

The young Harlequin stared into the distance. All around him was marble, an altering chessboard of black and white. He tried to make out what was the valley and what were the hills, but he became sick, as the optically impossible shapes disoriented him so much he had to shut his eyes. And when he did, he felt the faint figures in the distance peering right into his deepest anxieties.

Suddenly, a warm hand grasped his shoulder. A voice said, “Well, son, it’s your first battle, isn’t it? Don’t break formation. You remember the training- strike fear into your enemies’ hearts. Stay as still as possible, becoming an unwavering statue, and cast such an illusion so that when they see you move, they start to question their own sanity...”

Bruffin recognized that voice. It was the General speaking to him. Feeling determined again, he opened his eyes and tried staring into the distance again. The figures were hazy, but he could make out the white wisps of light surrounding them. They looked like clowns, with big white ruffles on their collar, mounted on wooden horses and holding thin diamond shaped spears in their hand. They stood motionless, poised for something he could not even guess or wrap his mind around.

Bruffin was overcome with a mixture of fear and confusion, but in the back of his mind, there lurked admiration. He, too, needed to channel his greatest fears into reality- he needed to become the apparitions he could not explain, so that the enemy could feel what he felt at this very moment. Knowing that, like him, the enemy’s soldiers could only see faint outlines of his own army, the young soldier relaxed, and braced himself to stand very, very still. ‘Become a statue’ he slowly thought to himself, over and over again. And gradually, with every one of his movements becoming more and more still, he did. From then on, he could only hear silence.

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The ‘toy resembling reality’ trope is meant to cast mystery. If it’s overused, it may become a gimmick. But this story will overuse this trope. The surprise and novelty ISN’T that the reality has become that toy. The reader must expect that the character’s memories about their toys will show up in some way as reality. But the surprise is HOW it shows up. It should be novel and paralyzing. It’s not always “that toy resembles this person I meet.” In one case, it’s “I didn’t expect that making these toys move this way would be the cause of my eventual demise”. In another, it’s “that toy was always supposed to be something I feared, but it turns out it was something protecting me, and now I’ve gone and betrayed/killed it.”

Paralyzing horror is best done when things are still unexplained. Explanations are given that seemingly satisfy everything, but then things come along to contradict them. The reader thinks they’ve gotten something all figured out, that everything is safe, but there’s an underlying current that it’s not. Is that clown in the memory actually the character itself?

This psychological horror is too hard to try to write now, so forget about trying to induce it. Just use it to decorate the world’s styles. Later, you can revise it to actually induce it.

All the memories are tied to one another. Underlying them are multiple explanations that characters don’t want to be uncovered. Tragic deaths or rewards await them. You must actually

write in rewards for characters, so the reader doesn't know if that memory is good or bad. The rewards are often bittersweet.

One clown may lead a child to finding their family, but that same clown may cause the family to become insane and abandon that child. There is always a 'good clown', but it eventually turns bad.

The clowns are exaggerated parodies of people. One is always grumpy, and struts along like a fat lard. Another is a sad clown, who keeps on begging people to let her in the house, but people constantly shut her out. It's unknown what happens if she's let in. When a character does, 2 separate paradoxical events happen. Was that clown actually rocking the baby back and forth and calming soothing it? The character finds this clown- dressed in a beret, black stockings, white gloves, a panda-like face, messy orange hair- sitting next to the furnace cradling the child. The character tries to smile, but she feels a creeping fear that something bad is happening. The clown looks at her, grins creepily and puts her white glove finger to her mouth, saying "Shhhh". This happens several days. The character's husband is not home, as he's traveling for a business trip for a while. Each time the character sees this scene, she waits until the clown leaves, then picks up her infant and rocks her to sleep again. But something feels wrong. One day, the husband finally returns home. The wife remarks to the cradled infant, "look, Papa is home." As the fire flickers against the darkness, the character's husband, in the distance, turns and sees the scene. He starts screaming like someone trying to wake up from a nightmare but cannot, and rushes to the clown, grabbing her. The baby is dropped, and in the confusion, no one knows what happened. The clown starts wailing in an inhuman cry, not saying a single word, only wailing. The wife rushes up and asks what's happening- the husband, his face fearful and near tears- can only stammer out that he saw the child wasn't theirs, that it had a strange face. It was a doll, not even alive. He fears his wife has gone mad, and the clown has tricked them.

The wife rushes to the dropped infant, and for a second, hesitates to pull back the white cover, but hearing its screams, she uncovers and sees her real child. She screams at her husband, saying he's wrong, but the husband insists the child is a doll, and screams at the clown to say where the real child has gone. The wife stops it. The couple lives in a distant place, with no neighbors, so no one else can say what is actually happening, except the maid. But while they were arguing, the maid had already left.

The rest of this storyline details how the wife cares for her son, whom she believes is a real human, but she constantly has doubts and thinks she's living in an illusion. The husband decides he has to leave the house to get others to convince his wife that she's in an illusion, and has to find the maid too, and also calls officials in the nearest town to try to come and deal with the situation. The wife protects the clown and the husband fears there will be violence if he steps in between. He thinks his child is lost, and has to find a way to find him.

When the husband returns, he and all the town officials find the child is now a human again, but the wife believes he's a doll. In confused agony, he goes to find the clown, and cannot. He walks back to his house, but along the way, he sees a carriage pass by him in the other direction. He fears something insidious inside. When he turns to look at it, he sees that same clown peering at him

from inside the carriage, and she creepily grins. He screams at the carriage to stop, but as he runs towards it, it ignores him. He then recognizes the carriage as his friend's, and screams at it to stop. But he got into an argument with his friend earlier, because he became paranoid and accused him of being bad, which the friend (a jolly old, bearded person) wasn't. Even before the incident, the two good friends got into scuffles that made them drift apart. The friend said he was now on a journey to help others, especially the downtrodden and misunderstood. Now the friend fears the husband and speeds up slightly- as the man runs towards the carriage, it speeds up more and more, and he cannot catch it. The clown is never seen again in the entire story, nor is his friend.

He returns to the house, and all the officials have left. But now the wife has gone mad, and doesn't know what to trust. She runs away with her wooden child, and the husband is left alone. As she leaves, he begins to hate himself about how he doubted her even though he knew what he saw, but then he finds something horrifying that she left behind. In one of the hidden basements, he senses something inside. When he goes towards it, he sees something wrapped in that infant's white blanket. He opens it and finds the back of a dead infant, but its face has disappeared, so he does not know what it even is- is it his son? But something horrible must have happened that allowed whatever it is to get inside. In paralyzing horror, he drops it and runs away from the house, running as far as he can. He does not know if that was his son or not.

In the next part of the story, the husband, whose name is Thomas, keeps on seeing eerie women cradling children in alleyways, and wonders if that's his wife and 'child'. When he approaches them, they turn out not to be, and he's always relieved. But after meeting Antony and in the middle of this story, Thomas tries to ignore one of them by looking away, and this time, it's singing a tune he feels he heard before. It's the lullaby his wife used to sing to the child. He approaches this figure, but one of his companions, an old woman seer, tries to drag him away. He tries to get her off but she casts a paralyzing magic on him and he stops. She says, "it may be your wife, but you cannot see. It may be dangerous. I am old and my life is near its end; let me do it for you." She grabs a music box playing a locket that's playing the same lullaby, and opens it. The woman in the alley hears it, stops, then starts singing along to it in sync. The old woman approaches that cloaked figure, and when she lifts her cloak, the husband cannot see the face but the old woman screams, and both figures disappear, leaving only behind the cloaks. The magic halts and Thomas runs towards the scene, and finds only his music box on the ground. Thomas picks up the infant's clothes which were left behind, as they may hold answers to what happened.

This woman was actually Tabby's grandmother, who knew a hidden link between the Kingdoms and Fionna's toys. She worked to deal with clowns and watched many die when investigating them, but she herself always persisted. Also, Tabby's grandmother is how Fionna and the rest become connected to Absolone and Gallilea.

Before this incident, Thomas stumbles his way to find Antony, and begs him to help him by writing a play to explore what actually happened. To do so, they need more evidence from the other side. Thomas and Antony must journey together to return to the house so Antony could try to ask the Pagliaccios what happened in the house, as they have all the answers related to paradoxical events. They kidnap one and bring him along, but when they do, they find out they haven't been

traveling to the house at all, but have been stuck in a toy world the whole time. Thankfully, Absolone has been looking the whole time for Antony (who has agreed to help him with sorting out the whole mess about the infant doll), and he manages to ask the Pagliaccio to play a game with him, which he wins by a small margin and frees Antony and Thomas. Absolone is annoyed with Antony, but upon hearing Thomas's backstory, he gains sympathy and realizes the two plays they are writing are very similar- what happened to Thomas may be what happened to the Queen of Spades's child. Realizing Thomas may hold answers, Absolone agrees to help track down the wife, Theresa. Tabby's grandmother keeps on insisting all of them to stay away from the cloaked figures, and especially away from the house, but Thomas is prepared.

Don't use this, but modify it for another storyline: [But when they make it back to the house, they see it's not there anymore. They look at the toy model that the Pagliaccio had made- it's not even a real representation of reality, just the clown's "own, nice little neighborhood" and sees the house there. Down below, Thomas sees that sad clown traveling inside. She looks up at him, and shushes. But no one else can see that clown]

Gallilea knows plays can give answers, as they show the facts of what actually happens, that others cannot see, and also lessens bias. If an event is not paradoxical, it's known the truth will lie in the play somewhere- it's solvable. The issue is the Pagliaccios only agree to this seer power only if the play becomes an allegory- the truth can only be learned through metaphorical interpretation of the play. Since many interpretations can be constructed, it's hard to know which truth is right. Plays were meant to resolve bias and clear up wrong facts, but with the advent of knowing that paradoxical events have always existed, who is meant to be right? These issues only add on to the issue of interpretation. Gallilea sought to train scholars to find the 'right' interpretation. They would compare interpretations to find which one scientifically held the most to what was known, and question interpretations and assumptions. Pen's Refuge believed playwrights have sacred abilities where the truth is hidden in their subconscious, and thus it's sacred to interpret the play in the way the author's subconscious intended. Once the author realizes the subconscious, he/she can confirm that's the way the play intended. Unfortunately, relying on author's word can lead to corruption, as the author can lie. Nonetheless, both these Kingdoms asserted there was a single truth in all these plays, which is why they're allied.

Now, if an event was paradoxical, there could be not just 1, but 2 or more truths. Florenzifani's branches believe either all these truths must be judged by their level of validity, or none should be judged for it's fruitless to try to reel in subjectivity into objectivity. Moderate branches of Gallilea and Florenzifani like the 'multiple truths, but not all truths, are right' approach, while extreme Florenzifani sects are completely postmodern. Some even advocate that real life events should be treated as interpretations too, written by some unknown force (perhaps the Lullaby children?) They claim that paradoxical events are just different interpretations of an 'unreachable' reality clashing with one another, and that life is just an allegory of that reality.

After seeing what happened to Tabby's grandmother, Thomas calls off the journey. Now they have the infant's clothes; it may be enough. Antony consults with the Pagliaccios about what happened. He begins crafting a play based on what they tell him. Antony decides this is a tragedy, one with

misunderstood characters, but upon showcasing the play to a rather large audience, it becomes a story centered around the sad clown, showing all the times she was shut out of life. Thomas did not shut her out- he did not even meet her before the fireplace incident. The allegory play describes a human child who is trying to find her family, but cannot. Indeed, at the end, it doesn't even touch upon Thomas and his family directly- but the characters must interpret this play to try to find how they all fit in.

Thomas, Antony and Absolone all have different interpretations. Absolone's interpretation is biased to discovering what happened to the Queen of Spades. It leads him on a journey where he defends Florenzifani against Gallilea, inciting calls of 'betrayal' that Absolone was always too biased to admiring the Queen of Spades and is defending her out of bias (which could be true). This leads one of the lords to backstab Absolone. At first, it seems it's Cormen, but then Absolone found it's not and Cormen defends him.

Antony becomes angry at the Pagliaccios. Antony is actually a clown-human mix, and is severely disfigured. Unlike the other mixes, who are physically, mentally and/or psychologically damaged, Antony was raised by Pagliaccios to become one of them, but decides to leave them to pursue his creative side instead. He feels the Pagliaccios have always detested him for this. Antony struggles with this and eventually ends up writing plays not in the name of the Laughing Pig, but similar to them, to go against several playwrights he has grudges against. Realizing that those playwrights were right too, he decides to become more Florenzifani (this is before succumbing to the Laughing Pig entirely; before, he just touches upon it) to help the world. He later becomes more like the Laughing Pig (this logo is nicknamed by others, and ANYONE can be branded 'laughing pig like' if they commit acts to sabotage writer's intent or moralistic intent that benefits society. However, for the sake of interesting things, there IS a laughing pig. We just never, ever have a storyline from a member's perspective. We never learn who is a member of it, or see any of its members.) Antony goes back and forth between those 4 schools, and hardly touches the other two schools, which he seems to enjoy but shys away from simply because he disagrees with them at his core. Another playwright, Gertrude, DOES encounter all of them intimately.

After near brushes with death, Thomas survives to the end. He always sees cloaked figures, but never approaches them anymore. He never hears that song again, but at the end he finds Tabby's orphanage and starts to care for the children alongside other workers, finding the courage to sing to them that lullaby song so he can put this to rest. He occasionally hears 'stories' about the sad clown, and traces of her are found, but he does not pursue this.

Some chapters are third person but from 1 character's perspective, the rest are first person. Thomas's backstory focuses mainly on Theresa, then only describes what he feels towards the end.

The plays were a promise into absolute truth. Gallilea had championed an age of rationality, away from the fringe cults and oppressive Suit Kingdoms, but now it was clear paradoxes exist, which pure Gallilean philosophy cannot deal with. Florenzifani sees Gallilea as a noble, but outdated, philosophical school. Pen's Refuge was not an offshoot of Gallilea, but started as a bunch of disgruntled playwrights who felt no one was taking their idea of their own subconsciousness

seriously, and that the plays- their creation- were being wrestled away from their care after their birth. Haleidolei, Florenzifani and Metaphorum are all based on more relaxed views. Haleidolei still deals with serious matters of how to live life, but they believe in living according to subjective emotions, not reason, which can be shared and understood by others to create closer bonds between naturally disparate souls. Florenzifani believes life should be led by reason, but that there is not just 1 interpretation, but multiple subjective ones. Metaphorum is completely detached from mortal life- it only cares about reveling hedonistically in plays. Instead of using plays to better mortal life, they believe life is about living in plays.

Rhiiia is not an actual clown, nor is she a hybrid; she's one of many actors who aspire to be like the Pagliaccios, but these actors are often just used by the Pagliaccios in the plays and there's something missing about them which prevents them from being like them fully. Pagliaccios seem to bend the rules of reality, and seem to only express a few archetype emotions their entire life- sad clown, sadistic clown, etc. To become like them, these actors must devote themselves to letting go of their true emotions. Ironically, they must develop empathy to act differently, while clowns do not have empathy. Rhiiia struggles with this.

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Unborn child

Several of the main characters are disfigured: Antony, Maximillian, Shiane, Bruffin, Jody, Ritadel, Florenzifani's Queen of Hearts. Maximillian, Jody and Ritadel are severely and mentally disfigured.

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While Wonthos leads a fringe cult because he's driven by his own biases, there are also many lords in Gallilea who are power hungry and either do not care for upholding Gallilean ideals, or do. Absolone is an example of the latter. Vacquell is a Gallilean lord, a Duke of Hearts, who only cares about power. A former playwright from Pen's Refuge, he tricks Gallilean members into gaining power to the stronger Kingdom, and he seeks to conquer the Amphitheater so that he can rain his 'beautiful, exquisite' ideas onto the people. He's self centered and believes he's an unrecognized revolutionary genius. Indeed, his moderate ideas- a mix of Gallilean and Florenzifani- are wise, but he lacks a desire to help others.

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(perspective) characters so far:

1. Fionna
2. Tabby
3. Shiane
4. Tristiain (Halei)
5. Absolone (Gall)
6. Antony (Pen's)
7. Gertrude
8. Maximillian

9. Jody
10. Ritadel
11. Theresa
12. Thomas
13. Vacquell (Gall)
14. Charlot (Floren)
15. Hilda
16. Bruffin (Floren)
17. Mgon (Halei)
18. Florenzifani's Queen of Hearts
19. Tivvaka (Floren)
20. Tgar (Gall)
21. Rhiia (Gall)