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# The Night Circus



## Synopsis

The circus arrives without warning. No announcements precede it. It is simply there, when yesterday it was not. Within the black-and-white striped canvas tents is an utterly unique experience full of breathtaking amazements. It is called *Le Cirque des Rêves*, and it is only open at night. But behind the scenes, a fierce competition is underway: a duel between two young magicians, Celia and Marco, who have been trained since childhood expressly for this purpose by their mercurial instructors. Unbeknownst to them, this is a game in which only one can be left standing, and the circus is but the stage for a remarkable battle of imagination and will. Despite themselves, however, Celia and Marco tumble headfirst into love—a deep, magical love that makes the lights flicker and the room grow warm whenever they so much as brush hands. True love or not, the game must play out, and the fates of everyone involved, from the cast of extraordinary circus performers to the patrons, hang in the balance, suspended as precariously as the daring acrobats overhead. Written in rich, seductive prose, this spell-casting novel is a feast for the senses and the heart.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It's a rare book that can live up to advance buzz of the sort "The Night Circus" has been getting. I had read the author plugs, the publisher's notes, the touting of film deals, and I had wondered what could really be so special about this novel to justify the hoopla. Within a few pages, I found out. This book is MAGICAL. The publisher's blurb doesn't really do the plot justice. Here's a modified one: There are two illusionists, chosen at a young age to be bound to one another in a contest that will

span their lives until one wins. They have been given no rules, other than that they must perform in some way. They have no idea how one wins, or what one must do to win. Their sponsors in the contest create the circus as the arena for their players. One will travel with it, the other will not. Their story is interspersed with the perspectives of several other characters within or affiliated with the circus, all of whom enrich the plot and provide a deeper look at the workings of the circus and those it touches. I love the structure of this book. Too often a book with split narratives lingers too long on one or another of the characters, to the point that the reader forgets the other tale being told. Not with "The Night Circus". Most chapters are less than 5 pages long. Any character whose story you long to continue will return again soon. There are no boring narratives. Each is carefully constructed to yield more detail or nuance to the contest, the circus, or the sinister dealings of the competition sponsors. There are many two-page intervals designed to lead the reader through a tent or aspect of the carnival as if the reader were a patron on a tour. The prose is beautiful - not too verbose, not too simplistic. Morgenstern has the rare ability to describe her fantastical imaginings in a way that is easily accessible. Reading "The Night Circus", I felt like I could see the contents of the tents, feel the fluffiness of the cloud maze, smell the caramel wafting in the air, gaze into the pool of tears, smell the scents in the table of jars. The author makes her creation real. She does so so well that I think the film will be a disappointment - no production company could make real the fantastical things Morgenstern makes me picture in my head. The romance is gentle and slow-burning. There are no bodice-ripper sex scenes, no overwrought proclamations of undying passion. The romance between the two illusionists is a motivator of events, not the event itself. By sparing us the gory details, the author creates a fairy-tale atmosphere for her love story, a theme alluded to by several of the characters throughout the novel. This is a story about stories. Each character is equal parts vague and filled in. The reader never feels as if a character is fully revealed, but each has a magical quality nonetheless...like fairy tale characters. Morgenstern skillfully translates fantastical, fairy tale elements into a world where fairy tales are unexpected, and dull reality has taken hold (the book begins in the late 19th century in post-industrialized England where the population has seen magic disappear in a haze of coal burning factories and speeding locomotives - magic is now whatever we can mechanize in the name of progress). The author incorporates the 'seen it all' attitude of the people into her narrative - the people are mesmerized by a combination of magic and mechanics, illusions designed for their world. And yet the novel never devolves in 'steampunk' silliness. There is an air of timelessness that pervades every description, so that the circus can move from era to era untouched by the specifics of that time. The novel approaches what could conventionally be called its climax about 40 pages from the end. But Morgenstern has created so many characters, so many

different narratives to care about, that the resolution of the illusionists' contest has become simply one of many stories. I was grateful for the remaining 40 pages to tie together the other narratives intertwined with the illusionists' story. This was altogether a beautiful novel, and I was sad to see it end. Like the *rÃfÃaveurs*, I wanted to travel along with the circus for awhile longer.

To say I had conflicting thoughts on this book would be an understatement. To make it a bit easier to express what I thought of it, I think it would be easier to divide my star rating into two; for the first half of the book, I give it two stars. For the latter half, I give it four. I began reading this with very high expectations, which probably contributed to the major disappointment I felt fifty to one hundred pages in. From the glowing reviews, one even comparing it to Harry Potter, I was expecting to be riveted. And...I wasn't. The first few chapters were promising. Breathtaking descriptions and imagery, and mysterious characters, brief scenes with magical undertones, and an intriguing set-up to the conflict had me thinking the following chapters would be fast-paced. Not so. This book dragged painfully in the middle, piling details and uninteresting characters on top of each other until I was literally counting down the pages. This is not to say that the fantastic imagery and description stopped; it didn't. Morgenstern's figurative language and imagery are top-notch and enchanting, fitting of the visually captivating circus she creates. My main problem with the narrative were the characters. Good god, the characters. The protagonists, Celia and Marco, were as flat as cardboard. I didn't understand either of them, despite the surplus pages featuring their boring interactions. Maybe this is being nitpicky, but it bothers me when characters laugh too much in dialogue. "Celia laughs" seemed to be the main reaction of our heroine, in every scene with dialogue. For one, it's tedious after a while. For another, it's almost like the author is pointing out the wittiness of her own dialogue. Also, Marco and Celia were just too...pretentious and self-important. Celia transformed from a quiet, abused child who watched her mother die to a radiant, confident woman possessing both beauty and social graces, who spends more time showing off her dresses than I cared to read about. And Marco was just pompous. As for the supporting characters, almost everyone is just too cryptic. Tsukiko smokes a lot and smiles, but who is she? No idea. Same with Prospero and the grey-suited man. We're given too many characters with all the answers, who don't really reveal anything, despite having excessive page space to do so. Some of the characters I did find interesting, although they still could have used a bit more fleshing out, were Poppet and Widget. I almost wished the book had been written entirely about them, because their sibling relationship was much more interesting than any other character dynamic. Bailey's perspective, at first out of place, really grew on me as the story continued. Now for the ending. (Maybe spoiler-ish?) I liked it. I

thought it was appropriate for these characters, and I was especially happy with Poppet and Widget's roles. Bailey, too, I guess, although he was kind of just convenient. I didn't really understand the whole "it's all about timing" bit. I loved the ship made of books scene--definitely my favorite Celia/Marco interaction, if for the setting, not the characters. I may be being overly critical of the two main characters. Mostly I grew frustrated with the absurd amount of useless chapters--this book could have easily been cut down by one hundred pages, maybe more. Although I was expecting more than I got from this book, but that does not diminish the quality of the imagery. I liked the imagination of the different tents, although the second-person point-of-view felt a bit too intrusive at points. Using "you" should really be more for detached observation, in my opinion, not specific actions and choices, because obviously not everyone reacts the same. Before I get too nit-picky, I think I'm comfortable with rating this three stars. "It's OK" fits what I felt about this book perfectly. My early frustration was mostly appeased by the ending, and I'm glad it left off on a good note. I probably won't be picking up anything by this author again, especially if it's of comparable length, but I may just go see the movie if it has the book ship scene.

This book knocked my socks off!"The circus arrives without warning ... The towering tents are striped in black and white ... No color at all ... the black sign painted in white letters ... reads: Opens at night fall / Closes at dawn. 'What kind of circus is only open at night?' people ask...Le Cirque des Reves...The Circus of Dreams."This is hands down the best book I've read in years. I want to use all the cliché reviewer terms like "astounding debut" and "richly imagined" and perhaps even - heaven forbid - "tour de force"!Some people will call this book magical realism. I will not. For me, it's flat out magical. There is a lot of descriptive detail in this book, but none if it is superfluous. The circus Morgenstern has created is astonishing, and she conjures it beautifully with her words. There are no other books I would compare this to, but if I had to pick a mood to compare, it would be to Murakami. The sense you get while reading is so encompassing I felt jolted when I'd look away from the text and find that I was in my home. Katherine Dunn said it perfectly, this book has a "leisurely but persistent suspense." I wanted to savor every word, but couldn't wait to get to the end. Even though it is couched in the context of magic, this book contains one of the best descriptions of physical (romantic) chemistry I've ever read. What is chemistry if not magic? I wish I could emphatically state that this book is for everybody, but it isn't. I think of readers I know well ... My step-father will love it, my mother might, my father won't. Then again, this book is so surprising, I could be completely wrong. For me, it was flawless. Bon Reves.

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