, right. I didn’t think of that.”</p>  
<p>Mr. Park glanced at Jin-Woo and chuckled cautiously.</p>  
<p>Fortunately, the distance seemed to prevent Jin-Woo from overhearing their conversation.</p>  
<p>But that was a miscalculation.</p>  
<p>‘I can hear you, you old men.’</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo forced a bitter smile, pretending not to notice their glances.</p>  
<p>At times like this, he resented his unusually sharp hearing.</p>  
<p>It was still early before the raid would start.</p>  
<p>‘Did I arrive too early?’</p>  
<p>Looking for something to pass the time, Jin-Woo spotted an Association staff member handing out coffee and approached them.</p>  
<p>“Could I get a cup of coffee, please?”</p>  
<p>“Ah, Hunter Sung Jin-Woo… I’m so sorry, but we just ran out of coffee.”</p>  
<p>“…”</p>  
<p>A cold winter breeze stung the tip of his nose.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo wiped his nose with his index finger.</p>  
<p>It was just his luck that the coffee ran out right when it was his turn.</p>  
  
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<p>“Why do you insist on being a Hunter, Jin-Woo?”</p>  
<p>“I’m sorry.”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo bowed his head slightly.</p>  
<p>The beauty casting a healing spell in front of him, Lee Joo-Hee, pouted in dissatisfaction.</p>  
<p>“I’m not saying this to make you apologize. I’m worried about you. If you keep fighting like this, you’ll end up in real danger one day.”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo looked past Joo-Hee’s shoulder at the other Hunters fighting.</p>  
<p>Beyond the Gate lay a dungeon.</p>  
<p>This dungeon was rated around D-rank.</p>  
<p>A dozen or so Hunters were effortlessly dealing with the monsters inside.</p>  
<p>But for Jin-Woo, an E-rank Hunter, even that was too much.</p>  
<p>Usually, injured Hunters were treated by Healer-type Hunters waiting in the rear.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo, who got injured in every raid, was a well-known figure among the Healer-type Hunters.</p>  
<p>Joo-Hee asked cautiously, “Is there a reason you can’t quit being a Hunter?”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo shook his head firmly.</p>  
<p>He didn’t want to reveal such personal matters to others.</p>  
<p>“Being a Hunter is just a hobby. If I didn’t do this, I’d probably die of boredom.”</p>  
<p>Joo-Hee stuck out her lips. “If you keep up this hobby, you’ll be raiding in the afterlife.”</p>  
<p>Caught off guard, Jin-Woo burst out laughing.</p>  
<p>This earned him another scolding from Joo-Hee. “Ah! Don’t laugh, don’t laugh! Your wounds will reopen!”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo chuckled and asked, “Where did you learn to say things like that?”</p>  
<p>“Where? From Mr. Kim, of course.”</p>  
<p>“Oh, that old man, really…”</p>  
<p>As they laughed and chatted, the healing was nearly complete.</p>  
<p>But it was already too late.</p>  
<p>The raid was winding down.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo’s expression hardened.</p>  
<p>‘Today, I only managed to kill one Magic Beast.’</p>  
<p>And it was just an E-rank one.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo fiddled with the E-rank Essence Stone in his hand.</p>  
<p>The lowest-grade Essence Stone from an E-rank Magic Beast wasn’t even worth 100,000 won. It was a pitiful reward for risking his life.</p>  
<p>‘Even a C-rank Essence Stone is worth over 10 million won…’</p>  
<p>But for Jin-Woo, who was only an E-rank Hunter, a C-rank Magic Beast was an insurmountable opponent.</p>  
<p>Just then, someone shouted, “Huh? There’s another entrance here!”</p>  
<p>The nearby Hunters rushed over.</p>  
<p>“Oh, you’re right!”</p>  
<p>“There’s really another entrance!”</p>  
<p>As the first discoverer had said, there was a hidden entrance to another dungeon inside the dungeon.</p>  
<p>“A Double Dungeon… I’ve heard these exist, but I’ve never seen one before.”</p>  
<p>Mr. Song, a 10-year veteran Hunter, peered into the dungeon entrance with fascination.</p>  
<p>The inside of the cave was too dark to see clearly.</p>  
<p>Mr. Song used his signature Fire Magic to throw a flame inside.</p>  
<p>The flame flew in, illuminating the interior.</p>  
<p>The passage stretched endlessly.</p>  
<p>Soon, the flame lost momentum and fell to the ground, flickering before extinguishing.</p>  
<p>The cave was once again shrouded in darkness.</p>  
<p>“Hmm… Everyone, gather around for a moment.”</p>  
<p>Mr. Song, the de facto leader, called all the Hunters together.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo and Joo-Hee, who had just finished healing, also joined the group.</p>  
<p>Mr. Song looked around at the Hunters and said, “As you all know, a Gate won’t close until the dungeon’s boss is defeated. Since the Gate is still open even after we’ve cleared this place, it seems the boss is inside there.”</p>  
<p>He pointed to the hidden dungeon entrance.</p>  
<p>The Hunters exchanged glances and nodded.</p>  
<p>There was no room for disagreement.</p>  
<p>Mr. Song continued, “Normally, in a situation like this, we’d report it to the Association and wait for their decision… But if we do that, other Hunters might steal the boss, and our earnings would drop significantly.”</p>  
<p>The Hunters’ expressions darkened.</p>  
<p>Especially Mr. Park, who needed a large sum of money due to his wife’s pregnancy, looked even more tense.</p>  
<p>‘The cost of postpartum care alone is already so high…’</p>  
<p>It would render the entire raid meaningless.</p>  
<p>“So, I suggest we take down the boss ourselves and leave. What do you all think?”</p>  
<p>The Hunters fell into thought.</p>  
<p>“…”</p>  
<p>“…”</p>  
<p>Of course, it wasn’t an easy decision, as they couldn’t guarantee their safety.</p>  
<p>But this dungeon’s difficulty was very low.</p>  
<p>Because of that, the hidden dungeon inside likely wasn’t very difficult either.</p>  
<p>“Ahem.”</p>  
<p>Mr. Song cleared his throat.</p>  
<p>“There are 17 of us, so let’s decide by vote. Once the decision is made, no complaints. How about it?”</p>  
<p>Everyone nodded at Mr. Song’s suggestion.</p>  
<p>No one objected.</p>  
<p>“I’m in.”</p>  
<p>Mr. Song raised his hand.</p>  
<p>One by one, the others followed suit.</p>  
<p>“I’m in too.”</p>  
<p>“I vote to go.”</p>  
<p>Mr. Park was the first to raise his hand, followed by Mr. Kim and the other Hunters.</p>  
<p>Of course, there were also many votes against it.</p>  
<p>“Let’s not go.”</p>  
<p>“Shouldn’t we wait for the Association’s decision?”</p>  
<p>As the votes for and against were evenly split, the decision came down to the last two people: Jin-Woo and Joo-Hee.</p>  
<p>“I’m sorry…”</p>  
<p>Joo-Hee bowed her head to Mr. Song and cast her vote against going.</p>  
<p>This made the vote 8 to 8.</p>  
<p>It was a tie.</p>  
<p>Mr. Song turned to Jin-Woo, who was hesitating, and asked bluntly, “What about you, Mr. Sung?”</p>  
  
\*\*CHAPTER END\*\*