



Jester

Brielle D. Porter

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In Brielle D. Porter's novel *Jester*, a girl's ambition to possess real magic and outrun her family's past threatens to consume her.

Terraca's city of Oasis is glutted with magic, and its many magicians are all competing to be the next court jester. No one wants the title quite as much as seventeen-year-old Lisette, an illusionist with no actual magic. Lisette makes the jester's motto, "Death before boredom," her own.

Through Oasis—a fantasy analog of Las Vegas—the novel uses magic as a means to explore the roles of privilege and money in people's quest for validation. The city's heart is equal parts corrupt and theatrical. Many of its inhabitants are born performers who drive themselves to the brink of exhaustion to do what they love. But no one loves the high of an audience more than Lisette—or is hungrier for adulation and the ability to possess what they cannot have.

The world's magic is also complex. Real magic is heritable and can only be possessed by one person at a time. Usually passed down within families, it has a singular, unique way of manifesting, but no practical limits. Then there's stage magic: the illusions and sleight of hand that can be mastered by practice, and whose only limits are the practitioner's imagination and ability. As a non-magical performer, Lisette's stage name is Mirage, and her main competition is Luc, a magician whose family magic gives him power over death. More than just an enemies-to-lovers trope, the relationship between Luc and Lisette generates a powerful commentary about the tensions between talent and skill, and between people-pleasing and self-knowledge.

The thrilling fantasy novel *Jester* situates an ambitious girl at the crossroads between drive, ambition, and an intact sense of self.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (July / August 2022)

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