

# Hop-Frog



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF EDGAR ALLAN POE

Edgar Allan Poe was the second child of Elizabeth Arnold Hopkins and David Poe, two traveling stage actors. His early life was tragic; Poe's father abandoned his family in 1810, and his mother died of tuberculosis a year later. The young Edgar was taken into the home of John Allan, a successful Virginia merchant who funded his education. Poe's relationship with Allan, his foster father, was alternately tumultuous and amicable; though he quarreled with Allan over his gambling debts in college, they later reconciled after the death of Frances Allan, John's wife. Poe's early writing was influenced by his brother, William Henry, who was an amateur poet. Poe began to publish his writings in 1827, but did not seriously pursue writing until 1831, when his brother died of tuberculosis and Poe was discharged from the military. Poe quickly gained recognition as a discriminating critic, and his short fiction and poetry were also modestly successful. Despite this, he struggled financially, as it was quite difficult to make a living through writing during this period. Poe died in 1849 under mysterious circumstances, which have been variously explained as disease, suicide, and murder. His posthumous influence was far-reaching; he is now regarded as the foremost writer of American romanticism, and his early translations into French had a profound impact on continental writing, too.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The fiery climax of "Hop-Frog" might have been inspired by the *Bal des Ardents*, a catastrophic event that occurred in January, 1393. At a masquerade ball held by Charles VI of France, the dancing men's flax costumes caught fire after the king's brother ill-advisedly carried torches into the ball and held one next to a masquerader. The fire quickly spread to the other masqueraders' costumes, resulting in all but two of the dancers burning alive. The graphic, visual details of the event are captured by several detailed illuminated manuscripts.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

"Hop-Frog" is primarily a story of revenge. Perhaps the best-known work of fiction that features a similarly elaborate and disturbing revenge plot is Poe's short story "The Cask of Amontillado." Like the jester dwarf from "Hop-Frog," the protagonist of this story commits a planned murder and escapes without punishment. The distant setting and exotic practices in "Hop-Frog" are also a recurring device in Poe's fiction. Poe's novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* is an account of sea travel that centers on a series of dangerous

lands and foreign practices. More generally, "Hop-Frog" and other works of fiction by Edgar Allan Poe are part of the American Romantic movement. Several works from this movement by writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville contain similarly dark and Gothic elements. Nathaniel Hawthorne's story "Young Goodman Browne," for example, is a narrative about an innocent man's striking encounter with his townspeople's corrupt nature.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Hop-Frog; Or, the Eight Chained Ourang-Outangs
- **When Written:** 1849
- **Where Written:** New York City
- **When Published:** March 17th, 1849
- **Literary Period:** American Romanticism
- **Genre:** Gothic Short Story
- **Setting:** A castle in a distant land
- **Climax:** Hop-Frog suspends his tormentors above the ground, sets fire to them, and escapes through the skylight.
- **Antagonist:** The king and his seven ministers
- **Point of View:** Third Person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Literary Revenge.** Many have speculated that "Hop-Frog" and "The Cask of Amontillado" represent Poe's attempt at written revenge on his enemies. After Poe spurned the romantic affections of Elizabeth Ellet, a writer living in New York, she and other members of a New York literary circle extensively gossiped about Poe, claiming he had committed many improprieties. It's possible that Poe meant for the king to represent Ellet in the story, and for the ministers to represent her various complicit associates.

**Antagonistic Critic.** Poe was an outspoken, frequent critic of the acclaimed Bostonian poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Longfellow's friends fiercely defended his works from Poe's critical attacks in a sequence of events that was later called the "Longfellow War."



## PLOT SUMMARY

The narrator describes a king who lives only to joke. [The king's](#) seven ministers are, like himself, committed jokers. They even resemble him physically—fat and oily. The narrator supposes that there is a connection between corpulence and joking, given how often jokers are fat.

The king's humor is unrefined, and he prefers practical jokes to verbal ones. He, like other kings at the time, owns a jester who amuses him at court. The jester's name is [Hop-Frog](#), and he is a dwarf and crippled. The king delights at this confluence of traits, as he can laugh both at Hop-Frog's witticisms and his stature. In order to walk, Hop-Frog must perform a very strained movement; his upper limbs have considerable strength, however, and he can climb abnormally well. When Hop-Frog climbs objects, he resembles a squirrel or small monkey more than a frog.

Hop-Frog was taken from a distant country when the king's general conquered it. Along with a dancer girl named [Trippetta](#) from an adjacent province, he was given to the king as a gift. Due to her grace and beauty, Trippetta possesses influence that she uses to benefit her companion Hop-Frog. The jester, by comparison, has no courtly favor with which to gain benefits.

The king plans to hold a masquerade ball on a grand state occasion. Hop-Frog is inventive in designing costumes and characters, so he assists greatly with such events. On the night of the ball, the hall is elaborately set up in accordance with Trippetta's guidance. Every masquerader has a costume except the king and his ministers, who are presently indecisive. For that reason, Hop-Frog is brought in to assist them in choosing costumes.

The king is in poor humor and forces Hop-Frog to drink copious quantities of wine, a beverage that makes Hop-Frog unpleasantly mad. Hop-Frog is confused after drinking the wine and cannot suggest anything immediately. The king is angered and tells Hop-Frog to drink more, joking that he is sulky and must need more wine. Trippetta intervenes and implores the king to spare Hop-Frog. The king is stunned and unsure what to do, but eventually shoves Trippetta to the floor.

After a period of silence, there is a harsh grating noise which, unbeknownst to the king and his ministers, is the sound of Hop-Frog angrily grinding his teeth. Hop-Frog placates the king by saying he will drink as much as the king wants, and states that he has an act for eight people that will cause great astonishment. He calls it the "Eight Chained Ourang-Outangs," and it portrays a set of beasts that have escaped their captors. The king roars with approval and agrees to perform the masquerade act.

Hop-Frog equips the king and his ministers with tight-fitting flax and wax costumes. Then he chains them together. In the circular masquerade hall, a [chain](#) hangs from the skylight that would normally hold the chandelier. The chandelier is removed for this occasion, on Trippetta's advice.

The masquerade begins, and the king and his ministers wait outside until midnight. They burst in when the clock strikes and instruct Hop-Frog, who has the keys, to lock the door. A great fright ensues, and people rush to the doors. During the height of the tumult, the skylight chain descends to just a few feet

above the floor.

The king and his ministers eventually find themselves at the center of the hall. While Hop-Frog incites them to maintain the commotion, he attaches the chain binding them together to the chandelier-chain. Suddenly, this chandelier-chain is pulled upwards, hoisting the king and his ministers into the air. Hop-Frog leaps onto the chained group and announces, with a torch in his hand, that he will soon find out who they are. The chained group is pulled further upwards, with Hop-Frog on top of them. After a minute's silence, Hop-Frog produces the same grating noise with his teeth, but this time the audience knows it's him.

Hop-Frog pretends to scrutinize the king and his ministers with his torch and sets fire to the flax of their costumes. He climbs higher on the chain to avoid catching fire and then announces to the aghast audience that he sees clearly who the masked individuals are. They are a king who would strike a defenseless girl and the king's complicit ministers, he states. He declares, furthermore, that he is the jester Hop-Frog and that this is his final act, before escaping onto the roof through the skylight. The narrator explains that his companion Trippetta likely aided him from the roof and that neither was seen again.



## CHARACTERS

**Hop-Frog** – Hop-Frog is a dwarf jester who is captured during the conquest of his native country and sent to the king's court as a gift. At the beginning of the story, Hop-Frog is inclined to perform his role as jester dutifully; during his meeting with the king and his ministers, Hop-Frog calmly handles his abuse, attempting to help his tormentors with their costumes despite their cruel behavior. But when the king strikes his companion Trippetta, Hop-Frog's disposition fundamentally changes. Before, Hop-Frog used his inventiveness for humor, but now, he employs it for subversive, violent ends; he devises a brutal scheme and then executes it with Trippetta's help. So, though Hop-Frog performs his final fiery jest and escapes his bonds by his own wits, he is moved to do so only by the cruel acts of the king.

**The King** – The king is a sadistic joker who is aided by seven cruel ministers. The king wields significant power in his court and abroad; in the past, his generals conquered foreign lands and sent gifts to earn his favor. When he enlists Hop-Frog's help in designing a costume for a masquerade ball, the king unknowingly brings about his own demise by cruelly striking the defenseless Trippetta. Despite his frequent abuse of Hop-Frog, he expects only willful compliance from the jester, evidenced by his unhesitating approval of Hop-Frog's masquerade act. Even moments before his death at Hop-Frog's hands, he still believes that Hop-Frog is just performing his part in an astonishing act. Though the king's arrogance and naiveté prevent him from doubting his jester's intentions, his cruelty is the primary cause of his undoing.

**Trippetta** – Trippetta is a beautiful dancer who was captured in the province adjacent to Hop-Frog’s native land. Trippetta becomes very close to Hop-Frog after they are both placed in the service of the king. She frequently helps Hop-Frog using her considerable influence in the court, a service which he is unable to reciprocate. When Trippetta is struck by the king during a tense encounter, Hop-Frog plots an act of vengeance, possibly out of a feeling of indebtedness towards her. Trippetta assists Hop-Frog in the act by maneuvering the chandelier-**chain** from the roof and pulling the king and his ministers upwards. Following their act, she and Hop-Frog manage to escape to their native lands and are never seen again.

sense, the story also cautions against underestimating seemingly meek, subservient people.



### SUBVERSION, JEST, AND TRICKERY

In the story, the court jester Hop-Frog manages to get revenge on a sadistic king through elaborate, subversive trickery. Given his role as a jester, Hop-Frog is expected to use humor and hijinks to entertain the court—but as the story progresses, he uses tricks to undermine rather than appease the king. Given the king’s power and influence over his court, trickery is perhaps the only viable way for Hop-Frog and fellow servant Trippetta to retaliate—the king’s soldiers would quickly suppress an open revolt. In this sense, Hop-Frog must plan and execute his scheme very subtly in order for it to succeed: he fools the king and his ministers into wearing costumes he can easily set on fire and then burns the men alive. But this principle also holds true more generally with respect to Hop-Frog’s resistance: even before the jester plots his vengeance, he resists the king’s authority through subtly subversive humor and banter. When Hop-Frog is forced to consume wine for the king’s amusement, for example, he refuses to outwardly demonstrate the effects of the wine, instead acting aloof. Furthermore, he tries to think of a witty response to the king’s cruelty.

In a certain way, then, Hop-Frog’s fiery finale is consistent with his previous subversion. Hop-Frog is aware of this fact, seizing the opportunity to announce at the end of the story that this is his “final jest.” Thus, out of necessity, Hop-Frog has taken the very qualities that the king appreciates in him—jest and trickery—and used them to resist (and defeat) the cruel king. His final act of subversion is his most elaborate, vicious trick. By illustrating this development, the story suggests that humor and trickery aren’t just forms of entertainment. Rather, they’re viable modes of resistance to oppressive powers that can develop into profound forms of subversion and defiance.



### PHYSIQUE AND CHARACTER

Throughout the narrative of Hop-Frog’s revenge, there is particular attention given to physical features and how they inform characters’ behavior. At the beginning of the story, the narrator clearly suggests that there is a strong association between appearance and behavior, evoking the stereotype that fat people naturally like to joke. The narrator later reiterates his belief in the determining effect of body type when he explains that Trippetta (another court servant) is more popular than Hop-Frog because of their drastically different appearances. (Hop-Frog is crippled and has dwarfism; Trippetta also has dwarfism but is extraordinarily beautiful.) This suggests that a person’s appearance can affect not only how they act, but how other people treat them.

Descriptions of physique also function to foreshadow events in



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don’t have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### CRUELTY AND COMEUPPANCE

In “Hop-Frog,” court jester Hop-Frog and fellow servant Trippetta severely punish their cruel king. The king has essentially enslaved the two of them, and he uses them for his cruel amusement. For instance, he forces Hop-Frog to drink copious amounts of wine, even though drinking alcohol makes Hop-Frog feel distressed and almost crazed. When Trippetta tries to stand up for Hop-Frog in this situation, the king pushes her and tosses his own drink on her. Following these acts, Hop-Frog plots violent revenge on the king that reflects the tyrant’s own sadism: after tricking the king and his abetting ministers into performing a masquerade act that involves them being chained together, Hop-Frog and Trippetta burn the group alive.

Ironically, Hop-Frog and Trippetta are implied to otherwise be calm and good-natured: up until this point, they dutifully accept their tasks as slaves. Hop-Frog is resigned to his abuse, responding to the king’s questions and requests in an aloof manner. But when the king strikes Trippetta, whom Hop-Frog deeply cares for, Hop-Frog decides to punish his tormentors—a decision that’s signified by the previously unheard sound of Hop-Frog grinding his teeth. In this sense, a specific act of cruelty provokes the two servants to seek retribution, even though they aren’t naturally inclined toward violence. The resulting reckoning of the king is extremely brutal—perhaps even disproportionate in harshness to his cruel deeds. By illustrating this striking turn of events, the story suggests that there are inevitable consequences for cruelty: wicked deeds tend to provoke violent reciprocation, sometimes even from people who might otherwise be kind and mild-mannered. In this

the story. For example, the narrator notes early on that Hop-Frog has large, strong arms that enable him to climb well. This is a seemingly insignificant detail that ultimately matters a great deal, as Hop-Frog's plots to trap his victims (the king and his ministers) and escape using a chain that he can climb. The king and his ministers' portliness and oiliness also arguably represent such an instance of foreshadowing, as these qualities call to mind a plentiful, greasy source of sustenance—something that the king and his ministers ultimately serve as for the fire when Hop-Frog burns them alive. Instances like these, in which the story associates a visual description with an outcome or behavior, suggest that a body type can tangibly affect how one acts or is received by others. By observing and emphasizing this trend, the story suggests that physique can determine how we interact with our environment—and in this sense, our physique may have an impact on our character.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



## CHAINS

Chains symbolize the anguish the jester Hop-Frog experiences in his captivity. After Hop-Frog is forced to drink wine and his companion Trippetta is struck by the king, the jester plots revenge, aiming to subject the king to the same sadistic treatment. Hop-Frog's plan involves burning his tormentors alive while they are dressed in flammable costumes. His use of chains is fitting; his captors are shackled to their extreme punishment, just as he was bound to his profound suffering.

At the end of the story, Hop-Frog ascends a chain to safety, emancipating himself using a tool that once bound him. In this sense, though the chains symbolize Hop-Frog's captivity and anguish, they also symbolize a clear route to liberation; Hop-Frog breaks out of his figurative chains and turn the tables on his captors at the end of the story, liberating himself and exacting revenge in a single act.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Everyman's Library edition of *The Complete Stories* published in 1993.

## Hop-Frog Quotes

“ I NEVER knew anyone so keenly alive to a joke as the king was. He seemed to live only for joking. To tell a good story of the joke kind, and to tell it well, was the surest road to his favor.

**Related Characters:** The King

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 283

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the narrator describes the king's insatiable impulse to joke. The king's actions in the story can be explained almost entirely by his fixation on joking, as he appears to be motivated only by his urge to joke.

These first lines establish the importance of jokes to the story. The king, the main antagonist, is very inclined to joke. Consequently, he surrounds himself with other jokers. Although Hop-Frog, the protagonist, ultimately opposes the king and resists his authority, he, just like the king, is a committed joker, albeit one whose jokes are subversive. Naturally, as both Hop-Frog and the king are inclined to joke, the conflict unfolds as a series of unsavory jests: The king first subjects Hop-Frog to a joke that goes too far, and then Hop-Frog retaliates with his own trickery. Given the story's later twist, the phrases “alive to a joke” and “live only for joking” are darkly ironic and foreshadow the king's comeuppance.

“ About the refinements, or, as he called them, the 'ghost' of wit, the king troubled himself very little. [...] Over-niceties wearied him. He would have preferred Rabelais' 'Gargantua' to the 'Zadig' of Voltaire: and, upon the whole, practical jokes suited his taste far better than verbal ones.

**Related Characters:** The King

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 283

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the narrator explains that the king's humor is crude and that he favors practical jokes to verbal ones. The narrator associates the king with the vulgar satire of French writer Rabelais over the philosophical writings of Voltaire. The king's preference for vulgar practical jokes explains many of his actions during the story. Hop-Frog

manages to convince the king to partake in his masquerade act by appealing to his preferences: Hop-Frog explains that his act is a prolonged practical joke that would frighten women. The king is so delighted by this confluence of things he enjoys that he immediately agrees to perform the act, resulting in his brutal death and the success of Hop-Frog's plot.

The sadistic personality of the king can also be explained to some extent by these preferences. The king's frequent cruel deeds are often rude practical jokes that he performs for his amusement. He torments Hop-Frog with alcohol, for example, because he views the act as a humorous prank, seemingly without regard for how much distress he causes Hop-Frog.

●● But although Hop-Frog, through the distortion of his legs, could move only with great pain and difficulty along a road or floor, the prodigious muscular power which nature seemed to have bestowed upon his arms, by way of compensation for deficiency in the lower limbs, enabled him to perform many feats of wonderful dexterity, where trees or ropes were in question, or any thing else to climb.

**Related Characters:** Hop-Frog

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 284

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage is from the narrator's descriptions of the story's important characters. It describes the physical characteristics of Hop-Frog, the dwarf jester and protagonist of the story. Hop-Frog has deformities of the lower body which prevent him from walking normally, but he also has an unusually strong upper body, seemingly by way of compensation.

The passage foreshadows the details of Hop-Frog's plot, the climax of the story; the narrator conspicuously notes Hop-Frog's arm strength and suggests that he could dexterously climb just about anything, a fact that later becomes relevant when Hop-Frog quickly climbs up the chandelier-chain and sets the king on fire. The story emphasizes these details of physique for both Hop-Frog and other characters, often foreshadowing how they might choose to act as a result. By demonstrating that these characteristics determine the tools that are available to characters, the story suggests that physique profoundly impacts the inclinations and

choices of its main agents.

●● It happened to be the poor dwarf's birthday, and the command to drink to his 'absent friends' forced the tears to his eyes. Many large, bitter drops fell into the goblet as he took it, humbly, from the hand of the tyrant. 'Ah! ha! ha!' roared the latter, as the dwarf reluctantly drained the beaker. – 'See what a glass of good wine can do! Why, your eyes are shining already!'

**Related Characters:** The King (speaker), Hop-Frog

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 285

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the king cruelly forces Hop-Frog to drink wine, a beverage which makes him unpleasantly mad, after he summons the jester to help him create a masquerade act. Hop-Frog obliges at first so as to avoid being severely punished by the king.

The personality of the king is made much clearer by this passage. The king is motivated to perform sadistic acts on his subjects not primarily by wrath, but by his twisted sense of humor. The tyrannical behavior of the king is a product of his general interest in pulling mean-spirited practical jokes. The narrator explains just before this passage that the king chooses to torment Hop-Frog because he is in a bad mood. The king acts cruelly in this episode presumably with the intent of cheering himself up. More generally, the king's obsessive oppression of his subjects is likely fueled by an interest in amusing himself—suggesting he's a terrible king and a character undeserving of readers' sympathy.

●● Hop-Frog also laughed although feebly and somewhat vacantly. [...]

"I am endeavoring to think of something novel," replied the dwarf, abstractedly, for he was quite bewildered by the wine."

**Related Characters:** Hop-Frog (speaker), The King

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 285

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hop-Frog, confused by the alcohol the king has forced him to drink to excess, aloofly responds to the king's request for an idea for a masquerade act. Hop-Frog does not immediately produce a suggestion due to his inebriation, angering the king, who then forces him to drink more wine.

Hop-Frog's behavior in this passage reveals that he is poised despite his captivity and mistreatment. Instead of responding to his torment with justified anger, Hop-Frog placidly answers the king's questions. The jester's behavior in response to his own abuse contrasts starkly with his attitude when, a little later, Trippetta is struck. Whereas at first Hop-Frog is cool-headed and poised, after Trippetta gets hurt, he becomes violent and enraged. The passage suggests, then, that Hop-Frog can accept the king's abuse calmly when it only affects him, but when someone he cares about is abused, he's motivated to inflict an extreme punishment on the king and his ministers. Thus this quote establishes Hop-Frog's normal temperament, which readers will be able to contrast with his shocking behavior in the second half of the story.

Hereupon the dwarf laughed (the king was too confirmed a joker to object to any one's laughing), and displayed a set of large, powerful, and very repulsive teeth. Moreover, he avowed his perfect willingness to swallow as much wine as desired.

**Related Characters:** Hop-Frog, The King

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 286

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hop-Frog placates the king by first laughing at his suggestion that it may have been Hop-Frog who made the harsh grating noise (actually him grinding his teeth), and then agreeing to consume as much wine as the king desires. Hop-Frog shrewdly responds to the king's concern with reassuring remarks so as to mask his intention to retaliate.

In this quotation, the transformation of Hop-Frog's disposition is evident. At the beginning of his confrontation with the king, he responds tranquilly to the king's abuse, but once the king strikes Trippetta, he becomes enraged. He reveals his anger in the immediate aftermath of the event by accident by grinding his teeth, but then manages to quickly cover it up: Hop-Frog asserts that the noise was not him and

then chats agreeably with the king. The transformation of the jester's attitude between the beginning and end of his confrontation is stark; Hop-Frog appears resigned to his abuse at first, but his anger prompts him to act shrewdly and manipulatively. This passage anticipates Hop-Frog's strikingly different behavior later in the story.

Soon after this, the king and his seven friends having reeled about the hall in all directions, found themselves, at length, in its centre, and, of course, in immediate contact with the chain. [...] The dwarf, who had followed noiselessly at their heels, inciting them to keep up the commotion, took hold of their own chain at the intersection of the two portions which crossed the circle diametrically and at right angles. Here, with the rapidity of thought, he inserted the hook from which the chandelier had been wont to depend[.]

**Related Characters:** The King, Hop-Frog

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** Hop-Frog

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes the way Hop-Frog lures the king and his seven ministers into a trap during the masquerade. In order to execute his scheme, Hop-Frog has the group tied together with a chain, ostensibly as part of their act. Then, during the masquerade, he moves them around in a particular fashion, inciting the watching crowd, so that he can sneakily attach the chains connecting the group to the chandelier-chain. Once the men are attached to this fixture descending from the skylight, he can hoist them into the air and perform his spectacle.

The extent of Hop-Frog's resourcefulness is revealed in this passage. The jester coordinated with the king and his ministers to lock the doors, knowing that when the masqueraders reach the edges of the hall, they will leave the costumed group at the hall's center. He also coordinates with Trippetta to have the hall's chandelier-chain lowered at a crucial moment so that he can attach the king and his ministers.

Though Hop-Frog's elaborate scheme is ultimately successful, one would assume that a less conspicuous, more subtle method of killing the king would have a higher probability of success. Hop-Frog clearly intends, however,

for the king and his ministers to participate in their own undoing, as he chooses to involve them in the decisions which lead to their death. In this sense, it would seem that Hop-Frog desires for his final act to be a subversive practical joke on the joke-loving king, and not only an act of retaliatory violence.

“I now see distinctly” he said, “what manner of people these maskers are. They are a great king and his seven privy-councillors,—a king who does not scruple to strike a defenceless girl and his seven councillors who abet him in the outrage. As for myself, I am simply Hop-Frog, the jester—and this is my last jest.”

**Related Characters:** Hop-Frog (speaker), The King

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 289

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this passage, Hop-Frog announces his motives for brutally murdering the king and his ministers. After he attaches the bound king and seven ministers to the chandelier-chain and hoists them into the air, the jester pretends to examine their features with a torch. He then sets fire to the bound group in front of the horrified audience of masqueraders.

Hop-Frog clearly intends for his final act to be a spectacle; instead of burning his unsuspecting captors outside of the hall or using a less conspicuous method such as poison, he chooses to prepare an audience and then kill his tormentors in dramatic fashion. It's evident that Hop-Frog desires for his revenge to have the form of a practical joke—here, he announces that his scheme is in fact a jest. It seems, given this pronouncement, that Hop-Frog aims to retaliate in a way that is befitting of his title as jester. The unprecedented cruelty of Hop-Frog's actions suggests, moreover, that he desires for this final act to reciprocate, and even exceed, the sadistic conduct of the king.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## HOP-FROG

The story's narrator describes a king who is unusually fond of jokes. The king seems to live only to perform jokes, and because of this, his seven ministers are accomplished jokers too. They, like the king, are "large, corpulent, oily men." (The narrator observes that jokers are often fat.) The king's humor is vulgar and unrefined, and he prefers practical jokes to verbal ones. At his court, he has a "fool" (jester) named Hop-Frog, who is both crippled and a dwarf. The king delights at the fact that Hop-Frog has deformities, as he can laugh at both Hop-Frog's features and his witticisms.

Hop-Frog received his name as a result of his inability to move around normally: in order to walk, he must perform a movement that resembles both a leap and a wiggle. His strained movements endlessly entertain the king. Though Hop-Frog's legs are underdeveloped, his arms have sizable muscles and considerable strength. The narrator observes that Hop-Frog's immense dexterity makes him resemble a monkey or squirrel (far more than any frog) when he climbs trees or ropes.

The narrator doesn't know exactly where Hop-Frog came from. One of the king's victorious generals forcibly carried him off from a distant region and sent him to the king. A young dancing girl from an adjacent province named Trippetta was sent along with him as an additional gift. The two captives quickly became sworn friends. Due to her beauty and grace, Trippetta has great influence in the court and uses her power to benefit Hop-Frog when she can. Hop-Frog, by contrast, has no power to help Trippetta.

*The story is, from its first lines, quite fanciful—it concerns a comically fat king who lives only to make jokes. The potentially unreliable narrator relates many details of the king's appearance and personality, heightening both the extravagance and fairy-tale-like quality of the story. The first lines of the story also suggest the thematic centrality of cruelty; the narrator describes the king's twisted enjoyment of the jester Hop-Frog's deformities, unambiguously characterizing him as a twisted tyrant. They also establish the story's emphasis on the relationship between physique and character—that is, a person's physique is an indication of their character (like the fat king's love of jokes) and can also impact others' treatment of them (like Hop-Frog's deformities).*



*The narrator describes Hop-Frog's physique at length: both the distinctive movement Hop-Frog must perform due to his lower body's deformity, and the immense potential of the jester's upper body. These are further examples of the story's emphasis on the impact of physique on behavior. In this passage in particular, the narrator emphasizes that, though Hop-Frog's lower limbs are feeble, his upper body gives him considerable adaptability while climbing, a conspicuous observation that foreshadows the jester's future actions.*



*The narration reinforces the story's fanciful tone here. The story ostensibly takes place in an odd country which conquers distant neighbors and sends back curiosities as spoils. The narrator again emphasizes the determining role of physique on one's character, noting the differing influences that Hop-Frog and Trippetta have and explaining it in terms of physique: Hop-Frog is a deformed dwarf and has little influence despite his frequent courtly activity, while Trippetta is a beautiful dancer and wields considerable influence as a result.*



The king plans an elaborate masquerade for a grand state occasion. Hop-Frog has a talent for inventing characters and arranging costumes, so he assists greatly with such events. On the night of the occasion, Trippetta has elaborately decorated a hall. Everyone has decided on their costumes, apart from the king and his ministers, who can't decide. They send for Hop-Frog and Trippetta as a last resort.

The king is in a bad mood and, as a practical joke, forces Hop-Frog to drink wine. Hop-Frog is overwhelmed almost to the point of madness when he drinks, and the king takes pleasure in observing his discomfort. The king tells him to drink to his "absent friends," causing him to cry as he grabs a goblet from the king. The king's ministers laugh at Hop-Frog once he drinks, joking that his eyes are shining with inspiration.

The king asks the maddened Hop-Frog to assist him in creating characters for the masquerade. Hop-Frog, confused because he's drunk, doesn't make a suggestion immediately. The king is angered and tells Hop-Frog to drink more, joking that he is "sulky" and must want more wine. Hop-Frog hesitates to drink, enraging the king, who then threatens him. But before Hop-Frog can be forced to drink more, Trippetta advances to the king's seat and begs him to spare Hop-Frog.

Trippetta's audacity stuns the king. He's briefly at a loss as to what he should do, but then he violently pushes her back and tosses the contents of his goblet at her. Trippetta withdraws and resumes her position at the foot of the table. There is then dead silence in the room for half a minute. Suddenly, a harsh and prolonged grating noise seems to come from every corner of the room. The king is alarmed and asks Hop-Frog why he is making that sound, but the jester quickly responds that it could not have been him.

A minister suggests that the noise came from a parrot outside the room. Hop-Frog laughs at the king's suggestion that it could have been the grinding of his teeth. He then says he's willing to swallow as much wine as the king wants, which pacifies the king. Beginning to plan for the masquerade, Hop-Frog says that just as the king threw Trippetta to the ground, he remembered a group act that people in his home country used to do at masquerades. It requires a company of eight people, he explains, and is called the "Eight Chained Ourang-Outangs."

*The elaborateness nature of the masquerade and the king's preoccupation with a suitable costume demonstrate the king's preoccupation with fun and jests. It appears these are the defining feature of his governance of the kingdom.*



*The precise nature of the king's cruel humor is demonstrated in this passage. The king's sense of humor is sadistic; he cheers himself up by watching his servant become more and more uncomfortable. This characterization makes the king quite unsympathetic, while readers are encouraged to sympathize with the suffering Hop-Frog.*



*The king doubling down on his practical jokes reinforces his sadistic characterization. Yet, despite the king's unforgivably abusive behavior, Hop-Frog responds calmly and without anger, as though the king's behavior is hardly affecting him. Perhaps Hop-Frog is lucid enough to refuse to give the king the satisfaction of an angry response. Regardless of Hop-Frog's exact motives, his behavior suggests his inner poise—and hints that he's got something up his sleeve.*



*The king's response to Trippetta's act is revealing; whereas his cruelty usually takes a joking form, his violence toward Trippetta shows that there is genuine rage underneath. The harsh grating noise is a strange detail—at this point, it's not clear where the noise came from, but it seems to be associated with Hop-Frog—and it's notable that everyone hears the noise right after the king mistreats Trippetta. These points will come up again later.*



*The shift in Hop-Frog's attitude during this passage is profound. Before the prolonged silence and the grating noise, Hop-Frog acted reservedly. But in this passage, Hop-Frog laughs and spiritedly appeases the king. The contrast between Hop-Frog's behavior before and after the incident with Trippetta suggests that the confrontation was a significant, perspective-altering event. The claim that Hop-Frog conceived of his masquerade act while the king threw Trippetta to the ground sounds far-fetched. At this point, readers should suspect that Hop-Frog is up to something.*



The king delights at the apparent coincidence that the act is for eight people, and that he with his group of ministers is a group of eight. He gleefully agrees to enact it. Hop-Frog explains that the act will frighten women (which makes the king roar in approval) and that he'll dress up the king and the ministers as "ourang-outangs" (orangutans) who have escaped from their keepers. Disguised as apes, they'll rush into the hall and disrupt the masquerade with "savage cries" and the sounds of their jangling chains. The group moves at once to execute Hop-Frog's scheme.

Hop-Frog equips the group with tight-fitting garments, which are then saturated with tar. He insists on covering the layer of tar with flax instead of feathers, in order to represent the beasts' hair. Finally, he ties a long **chain** around the king's waist and chains him to an adjacent minister, before doing the same with this minister, the next minister, and the rest of the group. He has the group stand as far apart from one another as they can, creating a circle, and passes the chain across them in two diameters forming right angles. (The narrator notes that this chaining method is how chimpanzees and other large apes are captured at the time.)

At Hop-Frog's suggestion, Trippetta removes the chandelier that normally illuminates the hall, as its waxen drippings could damage the guests' clothes. Counterbalanced by some other weight outside the room, it normally hangs from a **chain** that descends from a skylight. The king and ministers, dressed as orangutans, wait until midnight before rushing into the hall. They terrify the guests, tricking many into thinking that they are truly ferocious beasts of some sort. Many people try to flee from the room, but the king already ordered the doors to be locked and gave the keys to Hop-Frog.

During this commotion, the **chain** that normally holds the chandelier descends to three feet off the ground. The king and his ministers soon find themselves at the center of the hall, surrounded by a crowd. While encouraging the group to keep causing mayhem, Hop-Frog takes hold of the chain at the intersection of the two portions that span the chandelier's diameter. He attaches the hook from the chandelier chain to this portion of the group's chain. Then, an unseen force yanks the chandelier chain upward, pulling the group into a tight bundle.

*Hop-Frog clearly aims to appeal to the king's unsophisticated sensibilities with his ad-hoc and rather strange scheme—he explains that the act will be wild and frighten women. The king seems to completely trust his jester's scheme, despite Hop-Frog's disobedience only moments before this conversation. This trust, combined with the oddness of the scheme (and the fact that it just happens to be tailored to a group of eight), suggests that the king isn't very bright.*



*Hop-Frog intervenes during the preparation to ensure two main things: first, he makes sure that the costumes use flax, overruling a minister's suggestion that they use feathers. Second, he assumes responsibility for the arranging of the costumes' chains, preventing the king and his ministers from haphazardly tying themselves together. Given Hop-Frog's careful involvement with these two elements of preparation, readers should suspect that he has a specific outcome in mind. The third person limited point of view reinforces this suspense, as readers aren't given access to Hop-Frog's thinking.*



*The king presumably had the doors locked on Hop-Frog's instruction, given how closely the jester has been involved with the act's planning. The removal of the chandelier and the conspicuousness of the skylight-chain suggest that there's more to Hop-Frog's scheme than he's revealed to the king and ministers.*



*The chaos in the hall has clearly been orchestrated by Hop-Frog. The commotion he's stirred up serves as a distraction while he attaches the chandelier chain to the group's own chain, and it also ensures that the king and ministers have a rapt audience. At this point, readers should be reminded of the king's practical joke on Hop-Frog earlier in the story, when Hop-Frog was forced into a vulnerable position and humiliated in front of the king and his men.*



The guests recover from their alarm and begin to laugh at the orangutans' predicament. Hop-Frog seizes a torch from a statue and announces that he will find out who they are, then jumps on top of the group and climbs a few feet above them. He holds the torch in front of the group, pretending to examine their features. He then produces a shrill whistle, and the chandelier **chain** is violently pulled upward again, leaving the eight masked men suspended in mid-air.

*Hop-Frog's unusual upper-body strength, hinted at earlier, comes into play as he climbs the chain. It's evident that the spectacle is planned and not merely an opportunistic act, as Hop-Frog communicates with an accomplice who can respond to his signals. Hop-Frog has carefully plotted out this sequence of events, which first appears as a humorous practical joke. However, the violence with which the men are pulled upward, and their prolonged suspension in mid-air, suggest that this is more than a joke.*



The men's ascent astonishes the guests so much that there is a minute's silence. It is broken by the same grating noise that occurred previously. However, this time it's clear that the sound is coming from Hop-Frog's fang-like teeth. Glaring at the eight with a maniacal expression, Hop-Frog exclaims that he recognizes the people. Pretending to closely examine the group, he holds the torch close to their costumes, setting the flax on fire.

*The extent of Hop-Frog's resentment is revealed in this passage. He glares at the king and his ministers with unprecedented anger—in every previous episode, Hop-Frog has acted with composure. Shockingly, he sets fire to the group, an act which seems unthinkable brutal for a person who normally acts calmly and dutifully. It's now clear that the king's cruelty to Hop-Frog and Trippetta had a much greater effect on him than Hop-Frog ever let on, leading him to respond not simply with a joke in kind, but with a premeditated act of arguably greater cruelty.*



The group burns in a fierce blaze while the horrified guests stare and shriek. Hop-Frog climbs higher on the **chain**, so as to avoid the flames that are now spreading. The crowd once again falls silent. Hop-Frog seizes the opportunity to speak once more, stating that he now "sees distinctly" what sort of people the masked people were: they are a king who would strike a defenseless girl and ministers who would assist him in the act, he announces. He declares, furthermore, that he is Hop-Frog the jester, and that this is his final jest. By the end of his speech, the eight corpses are a black, indistinguishable mass. The jester hurls his torch down at them and disappears through the skylight. The narrator explains that Trippetta likely aided Hop-Frog from the roof, and that the two probably escaped back to their home country, as neither is seen again.

*Hop-Frog seizes the opportunity to act theatrically in front of the audience. Instead of immediately evacuating after he sets fire to his victims, he chooses to announce the crimes of the king as well as his orchestration of the king's and ministers' deaths. He commits to the pretense of his practical joke until the very end; Hop-Frog announces repeatedly that he must examine the intruders closely in order to make out who they are before he reveals their identities and his motive. Given these choices, it seems that Hop-Frog intends for his brutal retaliation to be a public spectacle. He is committed to using jest as the vehicle for his subversion, because he wants to one-up the king's cruel humor. In addition, it may be the case that retaliating with public trickery is cathartic for Hop-Frog: answering the king's comedic sadism this way gives him closure before he and Trippetta escape to his homeland. Readers are left to decide if Hop-Frog's revenge was proportional or not.*





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