

***The Adventurers Guild* series by Zack Loran Clark & Nick Eliopoulos**

Series containing the novels: *The Adventurers Guild*, *Twilight of the Elves*, and *Night of Dangers*

The Adventurers Guild series is a delightful and engaging middle grade fantasy series that will captivate readers with its rich world-building, lovable characters, and thrilling adventures in a setting reminiscent to that of a Dungeons & Dragons game.

Zed and Brock live in Freestone. It's one of the last cities to survive "The Day of Dangers", an event that happened over a hundred years ago when an evil wizard broke the barriers between plains, letting through monsters and unspeakable horrors which ravaged the world to ruin. Every year on the anniversary of that day, the guilds of the city choose new applicants to become apprentices, and this time it's Brock and Zed's turn.

Zed was born an illegitimate half-elven boy – the first in at least a hundred years – who lives alone with his mother in the Servants Guild. Being the only half-elven in a human city is enough to make Zed the butt of many jokes from both children and adults alike, as it is, but his best friend Brock (the son of a prestigious merchant family) won't let people get away with their pranks for long.

Zed has secretly harbored a desire to make it into the Mages Guild, a place where he can learn to harness the little bit of magic he knows he has, and gain importance and respect by helping to maintain the great Barrier that protects the city from its outside Dangers. However, even though the Mages Guild chose him as the first apprentice sorcerer since the Day of Dangers, his dreams are dashed when the Adventurers Guild invokes a draft and steals him away from the Mages Guild. In a (supposedly) selfless act of friendship and solidarity, Brock also volunteers for the Adventurers Guild, giving up the prestigious position with the Merchants Guild that he always wanted in order to support his best friend.

The Adventurers Guild is the least liked guild of them all. It's run by the fearsome Alabasel Frond – known as the Basilisk in whispers behind her back – and it's chock full of low-life criminals and people who would have been guildless. Or so everyone else thinks. But what many of the city dwellers don't understand is that the Adventurers Guild and its members are one of the last true protections the city has against the outside Dangers. Alabasel is a fearsome leader, but she's as loyal to the members of her guild as it's possible for a person to be. Sure, the guild runs a bit on the unorthodox side, but as Zed and Brock soon learn, unorthodox doesn't mean unorganized, and without the adventurer's guild, Freestone would soon cease to exist.

But Zed, Brock, and their new team of friends need to learn to harness their new abilities and work together quickly, because now Freestone is being faced with something new. For the first time in a hundred years, the magical barrier that protects the city from outside monsters is failing and no one seems to know why. The Mages Guild are doing all they can to keep the barrier in place, but nothing seems to help. If the barrier fades all together, then Freestone and its people will be sitting ducks for the monsters that roam and hunt just outside their walls.

And Brock knows something that even his teammates seem oblivious of: not every danger that Freestone faces is from *outside* the walls. Brock will do anything to protect Zed and his newfound powers from those who would exploit him, even if that means those same dangers exploit Brock instead. But can keeping such heavy and dangerous secrets from his friends and guild leader save the people he cares about most, or will it put them in even more danger than it's worth?

One of the standout features of this series is the detailed and immersive world that Clark & Eliopoulos create. The city of Freestone is vividly depicted, with its layers of society, intricate politics, and looming threat of monsters lurking just outside the walls. The world-building is both imaginative and well-

crafted, drawing readers into a world filled with danger and magic. Zed and Brock are also well-developed protagonists with distinct personalities and motivations that make them easy to root for. Their friendship is at the heart of the story, and watching them grow and face challenges together is both heartwarming and exciting. The supporting characters are equally well-rounded, adding depth and complexity to the narrative.

This series is fast-paced and action-packed, with plenty of twists and turns to keep readers on the edge of their seats. Clark and Eliopulos do an excellent job of balancing the quieter character moments with the thrilling adventure scenes. Full to the brim with themes in friendship, bravery, and standing up against injustice, this series will keep readers engaged right to its very end. The authors explore important themes of loyalty, teamwork, and the courage to fight for what is right, and he weaves these lessons seamlessly into the narrative, adding depth and emotional resonance to an already exciting adventure.

Overall, I feel that *The Adventurers Guild* series is a must-read for fans of both middle grade and adult fantasy, or just fans of role playing games. The series obviously took a lot of inspiration from RPGs, but I think it did it in one of the best ways possible, somehow managing to beautifully balance appropriateness for a younger audience, while also being engaging and well-written. The story and its world feels both immersive and exciting, and the world-building is such that it feels vast and intricate without feeling like that aspect of it needs to be expounded on – like, it's there and it feels huge and real, but we, as readers, don't need to know all the details of it in order to make it *feel real* to us. (Which, I might add, is a pleasant and welcomed surprise in comparison to some other fantasy series I've read in the past.)

There are many twists, turns, and unexpected revelations throughout the story that I think readers will absolutely enjoy to its fullest. I'd also say that this series is a great introduction to LitRPG for any young readers or adults who maybe want to immerse themselves in a story similar to their favorite game world or RPG campaign. It's an absolutely stellar series, and I hope the authors decide to expand on it someday with more books set in the same world!