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I PARRY
EVERYTHING

WHAT DO YOU MEAN I'M THE STRONGEST?

I'M NOT EVEN AN ADVENTURER YET!

Table of Contents

[Cover](#)

[Chapter 1: The Talentless Boy](#)

[Chapter 2: The Adventurers Guild](#)

[Chapter 3: My Long-Awaited Adventurer Life](#)

[Chapter 4: I Parry a Cow](#)

[Chapter 5: The Assassination of the Princess](#)

[Chapter 6: Reporting My Completed Commissions](#)

[Chapter 7: The Central Plaza](#)

[Chapter 8: Lynne's House](#)

[Chapter 9: The Audience Chamber and the Black Blade](#)

[Chapter 10: Ines, the Divine Shield](#)

[Chapter 11: Gilbert, the Spear Sovereign](#)

[Chapter 12: The Princess's Request](#)

[Chapter 13: "The Talentless Boy"](#)

[Chapter 14: The Prince's Melancholy](#)

[Chapter 15: My First Goblin Hunt](#)

[Chapter 16: The Forest of Beasts](#)

[Chapter 17: The Goblin Emperor](#)

[Chapter 18: I Parry a Goblin](#)

[Chapter 19: Disturbing Developments](#)

[Chapter 20: Reporting the Hunt](#)

[Chapter 21: Coach Ride to the Mountain City](#)

[Chapter 22: The Black Death Dragon](#)

[Chapter 23: The Cursed Child](#)

[Chapter 24: I Parry a Toad](#)

[Chapter 25: The Demonfolk Boy](#)

[Chapter 26: The Princess's Duty](#)

[Chapter 27: The Black-Bandaged Man](#)

[Chapter 28: Deadman Zadu](#)

[Chapter 29: Blades of Silver](#)

[Chapter 30: To the Royal Capital](#)

[Extra Chapter: Princess Lynneburg's First Goblin Hunt ~Five Years Old~](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Color Illustrations](#)

[Bonus Short Story](#)

[About J-Novel Club](#)

[Copyright](#)

Chapter 1: The Talentless Boy

I was raised by my mother in a small mountain cabin with a field, which we tended together. We lived in peace, even after my sickly father passed when I was little...but our calm didn't last forever. When I turned twelve, my mother, too, fell ill.

Desperate, I cared for her as best as I was able—but, little by little, she wasted away. Then, one day, she handed me a leather pouch containing a small amount of money and said:

“I'm sorry I couldn't give you much of a life. The least you deserve is to live one of your own choosing.”

Those were her final words to me; the warmth had gone from her body by the very next morning.

And so, I was alone.

After digging a grave for my mother beside my father's, I resolved to descend the mountain and head for the city. I'm sure I could have kept on living in that cabin, the way I always had; though it was a rural area with no access to a doctor, I had livestock and a bountiful field. The nearby forests were also filled with fruit to eat, as well as wild hares and other game to hunt. I would never have had to fear going hungry, and yet...

I still chose to leave my little home—the place I'd lived my entire life.

You see, I had a dream: I wanted to become an adventurer—one just like the heroes in the great epics my father had told me so many times when I was little. Like the hero who, with his friends by his side, slew a titanic dragon, won its treasure, and moved ever onward in search of the next quest. Or like the one who studied magic under the tutelage of a wizened magician, dispelled the curse afflicting a forest, and was rewarded by the Spirit King with a miracle elixir that could cure any illness.

My father had told me countless stories of such adventures, and each one lit a flame in my heart.

If I'd had a miracle elixir, then my parents might not have had to die. From time to time, I would let my imagination chase that what-if...but there was no guarantee that it even existed. Maybe the stories were all made up by my father to delight his little boy.

Still, I wanted to see for myself. How much truth was there to my

father's stories? How many were just fairy tales?

But, no—maybe it didn't even matter to me whether they were true. In reality, I just wanted to be like the characters that had always amazed me. I yearned to be the hero who would wield his sword for his friends and for the meek, staring down any hardship in his way—who would always win and ensure the story had a happy ending.

Yes, that was how I wanted to be. And that was all it was, plain and simple. I couldn't stop myself from wanting to be a hero.

It took me a few days to descend the mountain, after which I headed for the city's Adventurers Guild. Provided that I hadn't heard wrong, that was where I needed to go to become an adventurer.

Reaching the building itself was easy—I asked a guard where it was, and he led me there right away. Yep, *reaching* it was easy. When I tried to go inside, however, a grim-faced man came out and barred my way.

“This is no place for kids,” he said. “Go home.”

But there was nobody left waiting for me back on the mountain. I fumbled together an explanation of the circumstances that had brought me here.

“So you're an orphan, are you?” There was a brief pause before he continued, “I guess that changes things. In that case, why not go to a class training school? They've never taken in a kid as young as you before...but if you'd like to try, I'll see what I can do.”

Then, scratching his head, he began to explain.

In this city—the royal capital—those who wanted to register with the Adventurers Guild could receive class training at one of the royal training schools. According to the man, they had been established under decree by the currently reigning king as a way to help prevent the deaths of rookie adventurers. Anyone could attend them for free, and to top it off, the schools would feed, clothe, and board you for the duration of your attendance. All expenses were paid for by royal taxes.

It sounded beyond my wildest dreams. So, naturally, I jumped at the chance to attend.

“If you truly wish to be an adventurer, then go to a training school and come back after you've learned a skill. Any will do.”

At the time, I hadn't really understood what the man—a Guild employee—was talking about. It was the first I'd ever learned of the existence of skills.

Skills, he explained, were what people considered proof of one's

strength and ability. According to him, every person harbored within themselves the talent for one or two particularly exceptional skills, and the training schools existed to identify that talent.

In this country, there were training schools for the six basic class branches. Anyone could receive training for the class of their choice, through which you would quickly discover which skills you had a talent for and which class you were best suited to be.

So, I decided to follow the man's advice and undergo training. I asked him for directions, said my thanks, then headed straight for the one class training school I had already decided on.

Swordsman.

It was the class I'd always dreamed of being. In one of my favorite adventure epics, the hero had cut down a titanic dragon the size of a mountain with a single swing of his sword. I had always hoped to one day be capable of similar feats. I knew it was just a story, of course, but I couldn't help but wonder what I could become.

No, I decided—what I *would* become.

With that thought running through my head, I enrolled as a student of the swordsman training school...

But it wasn't meant to be.

After several months of training under an instructor, I learned something about myself: I had no talent with a sword. In fact, I was genuinely hopeless.

Generally speaking, the role of a swordsman is to attack. Their ability to wreak utter havoc—in other words, the possession of offensive skills—is valued above all else. But despite training for the entire term set by the school, I never developed a single offensive skill.

Far from it, in fact; I never even developed the commonplace skills that anybody could acquire through hard work. So, with my training term coming to an end and unable to bear the thought of giving up, I asked the instructor for an extension. But the response I received was as follows:

“A swordsman flailing his sword about with no skills to his name is nothing but a burden on his allies. You're wasting your time.”

Despite my disappointment, I went off to be trained in another class. If there was no future for me as a swordsman, then I would become a warrior instead.

Warriors were a vanguard class that used all kinds of weapons, putting their lives on the line to shield their allies. Though not as picture-perfect as

a swordsman when it came to the ideal adventurer in my head, it was still a class that I admired.

I already knew that I wasn't any good with swords, but that was fine; I would simply use another weapon. Anything would do. As long as I had the strength to live as an adventurer, it didn't matter to me what I used.

So I enrolled at the training school for warriors, where I spent the next few months living among burly grown-ups, training so intensely that it felt as though all my blood, sweat, and tears had been wrung out of me.

But despite my desperation, the only skill that I managed to develop by the end of the training term was the most basic one of all—one that anybody could use. It strengthened my physical ability a little, and that was it. It would never be enough for me to pass muster as a warrior.

In other words, I had no talent for becoming a warrior either.

The instructor had been kind enough to train me personally until the end of the term, but after that, he recommended that I try another class. "If you keep pushing for the impossible, all you'll have waiting for you is an early grave," he said.

And so, despite my mounting disappointment, I kept my hopes alive and headed for my next training school.

This time, I'd try to become a hunter. If close combat was beyond my grasp, then I was happy to settle for fighting with a bow and arrow. I wasn't a total novice to hunting either; I'd had practice setting traps and felling birds with stones back home on the mountain. Maybe I already had some promise—and it was with that thought in mind that I started my training.

Again, however, it was futile.

No matter how desperately I tried, the only skill I was able to develop was [Stone Throw]. It was something that anybody—even children—could develop and use. To add insult to injury, despite the bow being a hunter's defining weapon, I was never once able to use it correctly before the training term was over. In the words of my instructor:

"You have zero intuition when it comes to handling fine tools."

I felt awful after leaving the hunter training school; after all, I had learned that I would never be able to live up to my image of the ideal hero from my father's epics. I wasn't cut out to be a class that fought magnificent battles, diving into the fray with weapons in hand.

So be it then, I thought. As long as I could go on adventures, my actual class didn't matter to me anymore. I was fine with giving up the leading

role if there was some other way for me to help. Maybe I wasn't going to be a storybook hero, but there had to be something—*anything*—I could do.

That was why, somewhat frantic, I enrolled at the thief training school. I still had a faint hope inside me that maybe—just maybe—this was where my talents could shine.

But I was naive. In the end, all I managed to develop was a skill that muffled the sound of my footsteps a little.

“You can't even open trapped chests,” the man overseeing my training—a thief himself—told me, “and with no detection skills, you can forget about scouting altogether.”

Then, in very clear terms, he said that I should try a different class, because it was obvious that I had no talent for being a thief. So, despite having clung to this as my final chance, I was sent away again.

I was at a complete loss. Thief had been my last resort—the only remaining class that I'd thought was within reach for me. All that remained were the magic ones, but I'd given up on those as soon as the guildsman told me about them.

Magic was the cumulative product of one's innate affinity for mana, vast intellect, and diligent training. These three things were required just to reach the starting line. To make matters worse, it was commonly said that the difficulty of pursuing magic classes was incomparable to training for classes like swordsman and warrior. Knowing that, I'd discarded them as options...but now I had no choice. No other paths remained for me.

And so, despite my only knowledge of the world of magic being the bits and pieces I had gathered from children's stories, I decided to jump right in. I was being foolish, but at the same time, who knew? Maybe there was a hidden talent for magic lying dormant inside of me. It was with that in mind that I went to the magician training school and asked to be trained.

To cut a long story short, I was hopeless. At everything. The old magician at the door had welcomed me in, saying: “Mm, why not? Let's see what you can do.” But the most I had picked up was a single skill that created a tiny flicker of fire from my fingertip, no bigger than the flame of a lit candle.

It was a basic—no, beyond basic—skill that anybody, no matter how untalented, should be able to learn in three days at most, yet it had taken me the entire term.

“It's quite unusual for a person to be so naturally lacking in magical talent,” the old magician had said, overseeing my efforts with great

interest. But in the end, he sent me away with a gentle admonishment. “I’m afraid that this is not where you belong. Find yourself a different path to tread.”

That same day, I quietly departed the magician training school and gave up on becoming a magician.

All of my training thus far had ended in failure, and of the many classes that I could apply for with the help of the Adventurers Guild, there was only one left: cleric. It was a magic class that, for me, seemed like my most foolish pursuit yet. For one thing, becoming a cleric was even harder than becoming a magician. Those who held the title had almost always been born with a blessing from the divine—with healing magic—and undergone long years of disciplined training as young children.

“Clerics and the like?” the guildsman had said to me. “They’re the one branch of classes where putting your mind to it just ain’t enough.”

I believed his every word, don’t get me wrong...but it was already clear that I couldn’t become a swordsman, a warrior, a hunter, a magician, or even a thief. I had nothing else to pin my hopes on, so I headed for the cleric training school.

Soon enough, I arrived at a large, solemn temple built from stone. I knocked on the doors and then explained my situation and my hopes to the tall priest who came out to see me, but his response was plain and simple.

“You’re asking for the impossible. You have no foundational training. You should give up.”

I knew that all too well, but no matter how insistent he was on turning me away, I couldn’t bear to throw in the towel. “I won’t move from this door until you let me train here,” I said to the man. And, true to my word, I didn’t.

One day passed, then two, and then three, before finally...

“I suppose I can teach you the basics.”

Thus began my training to become a cleric.

Unfortunately, after a training term of nonstop, grueling effort, all I acquired was [Low Heal]. It was below even the lowest class of cleric spell, [Heal], and the most it could do was partially mend my own small scratches, making it a pointless skill for a cleric to have.

Even after training my absolute hardest, this one skill was the only thing I’d gotten. Put another way, I had proven my complete lack of talent once and for all.

“Coming this far despite not having received a blessing as a child is

amazing in itself,” said my instructor, the priest. But despite his consolation, I could see the other trainees who were my age learning far more impressive skills and improving incomparably faster. It was obvious that I was incompetent. In the end, it had all been for nothing.

And so it came time for me to report back to the guildsman—to inform him that I’d learned no useful skills and that I’d been declared to have “no aptitude” for any of the classes.

“You couldn’t learn a single decent skill?” he asked. “You’ll end up dead in a ditch on your first day of adventuring then, no two ways about it. Give it up and go home, yeah? I could look for other work for you too, if you’d rather that.”

Naturally, he told me to cast aside my dreams. It made perfect sense—even I knew that the path of an adventurer was fraught with danger—but I still couldn’t bring myself to quit. So instead, I quietly left the city.

I had no talent. None at all. That fact was as plain as day.

But so what? I suddenly thought. What does it matter that I’ve got no talent for anything? All that means is that I’ll have to put even more effort into my training.

I knew then that I couldn’t give up, no matter what. After all, my swordsman training instructor had once told me: “Though it’s extremely rare, if a person constantly trains a skill over a long, long period, they can end up developing an entirely new one.”

I clung to those words. They were all that I had—my last and only hope. I convinced myself that the time I had spent being evaluated had simply been too short, and that, with more training, even I could learn a useful skill and become an adventurer.

Yes, all I needed was some intense training. I decided that as soon as I got back to my home on the mountain, I’d train until I dropped.

Of course, since I wanted to be a swordsman, the first thing I did when I returned was make myself a wooden sword. Then, using lengths of rope, I hung sticks from the branches of the trees surrounding my home. I struck them away with my wooden sword, over and over and over again with single-minded intent. That, and that alone, would be my training.

[Parry]

I used the one swordsmanship skill that I’d learned during my time at the swordsman training school—the worst skill among them all, deemed useless by everybody.

And so I parried sticks from dawn ’til dusk, day in and day out. At

times, I even forgot to eat or sleep.



A year passed.

[Parry]

Now, I was able to parry ten sticks in the span of a single breath. I could feel my own improvement, but I couldn't feel myself developing a new skill. I didn't know *when* it would happen, but I was sure it would. I just had to keep working hard. And when it did, I would be able to stand on my own two feet as an adventurer. That would be when my adventures began.

The thought alone made my heart sing with excitement. I found myself giddily looking forward to each new day, with hope for the future ringing in my chest.



Three more years passed.

Excluding my time spent on necessities such as hunting and tending to my field, I was still training from morning to night, pushing myself until I was on the brink of exhaustion.

I'd long since exchanged the sticks for wooden swords of my own making, having figured that they'd make for better targets. All of my attention had been devoted to parrying the countless weapons as they flew through the air, and now...

[Parry]

I could parry a hundred wooden swords in the span of a single breath, even with my eyes closed. It felt like I'd gotten a little stronger, but I still hadn't developed a new skill. And my time away from the mountain had taught me that skills were everything in this world.

"I guess I haven't trained enough."

Even the realm of a rookie adventurer was still beyond my reach; as I was now, going on adventures was a dream within a dream. With that in mind, I resolved to be even stricter with my training.



The weeks and months went by, and before I knew it, another ten years

had passed. I'd kept up my strict training without missing a day and continued adding wooden swords to the point that I could no longer say how many were strung from the trees. I'd stopped counting a few years ago when I'd passed a thousand.

I devoted myself to my training, keeping my mind empty as I parried wooden swords over and over again. All I ever did was parry.

[Parry]

I'd reached the stage where I could parry a thousand wooden swords without even swinging my own, but I still couldn't feel myself developing a new skill.

"I wonder how much training real swordsmen must go through..." I mused aloud. I couldn't even imagine it. Adventurers seemed so far beyond me now that my head spun at the very thought of becoming one.

I didn't have a shred of talent—that much I already knew. That was why I'd tried to make up for it with hard work, but I could feel that I was finally reaching my limit.

The guildsman had told me that I needed to learn a skill to become an adventurer, but I was twenty-seven now and still without one. Even the most run-of-the-mill adventurer needed skills, but no matter how much I struggled, they were beyond my reach.

However, I still couldn't give up on becoming an adventurer and exploring the world.

"Talk about a foolish dream..."

I'd chased it knowing that it was foolish—or at least, that was what I'd thought. Anyone else in my shoes would have accepted that it was time to look for a different way of life...but I still couldn't lose heart.

And so I descended the mountain and made my way back to the royal capital. I needed to visit the Adventurers Guild again.

Chapter 2: The Adventurers Guild

More than a decade had passed since I'd last visited the Adventurers Guild. Though the interior was more or less the same, it no longer felt as spacious as when I was a child, and the place itself seemed more worn than I remembered.

"Do you have business with us today, sir?"

As I absentmindedly looked around, a petite young woman—no, make that a girl in her late teens—called out to me from where she was seated behind the receptionist's counter. She looked to be the only one there; the man who'd welcomed me so long ago was nowhere to be seen.

"Yes, I'd like to register as an adventurer," I replied.

The girl immediately produced a sheet of paper. "Then please fill this in with your name and the skills you possess. If you can't write, then please don't hesitate to say so. We'd be more than happy to do it on your behalf."

Luckily, my parents had ensured that I was more or less literate. I accepted the sheet and saw that my name and skills really were the only things I needed to write down, so I got straight to work.

<Adventurer Registration Form>

Name: Noor

<Declared Skills>

Swordsman Branch: [Parry]

Warrior Branch: [Physical Enhancement]

Hunter Branch: [Stone Throw]

Thief Branch: [Featherstep]

Magician Branch: [Tiny Flame]

Cleric Branch: [Low Heal]

One by one, I noted down my rudimentary skills for each branch, finishing with six in total. They were all that I had.

"Is this okay?" I asked the girl.

"Yes, thank you. Please bear with me for a moment while I go over—Huh?"

Seemingly confused as she continued to look over my form, the girl reached for a bulky manual sitting atop the receptionist's counter titled *The Dictionary of Skills*. Then, after a short while of examining its contents, she turned to me hesitantly.

"Um, are you sure you filled this in correctly?" she asked. "If there was anything that you forgot to add—"

"That's everything."

She paused for a moment and then said, "What?" My honest answer had turned the look on her face from confused to flustered as she grabbed a small booklet from nearby and hurriedly began to flip through it. From the look of things, she was studying a receptionist's training manual.

"P-Pardon my rudeness!" she said. "Then, um...are you, um, aware of the training schools we have here in the royal capital? Anybody is welcome to attend. You can receive training in the six basic class branches from first-rate instructors and develop new skills for—"

"Yes, I know about them. I've trained at every single one, and those are the skills I have."

"Huh...?!" she softly exclaimed, but her surprise only lingered for a brief moment. "Pardon me. Please hold on for a moment."

She was back to flipping through her booklet. After going through it several times over in search of whatever she was looking for, she looked up at me apologetically.

"U-Um, then, I'm sorry to tell you this, but..."

"I can't register as an adventurer?" I asked. I'd expected as much.

"I'm...afraid not. You don't meet the minimum requirements set by the Guild. I'm really sorry..."

"No, it's okay. You don't need to apologize."

I'd already known that my skills weren't enough to register as an adventurer. The girl looked relieved, but that quickly changed when she heard my next words.

"I'd still like to register as an adventurer, though. Is there anything you can do to help me?"

The girl glanced frantically between me and the training manual, her hands beginning to quiver. She had already been on the verge of tears, but now her face was flushed red. Had my request really been that bad?

"I guess not, huh?" I said.

"Um, um, but, um... P-Please wait here for a moment!"

Just as I was starting to feel even worse for her, she leaped up from her

seat and dashed toward the back of the Guild.

“Muh-Masterrr!”

“What’s wrong, Aria?” came a voice from out of sight. “Hm? What’s got your face all red?”

“Um, you see, there’s a man who—”

From the sound of things, she was explaining my circumstances to this “Master” person.

After a short while, a large, grim-faced man lumbered out from the back. Though his expression was mild, his cheek and arms were marred by a number of sizable scars.

I blinked. I knew this man. Though there was more gray mixed into his hair now, his face sent a ripple of nostalgia through me.

“Hey now,” he said, “I can’t say I appreciate you making sport of our greenhor— Hmm? Who’re you? Haven’t seen your face ’round these parts before.”

He didn’t seem to recognize me. In fact, he probably thought I was some kind of shady character if the sharp glare he was giving me was anything to go by. However, seeing a familiar face had put me in high spirits.

“Hey,” I cheerily blurted out. “Long time no see.”

“Hrrm? Long time no what-now? I don’t know who you think you are, but—” He paused, placed a hand on his beard, then tilted his head at me. “Wait. Give me a moment...”



After examining me for a while, his face lit up in realization. “Well, I’ll be damned. You sure have grown. You’re that one kid from way back, aren’t you? Noor, was it?”

“That’s me,” I replied.

To my surprise, he’d remembered me. By name, no less.

The receptionist girl, who’d been anxiously watching our exchange, looked between us, a perplexed expression on her face. “Um, is this man an acquaintance of yours?” she asked the guildsman.

“Yeah. Something like that. You can leave him to me now, Aria. Go find some other work to do.”

“R-Right away!”

We watched as the girl moved to another counter and started helping the other visitors, then the man turned back to me, his cheerfulness at complete odds with his demeanor just a short moment ago. “Sorry about that. Remembering faces is supposed to be part of my job. That said, you’re nothing like how I remember. You hit a pretty big growth spurt, eh?”

“Don’t sweat it,” I replied, smiling. “It’s been over a decade. To be honest, I’m amazed you even remembered my name.”

“Ha! ’Course I remember. I couldn’t forget if I wanted to. One stint at a training school is rough enough for an adult, but a little kid comes along and sticks it out for an *entire* term at all six, and without learning a single skill to boot? You were the first to manage it, and you’ll be the last too. Then you up and vanished into thin air. Didn’t hear a word of you from nowhere, so I’d figured for sure that you’d kicked the bucket. What’ve you been up to this whole time?” He paused, scratching his head. “Actually, never mind. Forget I asked. Don’t mean to pry.”

He sounded curious about what I’d been up to since leaving the capital. I had no reason to keep it a secret, so I told him about how I’d returned to my home on the mountain and continued my training alone.

“What? You’re not seriously telling me you spent more than fifteen years training alone to get a skill, are you? I’ve never heard of anybody thickheaded enough to—” He stopped mid-sentence, seeming to reconsider. “Actually, I guess you really would do something like that.”

Then, somewhat hesitantly, he continued, “So...what skills did you get?”

“I didn’t get any,” I answered honestly.

Yes, in the end, I hadn’t learned any new skills. My instructors had

been right to tell me that I didn't have any talents.

"Well, that figures. Royal training school instructors don't get to where they are by looking pretty. People call this city the Adventurer's Holy Land, and even then, they're the best of the best. There ain't much they get wrong. I'm sorry to say it, but if they said you don't cut it, then, well...that's that."

"Yeah. I don't. I trained pretty desperately in my own way, but it was no use."

There's a certain feeling that passes through a person's body when they develop a skill; I'd found that out when developing my rudimentary ones at the training schools. But after leaving the royal capital, I'd never felt it again. In other words, I hadn't developed any new skills.

Still, all things considered, I was sure that I'd made a really good effort...

"Well, don't let it get to you," the guildsman said. "Not everything in life's smooth sailing. There are so many things you can do other than being an adventurer. But, wait...you know that already. So that makes me wonder, why did you come here? Don't tell me this registration form here on the desk is yours."

"It is. Despite everything, I still want to be an adventurer. I know I'm asking for the impossible, but isn't there some way to make it happen?"

"Hold on. You serious?" He frowned at me for a moment before shaking his head, resigned. "Fine, fine. I take my job seriously though, so you're getting the rundown from scratch."

Then, rubbing at the hair on his grizzled head, the guildsman began to explain.

"First things first: adventuring is a job for those after something high risk, high reward; those who are sure of their own abilities; and those who are just plain weird and get a kick out of danger. Sign up at your own peril. You'll make forays into areas inhabited by monsters, undertake reconnaissance of criminal hideouts, and, at times, even hunt down bounties. When it comes to adventuring, a profitable job is a dangerous one. Put differently, to be an adventurer is to break bread with death every day...but I guess you know that much already."

"Yeah," I replied, nodding. "I'm fine with that." I was already fully aware of everything he was saying.

"Well, long story short, adventuring is a job where you make a point of poking your nose into danger. As such, in the interest of protecting human

lives, a set of standards officially recognized by all guilds was established way back. We call these standards ‘ranks,’ and they were set up so there would be fewer idiots slipping up while trying to do the impossible and dying in a ditch somewhere.”

Saying that, he retrieved and then showed me an official rank chart from within the Guild receptionist’s desk.

Official Adventurer Ranks

S-rank (Platinum): Individuals recognized by the Adventurers Guild Association as being of extraordinary ability.

A-rank (Gold): Individuals recognized by officially designated institutions as being exceptionally capable and having notable accomplishments.

B-rank (Silver): Individuals recognized by officially designated institutions as being exceptionally capable and of amazing ability.

C-rank (Bronze): Individuals recognized by the Adventurers Guild Association as being capable and of excellent ability.

D-rank (Iron): Individuals who are of excellent ability as an adventurer.

E-rank (Beginner): Individuals who are of the minimum ability required to become an adventurer.

“As a general rule, there are only five adventurer ranks: A through E,” the guildsman said. “S-rank, or Platinum, does exist, but it’s an honor reserved only for the most exceptional of outliers. Don’t pay it any mind. Now, normally, a person’s rank begins at E and rises up toward A as they complete successful commissions and gain recognition for their abilities...but for that to happen to you, you’ll first need to be recognized as someone who’s ‘of the minimum ability required to become an adventurer.’ Only then can you become an E-rank—a Beginner.”

His explanation sounded familiar; I vaguely remembered hearing it from him as a child.

“Now,” he continued, “the official requirement for starting out at the bottom, E-rank, is that you have at least one useful skill. By all rights, it’s a pretty lax requirement”—he paused—“but I suppose it’s a pretty big stumbling block for you. Still, since it stands at pretty much every guild in every nation, not just here in the royal capital, my hands are tied in terms

of what I can do for you. Sorry.”

Looking apologetic, he scratched at his head.

“I see,” I said. “I guess there’s nothing I can do, then.”

Maybe it was finally time for me to call it quits and grow up. I’d known in my head that this was how things would turn out. To be honest with myself, I’d only really come here to make sure of what I’d been told as a kid.

Despite that, though, it was still a huge blow. Until now, I’d always lived with my sights set on becoming an adventurer. Knowing that it was impossible didn’t make it any easier to change how I felt. Still, the impossible was called that for a reason.

“I guess I really will have to give up…” I sighed, my shoulders dropping as my mind went elsewhere.

The guildsman watched me silently for a while before he spoke again. “Well,” he said, scratching his beard, “if you *just* want to be an adventurer, then you might not be completely out of options.”

My head jerked up reflexively. “There’s a way?”

“I wouldn’t say there *is* one…but I can’t really say there *isn’t* either.”

“Tell me. Please.”

He let loose a small sigh, then slowly said, “As I explained earlier, you don’t meet the requirements to become the lowest rank of adventurer, E-rank. But, strictly speaking, there’s actually a rank lower than E.”

“Lower than E?”

“Not many know about it, even among those of us who handle these matters. It’s an irregular position called F-rank, otherwise known as Novice. Beginner is generally considered the lowest, but Novice is even lower. It’s a special rank that only exists here in the royal capital. Since it has no stipulations about needing any kind of skills, you can register as a Novice even as you are now. Still—”

“I…I’ll do it!”

Before I’d realized it, I’d thrust myself over the counter in excitement. I knew it was childish of me, but still, I couldn’t contain myself. Tiny as it was, I’d just been given new hope.

“Calm down and hear me out first,” the guildsman said. “The important part comes next.”

“Okay.”

“In practice, Novice rank might as well not exist, and there’s a reason for that: skills or no, anybody can register for it, yourself included. But it