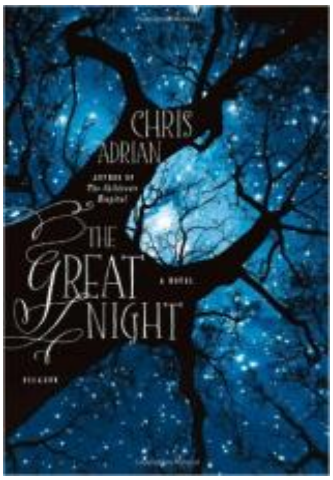
The Great Night

by Chris Adrian



About the Book

Chris Adrian?s fiction has been hailed for its startling originality and provocative meditations on life and mortality. Inspired by Shakespeare?s **A Midsummer Night?s Dream**, **The Great Night** infuses Adrian?s storytelling with new levels of creative genius, bringing the imaginary kingdom of Titania and Oberon to San Francisco?s Buena Vista Park.

Midsummer?s Eve, 2008. Molly, Henry, and Will, each of them reeling from the loss of a love, set out for a party but become trapped in the park, which has become the home in exile for a madcap faerie court. Like the three mortals who are ensnared in her world that night, Queen Titania is mourning too: her adopted son has died of leukemia, a disease that defied the most potent magic. The queen?s grief has turned to rage, and on this night she unleashes an ancient beast, along with the fearsome might of her tiny Puckish followers.

As their stories unfold, the cast of characters proves to have surprising shared histories, blurring the line between memory and hope at every turn. For some, retracing the past becomes a way of flirting with immortality. For others, it?s only a reminder of how dark the mortal world can be. Culminating in a staging of the 1970s cult classic **Soylent Green** --- indirectly produced by Titania via a homeless man who wants to bring down a seemingly sinister mayor?the novel unfolds as an unforgettable homage to the power of the imagination.

The following questions and discussion topics are designed to enhance your reading group?s experience of **The Great Night**. We hope this guide enriches your fantastic journey.

Discussion Guide

1. The book?s epigraph is taken from lines spoken by Shakespeare?s Titania to the laborer Nick Bottom, who has been magically transformed into an ass. Under a spell, Titania has fallen in love with the donkey-headed Bottom. Is fairy life as comfortable as she says it is? Is mortal love a kind of spell, too, as Molly, Henry, and Will experience it?

2. The grim reality of the pediatric oncology ward illuminates the splendor of Titania and Oberon?s world. What does their experience with the Boy demonstrate about parenting, and about the limits of a parent who seems to have unlimited resources? What is good and bad about Titania and Oberon?s parenting? In what way do Beadle and Blork become like parents to the parents?

3. If you?re familiar with **A Midsummer Night?s Dream**, compare it to **The Great Night**. How do real and imaginary realms influence each other in both works? Do the authors have the same approach to despondent lovers?

4. As Molly mourns for Ryan, is her family?s religious history, along with her botched chaplain internship, a help or a hindrance?

5. How does Henry?s abduction affect his relationship with Bobby? What is left of Henry?s identity after Bobby leaves? How did you react to the crossroads between Henry?s and Ryan?s youth?

6. What do Will?s parents teach him about relationships and love? Which of their lessons does he unlearn with Carolina?

7. How might the novel have unfolded if it had been told from the other lovers? points of view: Bobby, Carolina, and (from the grave) Ryan?

8. Do the mayor and Titania have similar problems as rulers?

9. Just as Shakespeare presents a play within a play, staged by Bottom, Adrian imagines a homeless performance of the 1973 cult classic Soylent Green, which is set in a dismal 2022, featuring a world consumed by overpopulation, the greenhouse effect, and a reliance on processed food rations (Soylent Green). How does it affect your reading to watch fiction unfold inside fiction?

10. How did you picture the frightening, unleashed beast? How did you feel when the fear was resolved, and Henry and Titania came to their resolution? What do you suppose the squirrel will tell Bobby?

11. Enchanting, liberating, yet gritty, how do San Francisco and Buena Vista Park mirror the characters in **The Great Night**?

12. How do love and longing manifest themselves differently in the novel?s two worlds? Whether the characters are mortal or not, what are the greatest sources of oppression and freedom in their lives?

13. Chris Adrian has compared **The Great Night** to a mixture of ?odd-tasting foreign candies.? Which of the many tiny feasts in this novel was the most appealing to you?

14. What aspects of **The Great Night** echo the struggles captured in Adrian?s previous fiction (**Gob?s Grief**, featuring Walt Whitman and Victoria Woodhull; **The Children?s Hospital**, invoking Noah?s Ark; and **A Better Angel**, a story

collection in which the characters contemplate the metaphysical)? Which aspects of **The Great Night** are unlike anything you have read before?

15. If your world were inhabited by fairies, what would they want from you? How would they manifest themselves in your workplace, your neighborhood, and your love life?

Author Bio

Chris Adrian (born 1970) is an American author. Adrian completed his Bachelor's degree in English from the University of Florida in 1993. He received his M.D. from Eastern Virginia Medical School in 2001. He completed a pediatric residency at the University of California, San Francisco, was a student at Harvard Divinity School, and is currently in the pediatric hematology/oncology fellowship at UCSF. He is also a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop.

Adrian's writing styles in short stories vary greatly; from modernist realism to pronounced lyrical allegory. His novels both tend toward surrealism, having mostly realistic characters experience fantastic circumstances. He has written three novels: GOB'S GRIEF, THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL, and THE GREAT NIGHT. In 2008, he published A BETTER ANGEL, a collection of short stories. His short fiction has also appeared in *The Paris Review*, *Zoetrope*, *Ploughshares*, *McSweeney's*, *The New Yorker*, *The Best American Short Stories*, and *Story*. He was one of 11 fiction writers to receive a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2009.

Critical Praise

"A writer of prodigious talent who holds your heart in his hands... We will be lucky as long as he continues to write."

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