

Your life on stage

Brendan Lloyd PhD, September 2023, r:02

What's going on? Why do I feel this way? What's wrong with me? What do I need to do? Ever had ideas like this? A lot of questions I know. It could be universally said that "not knowing" is the worst form of distress.

How can we know the unknown; it seems that life is pretty well full of unknowns. What we need is some way to picture life in our minds so that we can make sense of it. If we have that feeling of distress, we need some way to get back on track. We need the mind-skills to work it out. Storytelling can help us to build useful models in our minds that can keep us on track.

This is your life on stage: There you are sitting in your theatre seat. It's a live show and you have the perfect seat centre house. You have a good view.

Let's say that the show is your life. Interestingly it's the same for all the people in the audience. Let's say it's a full house. Everyone in the theatre is there to view their life.

The show in front of you progresses through the minutes, hours, days, and years of your life. You sit there in your seat and you watch. As you watch an usher is patrolling up and down the aisle. She has a small touch and she is there to unobtrusively observe, to see how the audience, you, are getting on.

If the usher notices you sitting there in a distressed state she responds. She will shine her small touch in your direction and she will beckon you from your seat. You make your way past the other audience members over to the aisle.

The usher then takes you out through the side door of the auditorium, and out into the foyer. She then leads you to the Green Room door. You walk through the Green Room to the backstage area.

When you arrive backstage you take up a position stage-left (audience POV). There you are, standing in the wings. If you peek around the curtains, you can see the audience sitting in their seats watching their lives. Some are laughing some are crying. Some are excited some are bored.

When you look across the stage you can see through the action. You can see the stage manager's console on the other side, stage right. Behind the console, on the side wall, are all the ropes. The usher gives you a nudge to go and look at the ropes. You don't walk across the stage through the action. No, you walk behind the backdrop to stay out of view. You wouldn't want to ruin the show, would you?

"Ah, right," you say to yourself. You can see that all the effects are done with ropes, smoke machines, mirrors, sound effects, etc. From being backstage you can see how it all fits together. You can see how the scenery is flown in and out with the ropes. You can see that big scary monster just sitting idly in the back corner waiting for its cue. You look at the stage manager's console and you see that events are *triggered* by cues.

When you're satisfied that you've had a good look, the usher takes you back to your seat. Now you can sit there with some confidence. At least you know what's going on.

There you back in your seat, grinning at the stage when suddenly the big scary monster appears, seemingly out of nowhere. Naturally, you scream out loud.

According to the usher you have permission to react like that. One thing that you learnt backstage is that when you scream like that it's because you've seen something that's scary. Not all things are scary to everyone. Everyone has their own list of scary things.

Some things are scary for you. You have your list of scary things. You then remember a funny thing the stage manager said. He said that you'll never get to see that list unless you ask for it. *"What did he mean?"*

Backstage you saw how the scariness works. Backstage you saw all the special effects. You saw how the monster is flown in. You saw the sound effect machine that omits a noise like chattering monkeys. Also, backstage you saw the connection between certain cues (triggers), the appearance of the big scary monster and then that chattering sound.

According to the stage manager, when it comes to the appearance of scary monsters on the stage, your initial response is natural and forgivable. It's not your initial response that catches the attention of the usher. Your continuing distress is what caught her attention.

It's the awful sound of the chattering that keeps the distress alive. The chattering is all about the appearance of the monster and its bigness and scariness. It just doesn't seem to let up on the subject. It's like chatter-chatter in your head.

The chatter keeps your eyes focused on the area on stage where the monster appeared. It keeps you focused on the scariness even without the actual presence of the monster. What you really need to do, according to the stage manager, is to turn that chatter off. *"Yes of course"* you think to yourself.

So, when the big scary monster turns up again, you know what to do. You need to know how to turn the sound off. You can try to put into action what you learnt backstage. This is when you remember what the stage manager said about the special effects like the chattering sound.

He said that the special effects only apply to the action that has your attention. *"Oh, really?!"* you said aloud at the time. The stage manager smiled at you and said, *"Yes, really?"* You wondered what he meant.

You remember the stage manager smiling at you when he said, *"Ok, have you noticed how the monster makes an appearance and then he*

disappears very quickly?"

"Ah, sort of", you were a bit confused.

"Yes, it pops on stage, then it just goes back to its seat in the backstage corner. It leaves you with the chattering sound to make you believe that it's still there."

"Ah yes", you remember, the chattering sound stands in for the monster while it just sits around backstage doing nothing. There is something about that chattering sound. It's a clever special effect. It really makes you believe that the monster is still there. It keeps you focused on the spot on the stage where the monster made its appearance.

During your visit backstage at one point the stage manager had put his right hand on your left shoulder. He smiled as he said, *"The stage is a vast space. Everything is going on at once and it's all about everything and everybody."* He removed his hand gestured toward the stage and said, *"Yet, special effects only apply to audience members individually. What you see on stage is real for you exclusively."*

In other words, the monster as you see it will get your attention to a particular area on stage and then the special effect, that chattering sound, keeps your attention focused on that area.

The stage manager put it like this, *"there's plenty of action on stage all the time. All these different things happening all at the same time, it's all your life. You can choose to alter your focus anytime as you choose."* Or at least he said words to that effect.

You figure it out. The monster makes an appearance. It is scary. Then the monster goes backstage and the scariness continues. The scariness continues because of the chattering that get into your head. There is always more than one thing happening at any given point in time. You don't need to continue looking at the place where the monster was. You can instead focus on any other aspect of your life there on stage as it happens.

The last thing the stage manager said was that you could come backstage for another look anytime. He said that you might want to return to learn the monster's names. He said that

there were about 11 of them out back. Not all of them are your monsters, he said. The one sitting over there gets a lot of work. It calls itself *Imperfection*. They all have fancy names

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like *Self-Sacrifice*, *Abandonment*, *Abuse*, *Shame*, etc. “*I wonder what your favourites are?*” asked the stage manager. But that's another story.