

## Author Spotlight

# ERIN MORGENSTERN



Author of *The Night Circus*, Erin Morgenstern is a multimedia artist and writer. Born and raised in Massachusetts, she studied theater and studio art at Smith College. She currently lives in Manhattan with her husband and is working on her second novel.

*The Night Circus* (2011), has been translated into 20 languages and spent 7 weeks on the *New York Times* best seller list. In 2012, the book received the annual Locus Award for Best First Novel and the Alex Award presented by the American Literary Association. Morgenstern started the piece for the National Novel Writing Month's (NaNoWriMo) 50,000 words in 30 days challenge in 2005 and ultimately the work became *The Night Circus*.

*The Night Circus* takes you on a thrilling journey through *Le Cirque des Rêves*, a circus only open at night. 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 amusements.

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.

Prepared by Alexis Vreeland  
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Source: [www.erinmorgenstern.com](http://www.erinmorgenstern.com) and [www.penguinrandomhouse.com](http://www.penguinrandomhouse.com)  
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## Discussion Questions for *The Night Circus*

1. 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? Why do you think the author chose to tell the story from varied perspectives?
2. 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?
3. There are a number of allusions to Shakespeare throughout the text: *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tempest*, and *As You Like It*. Explain these references—how does each play reveal itself in the novel?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. Marco asserts that Alexander H. is a father figure to him (though his paternal instincts aren’t readily noticeable). In what ways does Alexander provide for Marco and in what ways has he failed him?
7. Poppet and Widget are especially affected by the lighting of the bonfire. How crucial are their “specialties” to the ongoing success of the circus?
8. How do you view the morality of the circus in regards to the performers and developers being unknowing pawns in Celia and Marco’s competition? Do Celia and Marco owe an explanation to their peers about their unwitting involvement?
9. 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?
10. How does Isobel serve as a foil to Celia? Who, if anyone, fills that role for Marco?
11. 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.
12. Celia tells Bailey that he is “not destined or chosen” to be the next proprietor of the circus. He is simply “in the right place at the right time . . . and care[s] enough to do what needs to be done. Sometimes that’s enough.” In this situation, is that “enough?” Can the responsibility of maintaining the circus be trusted to just anyone, or unlike Celia suggests, is Bailey truly special?
13. 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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