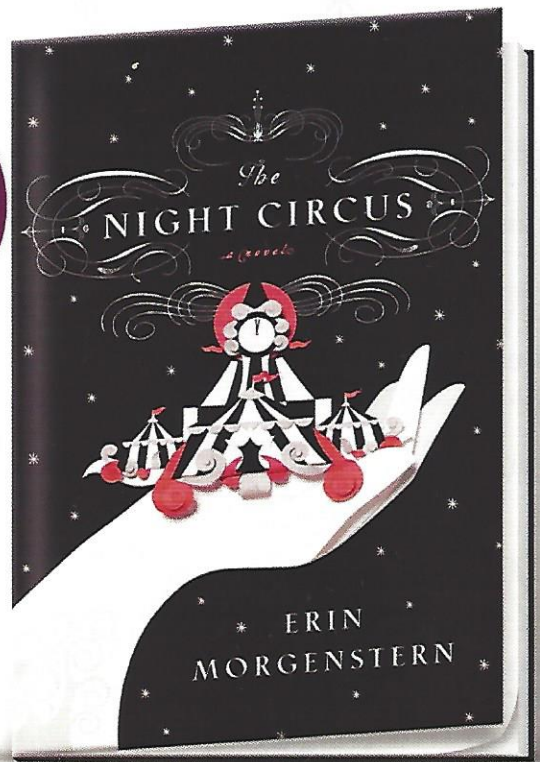


The Night Circus

Forget about clowns, cotton candy, and colorful tents. *Le Cirque des Rêves*, or *The Circus of Dreams*, is unlike any circus you've ever been to.

By Erin Morgenstern
 Publisher
 Doubleday
 (September 2011)



This one arrives suddenly and without warning, relying on word of mouth to attract visitors. It opens at nightfall and closes at dawn. Its tents are striped in monochromatic black-and-white; no other color in sight. Most importantly (and unknown to everyone but a select few), the circus is the setting for a lifelong duel between two gifted magicians, Celia and Marco, who have been chosen to do battle with each other since childhood.

The Night Circus is a stunning achievement from first-time novelist Erin Morgenstern, who received a sky-high six-figure advance for it from her publishing company. The book has already been optioned by Summit Entertainment (a.k.a. the makers of *Twilight*) for a movie adaptation, with no less than *Harry Potter* producer David Heyman rumored to produce.

"It's overwhelming," Morgenstern says about her success. "I keep waiting for it to end, maybe, and it doesn't. It's funny, everything anyone ever told me never happened to debut authors is happening to me."

a contortionist in a sparkling black costume bends her body into impossible shapes; a bonfire glows white instead of yellow and orange; a hall of mirrors reflects a man in a bowler hat in some mirrors but not in others. There are cloud mazes, labyrinths, ice gardens, and carousels.

The author, who is an artist aside from being a writer, says the story came about as an accident. "Several years ago, I got bored with the story I was writing, so I decided to take all my characters to the circus, and the circus was a lot more interesting. I abandoned what I'd been writing and just focused on the circus."

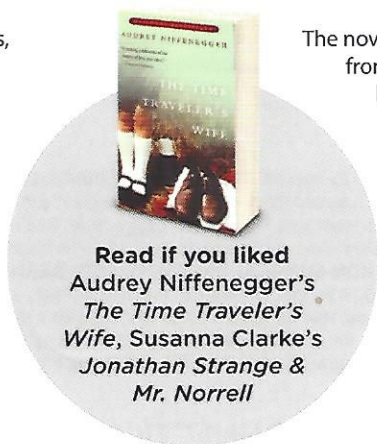
The technicalities of the magic and the rules of the "competition" are never fully explained, and we never really understand who Celia and Marco's instructors (who control the game) really are, except that they have been at this for a very, very long time. Still, all this does is enhance the book's air of mystery and hyperrealism.



ERIN MORGENSTERN is a writer and artist. Most of her writings and paintings are fairy tales, in one way or another. She lives in Massachusetts.

She was particularly inspired by two books, *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* by Susanna Clarke and *The Prestige* by Christopher Priest (as well as the film version of the same name), and the influences are evident in her text. Aside from the "dueling magicians" concept, her story is also set in Victorian London; the atmosphere so strong that you can almost hear the clatter of horses' hooves on cobblestoned streets, or see gaslights glowing through thick yellow fog.

Then again, the world of *The Night Circus* is its own and like no other. In it:



Read if you liked
 Audrey Niffenegger's
The Time Traveler's
Wife, Susanna Clarke's
Jonathan Strange &
Mr. Norrell

The novel walks a tightrope of suspense and horror from the very beginning, with the tension building to an exhilarating climax. Despite themselves, 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.

At its heart, it is a doomed love story, like *Romeo and Juliet* but with spells. By the end, however, the book also feels like a love letter to the circus devotees—the *revêurs*, the dreamers—who prefer a world of imagination and illusion to the real one made of glass and steel. **AV**