

## Dungeon Jest: The Ruby of Power

**Andrew Snook**

FreisenPress (Feb 2, 2022)

Hardcover \$29.99 (248pp)

978-1-03-912972-6

*This loving homage to role-playing games is dialed-in, lighthearted, and knowledgeable, frolicking through familiar fantasy grounds with joy.*

In Andrew Snook's interactive fantasy novel *Dungeon Jest*, a wondrous realm is reimagined in rich detail.

In this title, the audience controls the moves that the hero, Stulty, makes—both via subjective decisions, and by rolling dice to reveal a situation's outcomes at random. Its central premise is that Stulty hopes to graduate from being a court jester; to do so, he has to find the Ruby of Power for the king and the queen. To do so, he avoids various instruments of his probable doom.

Following a series of comical misunderstandings, Stulty starts out with just his wits to help him. His success is reliant on his ability to accumulate helpful tools like a tiny spear, magic beans, and a vial of healing. He also has to fight monsters and make his way out of a labyrinth. Deadly traps and other perils abound; any one decision could result in his sudden death.

This loving homage to role-playing games is dialed-in, lighthearted, and knowledgeable, frolicking through familiar fantasy grounds with joy. The audience is called upon to make decisions for Stulty as he runs into vampires, orcs, and minotaurs; the roll of the dice is used to ascertain his levels of gore, skill, damage, and health, which determine whether Stulty will survive or not. The results are thrilling.

Stulty's adventures are brisk, piquing and holding interest throughout. Action dominates, with one adventure leading to the next. Most are compressed into a few pages. And while audience missteps result in abrupt endings for Stulty, they're all in good fun: it is easy to circle back and make another choice.

Happy endings to Stulty's perilous journey are all the more satisfying because they are rare, while gory endings (Stulty is variously incinerated and put on a spit) abound. Even the latter are handled with jocularly, though: Stulty is encouraged "not to soil your pantaloons," even when facing his own certain demise. At one point, he attempts to distract a dragon with a puppet show; elsewhere, he is given an option to whack an adversary with a sack of manure.

Lavish illustrations infuse the proceedings with additional whimsy. They show Stulty tip-toeing past a sleeping giant and encouraging a cyclops baker whose cupcakes are sprinkled with eyes. Their more familiar depictions, as with a muscular blacksmith forging weapons on an anvil, are injected with absurdist twists: a massive tuft of hair pokes out from the blacksmith's armpits as he raises his hammer, reinforcing the book's irreverence.

*Dungeon Jest* is an entertaining interactive adventure through familiar role-playing lands.

JOSEPH S. PETE (April 12, 2022)

*Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a*

*positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.*