



A Living Nightmare (Cirque Du Freak) by Darren Shan



Subjects: Vampires; Freak shows; Horror tales

Book Lists: Gifted, Grade 6, Middle School, Reluctant Readers

Props: Spider puppet, flyer

I'm Darren Shan and this is my story. I guess I should begin by telling you that I've always had a fascination with spiders (*Spider puppet creeps onto arm*). I used to collect them when I was little. One time I found one and took it to my room. The spider hung around for a whole month. It built a web above my bed.

At night I used to lie there imagining that while I slept the spider crept down from its web, crawled into (*Spider crawls to head, down to mouth then stomach*) my mouth, slide down my throat, and laid eggs in my belly. The baby spiders would hatch after a while and eat me alive from the inside out.

I guess, along with my fascination for spiders, I also had a fascination with being scared. Looking back, I realize that that is probably why I went to the show, the freak show. I went in the middle of the night to an abandoned theatre to watch a show called Cirque Du Freak. I guess I was hoping to see something scary.

I went to the show with my friend Steve. He was the one who got the money for the tickets. He was psyched! The flyer (*Show flyer*) for the show promised a Wolf-Man, a Snake-Boy, something called Madam Octa, another called Gerta Teeth, and more. We knew they were probably only people in costumes with props, but we figured it would at least be worth a good laugh, or maybe even a good scare.

The plan was for me to spend the night at Steve's. We would sneak out late at night, go to the show, sneak back, and no one would know we were ever gone. The

night began just fine. At Steve's house we spent some time going over his old horror comic books, and some other books on werewolves, ghosts, and vampires. Steve is an expert on such things. Then, we went to the freak show. At first I was laughing a lot. But I was also scared, a little. There was an awesome spider and other bizarre creatures that seemed really real. But by the end of the show I wasn't laughing anymore. I was freaked!

Now before I go on, I want to be very clear about one thing—this is a true story. I wrote it down, here in this book. I don't expect you to believe me. I know people don't believe in such things as vampires and their pet spiders. I wouldn't believe it myself if I hadn't lived through it. But it's my life and it's real. The thing about real life is, when you do something stupid, it normally costs you. In most books, the heroes can make as many mistakes as they like. It doesn't matter what they do, because everything works out in the end. They'll beat the bad guys, put things right and everything ends up cool. In real life, if you cross a busy road without looking, you get whacked by a car. If you fall out of a tree, you break 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. This story is real. I made mistakes, I'm paying for them, and there is no happy ending.

What happened at the end of that show? What mistake did Darren make? Find out for yourself. (*Hold up book*) Read *A Living Nightmare*, the first book in the Cirque Du Freak series.