



The night circus

By Erin Morgenstern

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Genre & subject

Magicians

Circus performers

Fantasy fiction

Synopsis

In 1886 a mysterious travelling circus becomes an international sensation. Open only at night, constructed entirely in black and white, Le Cirque des Reves delights all who wander its circular paths and warm themselves at its bonfire. There are contortionists, performing cats, carousels and illusionists - all the trappings of an ordinary circus.

Author biography

Erin Morgenstern was raised in Marshfield, Massachusetts and studied theatre and studio art. In addition to writing, she paints, mostly in acrylics. She signed with Inkwell Management after being rejected by thirty literary agents, and sold her debut novel in 2010. She has participated in National Novel Writing Month since 2003, and first wrote about what would become *The Night Circus* in November 2005. Morgenstern has since moved to New York City.

Discussion starters

- The novel opens with a quote from Oscar Wilde: "*A dreamer is one who can only find his way by moonlight, and his punishment is that he sees the dawn before the rest of the world*" How is this sentiment explored in *The Night Circus*? Who in the novel is a dreamer?
- The novel frequently changes narrative perspective. How does this transition shape your reading of the novel and your connection to the characters and the circus?
- The narrative also follows a non-linear sequence—shifting at times from present to past. How effective was this method in regards to revealing conflict in the novel?
- What role does time play in the novel? From Friedrich Thiessen's clock, to the delayed aging of the circus developers, to the birth of the twins—is time manipulated or fated at the circus?
- Chandresh is portrayed as a brilliant and creative perfectionist at the beginning of the novel, yet he slowly unravels as the competition matures. Is Chandresh merely a

puppet of the competition—solely used for his ability to provide a venue for the competition—or do his contributions run deeper?

- From the outside, the circus is full of enchantments and delights, but behind the scenes, the delicate push and pull of the competition results in some sinister events: i.e. Tara Burgess and Friedrich Thiessen’s deaths. How much is the competition at fault for these losses and how much is it the individual’s doing?
- Friedrich Thiessen asserts that he thinks of himself “not as a writer so much as someone who provides a gateway, a tangential route for readers to the circus.” He is a voice for those unable to attend the circus and suggests that the circus is bigger than itself. What role do the reveurs play in keeping the spirit of the circus alive outside of the confines of the circus tents?
- What is Hector’s role in determining the final fate of the competition? He lectures Celia about remaining independent and not interfering with her partner, but ultimately, Hector largely influences the outcome of the competition. Explain this influence.
- Poppet and Widget are especially affected by the lighting of the bonfire. How crucial are their “specialties” to the ongoing success of the circus?
- Isobel is a silent, yet integral, partner in both the circus and the competition. She has an ally in Tsukiko, but seemingly no one else, especially not Marco. How much does Marco’s underestimation of Isobel affect the outcome of the competition?
- How does Isobel serve as a foil to Celia? Who, if anyone, fills that role for Marco?
- Tsukiko is aware of Isobel’s “tempering of the circus” from the outset and when Isobel worries that it is having no effect, Tsukiko suggests: “perhaps it is controlling the chaos within more than the chaos without.” What, and whose, chaos is Tsukiko alluding to here?
- At the closing of the novel, we are left to believe that the circus is still traveling—Bailey’s business card provides an email address as his contact information. How do you think the circus would fare over time? Would the circus need to evolve to suit each generation or is it distinctive enough to transcend time?

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