



THE  
CIRCUS  
FREAK

**THE CIRCUS FREAK**  
BEHIND THE IDEA

# HISTORY

One of my earliest memories of puppetry was playing with an Indonesian marionette of an elephant in my grandparent's basement. It had very limited movement and wasn't what you would typically call a child's toy, but I loved it and spent many afternoons at their house figuring out the intricacies of operating a marionette puppet.

That early fascination in the world of puppetry led me down a rabbit hole that I would never leave. In my freshman year of college, while taking a puppetry class, we were given a task to create a character both on the page, but also through a head-sculpt. What emerged was the idea of a clown who gets kicked out of the circus for being a freak.

That character turned into my senior thesis presentation which was an immersive theatrical performance that featured circus acts, shadow puppets, original music, and 3 bunraku-style puppets bringing the world of the Freak to life.

While that show was short-lived, the story that was created has lived on in the hearts of everyone who saw it. It was a story of friendship, belonging, and the existentialist query of finding one's true purpose in the world. What happens when you are rejected from doing the thing you were literally created to do? How can you overcome that oppression to thrive in your own world?

-David Fertik  
Creator / Designer



Photo Credit: Paola Noguerras



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# CHALLENGE PROMPTS



## **Depth and Richness of Storytelling: *Does it entertain, thrill, and excite?***

This world and story benefits from having lived once before as a theatrical presentation that had to rely on the power of its narrative. The audience before was only able to be a passive participant, but now with the entire world brought to life, audiences have the opportunity to explore a place of wonder and then be put through a literal ringer in order to defeat the Ringmaster.

## **Emotional Resonance: *Does it move people to act?***

What started as a tale of belonging evolved to contain elements of commentary on social structures behind big business, and individuality. It's important to think about how to inherently survive in a system designed to crush you, and how you need to unapologetically be yourself at all times - especially if it inconveniences those who put you there in the first place

## **Design Innovation: *Does it push the boundaries of what's been done before?***

The ride dares you to interact with the world around you by letting go. It includes elements of circus, escape rooms, puppetry shows, and live interactive theatre in a dark ride format that is typically designed for patrons to sit back. It combines clowning and adventure narrative into something bold and new.

## **Creative Use of Materials: *Does it find new ways to use old tools and design methods?***

Dark rides have been around for decades, but by combining this traditional technology with new trackless vehicles, and innovative theatrical techniques, we can create a wholly unique experience unlike any other dark ride in the world. It takes industry standard processes and folds them on itself to create a layered narrative ride which moves you through the story, as opposed to letting it simply happen to the patrons.

## **Executability: *Is it doable?***

Everything from puppeteers in close proximity with patrons to trackless ride vehicles moving up and down on elevators is out of the realm of possibilities. From a financial standpoint, we would be able to accommodate 48 patrons per "round" of the experience, with each experience lasting approximately 9 minutes. We would then be able to accommodate just under 200 people per hour.

## **Ecological Compatibility:**

### ***What's the impact on the area where the project would be installed?***

The layout and configuration of this ride presents us with enormous flexibility. These 3 factories can be configured in a number of different ways that would allow us to repurpose buildings that have been forgotten or utilize land that has been brushed aside around the country and bring our version of the circus to town.

# EXTRA TIDBITS

This idea is something that we've never seen accomplished before. A unique combination of circus, puppet show, immersive theatrical performance, escape rooms, and dark rides all in one. It's the exact kind of experience that we know we want to explore.

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Thinking about other immersive theatrical performances like "Sleep No More", the entire world of the Ringmaster is ripe for extra-curricular activities that can happen not only in the circus tent itself, but also in the courtyard and throughout the queue experience. Circus performers can be wandering around juggling and performing magic tricks for guests, buskers can be playing in the corner of the lot, carnival game and food vendors can be set up to welcome guests. The options for expanding the footprint of this experience are limitless.

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Inside this world, it gives everyone a chance to be free and to be themselves. It shows the power of standing up to authorities that want you to fit in to be accepted. It proves that even if you feel rejected by your own community, you can find strength in knowing that your uniqueness is what makes you important and special.

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Certain parts of this experience aren't shown in the ride through, such as the Freak helping the kidnapped guests escape by using an admit one ticket (the very thing that got them captured) as the spark that lights off a distraction against the Ringmaster. This is where the script comes in. Since this is a heavily narrative based experience, we wanted to treat it as any other theatrical performance and make sure that we based every decision off of a solid script.

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As a part of the ride, we wanted to make sure that every attendee has something that they can take home as a souvenir. In this instance, to help make sure that everyone starts to fit into the image that the Ringmaster has in his head, every guest of the circus receives a red clown nose once they've been kidnapped.

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The full ride system at the moment is 100% accessible and would be wheelchair friendly. Since all of the ride vehicles would be stored in the basement outside of the intake center, we would have a dedicated wheelchair accessible version of the ride vehicle. The entrance and exit of the ride are located on ground level making transport easier for anyone with limited mobility.

