

Year 7 English Autumn Term

Reading Imaginary Novels: Darren Shan's *Cirque Du Freak*

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<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Plot</u></p> <p>Darren Shan's an ordinary schoolboy, until he and his best friend Steve get tickets to the Cirque Du Freak, a bizarre freak show featuring such arcane performers as Hans Hands, Gertha Teeth, the Wolf Man and Rhamus Twobellies. In the midst of the ghoulish excitement, true terror raises its head when Steve recognises that one of the performers - Mr Crepsley - is in fact a vampire!</p> <p>Steve remains after the show finishes, to confront the vampire but his motives are anything but ordinary! In the shadows of a crumbling theatre, a horrified Darren eavesdrops on his friend and the vampire, and is witness to a monstrous, disturbing plea.</p> <p>Later, in a moment of insane daring, Darren sets out to steal the vampire's magnificent performing tarantula, an act which will have severe, tragic consequences for both Darren and Steve. Their lives will never be the same again ...</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Key Characters</u></p> <p>Darren Shan - the main character of his diary, which is expressed from his point of view. Larten Crepsley - the vampire that made Darren Shan his assistant after he saved Darren's friend, Steve. Steve Leonard - one of the main characters of the Saga, appearing in the first book <i>Cirque Du Freak</i> as Darren's best friend. Annie Shan - Darren's younger sister. Mr Dalton - Steve's favourite teacher and is the one that informs Darren that the freak circuses are illegal and banned. Mrs Leonard - Steve Leonard's mother. Rhamus Twobellies, - as the name implies, has two stomachs. Gertha Teeth - one of Cirque Du Freak's female performers. Hans Hands - another of the Cirque's performers. The Wolf Man - a ferocious beast who is half human and half wolf. Alexander Ribs - more of a comedy act than a scary one which was needed to calm down the audience after the terrifying start with The Wolf Man. Madam Octa - Larten Crepsley's spider.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Key Quotations</u></p> <p>"If this were a made-up story, it would begin at night, with a storm blowing and owls hooting and rattling noises under the bed."</p> <p>"In real life, vacuum cleaners kill spiders. If you cross a busy road without looking, you get whacked by a car. If you fall from a tree, you break some bones. Real life's nasty. It's cruel. It doesn't care about heroes and happy endings and the way things should be. In real life, bad things happen. People die. Fights are lost. Evil often wins."</p> <p>"You stole from a member of the undead."</p> <p>"I sucked blood from one of my best friends."</p> <p>"'First of all,' he said, with a sly smile, 'we have to kill you!'"</p> <p>"'But Steve will die if I do that!' I cried. 'Yes,' he agreed. 'It is your assistance or his life.' 'That's not much of a choice,' I grumbled. 'No,' he admitted, 'it is not. But it is the only one I offer.'</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Key Themes</u></p> <p>Truth and reality: Right from the beginning the author blurs the boundary between reality and fiction. For a start, he calls himself Darren Shan, which is the name he has given to his main character - except he tells us in the introduction that Darren Shan is a made-up name. He also announces very clearly that: "This is a true story". And he tells us about the mistake he made when he was a small boy, putting his pet spider in a vacuum cleaner, thereby emphasising his point that "in real life, bad things happen".</p> <p>Freak shows - good or bad? These days, we think it's wrong to put deformed or unusual-looking people on stage for our amusement. As Darren and Steve's teacher Mr Dalton puts it, the freak shows of the Victorian era were "cruel and monstrous creations". That said, the boys are still mad keen to go and see this one.</p> <p>Unhappy families: "Steve doesn't get on with his mum". It upsets Darren to see Steve being nasty to his mum, but says he never really brings the subject up because "There are certain things you don't discuss with your friends if you're boys".</p> <p>Imperfect heroism: Most heroes in books don't go in for theft and blackmail (it's just not nice), so how do you feel about Darren deciding to steal Madam Octa and threaten to expose Mr Crepsley? Does it put you off him? Or do you understand and forgive him? His sister Annie says: "I love you, Darren, but you were a fool to bring that spider into this house, and if Steve dies, I think you are the one who should be blamed."</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Context</u></p> <p><i>The Saga of Darren Shan</i> is a young adult 12-part book series written by Darren Shan (pen name of Darren O'Shaughnessy) about the struggle of a boy who has become involved in the world of vampires. As of October 2008, the book has been published in 33 countries around the world, in 30 different languages.</p>			