

ORIGINAL CONCEPT — FINLEY MURRAY

STRINGS OF CONTROL

A derelict marionette theatre has started advertising shows again. You have come to watch one.

CONCEPT PACKAGE • DRAFT 01





**EVERY SEAT
IS TAKEN.
ONE OF THEM
IS YOURS.**

THE BILL

The posters went up last week. The theatre has been shut for years — but the posters are new, the doors are open, and a warm voice is telling you where to sit.

The guest arrives as an **audience member**, holding a ticket to a show that is genuinely about to be performed. The route to their seat runs the length of the workshop, through every stage of how a marionette is made, **in order**.

By the time they reach the auditorium the Puppeteer has stopped calling them the audience.



ACT ONE

THE THEATRE

Abandoned long enough to rot, and recently taken over. Something in the building has started making puppets again — and has started advertising.

ACT ONE — THE WORLD

THE POSTERS ARE NEW

It answers the question every attraction has to answer — **why is this person here?** — without a word of exposition. The guest is not trespassing, not investigating, not lost. **They bought a ticket.**

The building is open because it wants an audience, and an audience is raw material.

It also gives the façade its entire job: a derelict, rotting theatre frontage with brand new, clean, brightly printed bills pasted across the whole of it.

NO PERIOD

Deliberately timeless — no telephones, no switches, no printed dates, no vehicles, no era-specific costume. Gaslight and candle where light is needed. This is the one attraction in the portfolio with no period at all, which means it can sit in any park in any territory without a single change.

TWO AGES OF DIRT

Abandoned long enough to rot, then reoccupied. The old damage, and the new work laid over it: fresh sawdust on rotted carpet, clean tools on a ruined bench.



Zone 1 — the Rotting Vestibule. A fallen chandelier with candles burning in it where it lies, and a rack of marionettes where the cloakroom should be.

ACT ONE — THE PROCESS

THE ROUTE IS A PRODUCTION LINE

The six zones are not rooms. They are the six stages of making a marionette, walked in order by a guest who does not realise they are on a production line until it is far too late.



ZONE 1

ARRIVAL

Stock is delivered.
You hand over your ticket.



ZONE 2

SIZING

Timber is measured and cut to a body.
You are looked at, and assessed.



ZONE 3

JOINTING

Limbs are given their joints.
You see what jointing costs.



ZONE 4

STRINGING

Control lines are attached.
You walk through the strings.



ZONE 5

FINISHING

The face goes on.
You watch someone stop being a person.



ZONE 6

PERFORMANCE

It performs.
You take your seat.

NEVER EXPLAINED

The route does not announce itself. No signage, no exposition, no reveal scene. The guest works it out somewhere around Zone 4 — **and the realisation is the scare.**

ACT ONE — PALETTE

NOT ONE COLD COLOUR

There is **no blue, no green, no daylight and no electric light** anywhere in this attraction. Every light source is flame, candle, oil or gaslight.

It makes this the warmest-looking maze in the portfolio and the most unpleasant, and **those two facts working against each other is the art direction.**

Gesso Bone #E3D9C4 Cracked paint, faces, raw timber	Gilt #C9A227 Proscenium, frames. Tarnished, never bright	Warm Timber #6B4A2F Everything structural
Blood Velvet #6E1218 Curtains, seating, the auditorium	Sawdust #D6BE8F Floor, air, light	Varnish Amber #B5762A Zone 5, and every practical light

MATERIALS

Carved and turned wood, gesso, horsehair, cord, canvas, iron eyelets, varnish, sawdust, moth-eaten velvet, cracked gilt, water-stained plaster.



Above — the finishing bench. Faces laid out in rows, blank timber at one end and glass eyes at the other.



Above — the cutting patterns. Drawn full size, and the shape of a person.

ACT TWO

THE WORKSHOP

Sawdust, timber, tools and patterns. Four zones of being made into something, walked in the correct order.

ACT TWO — RUNNING ORDER

SIX ZONES, ONE LEVEL

ZONE	SPACE	STAGE OF MANUFACTURE	WHAT IS IN IT
—	Façade & Queue	—	New bills on a dead theatre
01	The Rotting Vestibule	ARRIVAL	Front of house, decades gone. A rack of marionettes
02	Sawdust & Sizing Room	MEASURING · CUTTING	Benches, patterns, a person with lines drawn on them
03	The Articulation Ward	JOINTING	Lathe, vices, racked limbs, straps worn smooth
04	The Tangled Rigging	STRINGING	Dense hanging cord. Things hang in it
05	Varnish & Paint Vats	FINISHING	Open vats, drying racks, a bench of faces
06	The Master's Stage	PERFORMANCE	A full house, and the fly tower above it

ONE LEVEL, ONE DIRECTION

No branching, no choice, no backtracking. The guest is moved along a line at a set pace, which is exactly what happens to stock in a workshop. The route's rigidity is the theme.

WHERE THE RESTS ARE

Zone 1 has no scare at all and Zone 3 holds on a single figure. Everything else escalates. A maze with no rests has no scares.



FAÇADE



01 VESTIBULE



02 SIZING



03 JOINTING



04 RIGGING



05 VARNISH



06 STAGE



ZONE 01 • ARRIVAL

THE ROTTING VESTIBULE

~40S FRONT OF HOUSE NO CAST

Swollen carpet, torn flock wallpaper, a collapsed box office, a fallen chandelier lying broken across the floor with candles burning in it where it lies.

THE BEAT — NONE

The voice welcomes the guest, and it is genuinely warm. Where the cloakroom rail should be, forty marionettes hang tangled on hooks at head height.



ZONE 02 • MEASURING

SAWDUST & SIZING ROOM

~50S SAWDUST FLOOR STAGE 0 & 1

Benches, saws, calipers, timber to the ceiling, sawdust ankle-deep. Body patterns pinned across the back wall.

THE BEAT — THE ONE THAT IS BREATHING

A rack of hanging marionettes, all identical, all wooden. **One of them is a person**, hung on a hook in the same posture and costume, with measuring lines drawn on their face.

ZONE 03 · JOINTING

THE ARTICULATION WARD

A treadle lathe, bench vices, mallets, drawers spilling wooden ball joints and iron pins. Carved limbs racked along the wall by size, sorted like stock.

It is not a hospital. Nothing about it is clinical except the word — somebody has started calling a workshop a ward, and that is the disturbing part.

THE BEAT — IT ASKS FOR HELP

On the bench, a person whose limbs have been amputated at every joint and rebuilt in wood. Their face is completely untouched and entirely human. The straps are unbuckled. It is reaching for the guest.

GENERATIVE AI USED FOR CONCEPT VISUALISATION

ZONE 04 · STRINGING

THE TANGLED RIGGING

A real backstage rigging passage, hung floor to ceiling with control line, cord and wire on their pins — some racked tidy, most fallen and knotted together in masses.

Near-zero visibility. Single file, walking pace. Dense enough that the guest is **pushing through it** rather than walking past it.

THE BEAT — THINGS HANG IN IT

Marionettes are caught in the lines throughout, at head height and above, limbs at wrong angles. At least one of them is not a marionette, and it moves as the guest passes.

GENERATIVE AI USED FOR CONCEPT VISUALISATION



ZONE 05 · FINISHING

VARNISH & PAINT VATS

Open vats of amber varnish, drying racks of figures hanging glazed and wet, faces laid out on a bench in rows. Strong fumes, honey light, everything sticky.

THE BEAT — GOING QUIET

A figure lowered into the vat on a chain hoist, hanging by the hooks in its shoulders. One half of its face is still skin and screaming; the other half is already glazed hard and shining, that eye already a glass bead, that side of the mouth sealed shut mid-scream.

The most upsetting moment in the attraction, and it is entirely silent. This is the one room where the voice stops talking.

GENERATIVE AI USED FOR CONCEPT VISUALISATION



ACT THREE

THE STAGE

The guest reaches the auditorium, and the auditorium is full.

ZONE 06 · PERFORMANCE

THE MASTER'S STAGE

The guest enters the auditorium from the back and walks down the centre aisle. **Every seat in the house is occupied by a seated puppet**, all facing the stage. The curtain is up. The lights come on hot and blinding.

Puppets drop from the fly tower on bungee cords over the guests' heads.

THE HEADS TURN

Simple motors in the necks of the seated puppets, so a portion of the house turns to follow the guest down the aisle. Cheap, entirely practical, and **the strongest image in the attraction**.

GENERATIVE AI USED FOR CONCEPT VISUALISATION

ACT THREE — THE CAST

THE CONVERSION

Every wound in this attraction is a **manufacturing step** rather than an act of violence. That is what earns the body horror its place — and it maps directly onto the zones.



STAGE 0 • ZONES 1-2

STOCK

A genuine marionette. Carved wood, hinged, lifeless. Not a performer at all.

Dressed identically to Stage 4, so the guest can never be certain which figures are props and which are breathing.



STAGE 1 • ZONES 2-3

SIZED

A person, marked up in carpenter's pencil — rule marks, every joint circled, dotted cutting lines, a numbered tag tied to the wrist.

The first cut has been made and pinned open. Fully conscious, entirely lucid, looking straight at you.

ACT THREE — THE CAST

THE CONVERSION



STAGE 2 • ZONES 3-4

ARTICULATED

Limbs amputated at every joint and rebuilt with wooden ball joints nailed into the stumps, skin peeled back and tacked to the timber.

The face is completely untouched. It still knows exactly what it was.



STAGE 3 • ZONES 4-5

STRUNG

Iron eyelets driven through the shoulders, collarbones, spine and skull, with control lines rising into the dark.

The body hangs from its own wounds. It moves only when the strings move.

ACT THREE — THE CAST

THE CONVERSION



STAGE 4 • ZONES 5-6

FINISHED

Varnished and sealed — including all the damage, still visible under the glaze. Painted face, carved smile, glass eyes.

No distress whatsoever. It is finished, and that is the horror.

THE RULE THAT MAKES IT WORK

Stage 0 props and Stage 4 performers are dressed and finished identically. A rack of forty hanging marionettes contains one that is breathing, and the guest has no way to tell which. Every room in the attraction uses this.

ACT THREE — THE PUPPETEER

A VOICE, AND NOTHING ELSE

Never seen. Never sourced. Never explained. Warm, friendly and welcoming — and commanding and stern at times. A theatre manager who is pleased you came and will not tolerate being interrupted.

It addresses the guest as **the audience** throughout, and increasingly as **the next project**, without ever changing tone.

IT IS A RECORDING

Played from speakers above the guest. It cannot respond, it cannot improvise, and it never reacts to anything that happens.

Which means it was recorded before the guest arrived. The show already has a script, their part in it was written in advance, and nothing they do will change a word of it. The warmth is pre-recorded. So is the sternness.

SOUND

- **The bed.** An old building. Timber ticking, rope creaking under load, something wooden knocking somewhere else in the dark.
- **The signature sound: wood on wood.** A marionette's joints clacking. It should be what the guest hears before they see anything, in every zone.
- **A wind-up mechanism** through the workshop zones — a music box movement, slightly slow, running down and being wound again.
- **A theatre organ** in the auditorium. Full, warm, slightly out of tune. The wind-up is the maze; the organ is the show.
- **Dead air in Zone 5.** The one room where the voice stops talking.

SCENT

Pine, sawdust and varnish, zone by zone. Almost no attraction designs smell deliberately.

HOW IT GETS BUILT

CORRIDORS AND BOO HOLES

Every space in this package is drawn as it would actually be constructed: a guest path roughly a metre and a half wide, full-height walls so nothing beyond is visible, and a sightline that stops within a few metres. What reads as a room is a corridor with a façade along it.

SIGHTLINES

Every jog and blind corner shortens the sightline. That hides the next scare — and lets groups be dispatched closer together, which raises throughput. **Sightline control is a capacity decision as much as a creative one.**

BOO HOLES

An actor standing in open floor cannot scare anyone. Each position is built into the scenery: a gap behind a bench, a shadowed alcove, a panel ajar, a corner boo just past a turn.

RESET

Every position must let the performer pop, retreat and be back before the next group arrives. Seconds, not minutes.

RIGGING

The finale needs a fly tower, rated anchors and harnessed performers. Zone 4 needs every line tested for free movement before each show.



Above: the Articulation Ward drawn as built — the path squeezes past the bench, racked limbs break the sightline, and a dark opening sits beyond.



Above: the Tangled Rigging — the hanging lines are themselves the sightline blocker, and performer positions sit within them.

DESIGN REFERENCES

BUILT FROM REAL PLACES

Every set here starts from a real, photographable building and a real object. The design is not invented out of horror — it is invented out of carpentry and architecture, and then something is let into it.



R1 • STAGE 0

Antique carved faces in warm low light. The rack in Zones 1 and 2.



R6 • THE JOINTS

The ball-joint construction the entire conversion is based on.



R2 • SCALE

A large figure handling a smaller one — the relationship the finale inverts.



R3 • ZONE 6

Seat rows and the true state of an abandoned house.



R4 • ZONE 6

Ornate boxes and tarnished gilt. Two ages of decay in one frame.

WHY R6 IS THE IMPORTANT ONE

A marionette's ball joint is a beautiful, ordinary piece of woodwork — turned, socketed, designed to move. The whole attraction is that object being fitted to a person who is still awake. The horror is manufacturing, not magic.

SCENIC & SCOPE

WHAT GETS BUILT

DECISIONS THAT PAY FOR THEMSELVES

- **No period.** Nothing dateable anywhere, so no era-specific sourcing, no vehicles, no signage — and the attraction exports to any territory unchanged.
- **Stage 0 is a prop, not a performer.** Racks of real marionettes cost nothing to staff and do half the work, because the guest cannot tell which are breathing.
- **One material palette.** Timber, gesso, cord, canvas, iron. A single scenic shop can build almost the entire attraction.
- **Motorised heads** in the finale seating: a small motor per neck, no performer, and the strongest image in the show.

THE ATTRACTION

FORMAT	Walkthrough house, Universal / HHN scale
ZONES	Six, single level, plus façade and queue
DWELL	Approx. 5 minutes
HIGHEST COST	Fly tower, rated anchors and bungee rigging for the finale
ALSO SIGNIFICANT	Zone 4 — thousands of individually hung lines, tested before every show
SCENT	Pine, sawdust, varnish. Designed, not incidental
CHEAPEST ROOM	The Rotting Vestibule. No cast at all, and it sets the entire tone
STATUS	Blue sky · original IP



STRINGS OF CONTROL

Original concept, story, design and art direction
Finley Murray
Concept Package · Draft 01

IMAGE CREDIT

Concept imagery in this document was **generated with AI** from original written design direction by the author, and is marked as such throughout. The images visualise the design; they are not the design. Story, world, route, cast, art direction and build logic are original work.

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