

## Cirque Du Freak - 100% SHEET

PLOT	KEY CHARACTERS
<p>Darren Shan starts narrating the story by saying he was always fascinated by spiders. When he was young, he used to bring spiders from the garden and let them loose in his house despite what his mom said about never bringing them in, and at the age of 9, he received the greatest gift of his life: a small tarantula.</p> <p>His best friend, Steve "Leopard" Leonard, has grown up reading horror comics and stories of the Wolfman and Vampires. One day, their other friend Alan comes across a flyer (which he has stolen from his older scary brother) advertising "The Cirque Du Freak", and eagerly shows it to Darren, Steve, and Tommy (Darren's other friend). Each flyer could only get two tickets, however, so they play a game of chance to see who will go. Darren and Steve win and both end up going to the event.</p> <p>Darren and Steve are mesmerized by the fantastic and disturbing show, especially by the act of the mysterious Mr. Crepsley and his giant spider, Madam Octa. Mr. Crepsley's act consists of him letting the highly poisonous spider out of her cage and controlling her actions via telepathic communication, using a small flute to focus his thoughts. One bite from Madam Octa will kill a human being after several days.</p> <p>Darren plans to steal her, leaving a note for Mr. Crepsley warning him that if she tries to find him he will tell everyone about Mr. Crepsley's true identity- a vampire.</p> <p>Darren's plan succeeds, and after a few weeks of training Madam Octa, he is fully comfortable with having it in his bedroom, using Mr. Crepsley's flute as an excuse for privacy. During this time, he grows more and more detached from Steve due to overhearing Mr. Crepsley stating that Steve has bad blood and is not good enough to become a vampire's assistant.</p> <p>One day while Steve is at Darren's house playing with Madam Octa, Darren drops the flute and loses control over the spider, which bites and poisons Steve. His only hope for survival is if Darren makes a deal with Mr. Crepsley to become his assistant and pay off the cost of the spider antidote. Steve lives, but Darren is turned into a half-vampire, and is forced into the dark world of the vampires. Mr. Crepsley makes Darren fake his own death and even performs an open casket funeral. Following the events of Darren's funeral, Mr. Crepsley returns and digs Darren up. Steve meanwhile, is extremely jealous at being deprived of his chance of being a vampire's assistant. He cuts a cross into his hand and claims this is a constant reminder of the betrayal caused.</p>	<p><b>Darren Shan:</b> Darren Shan is the main character of the novel. The story is told from his perspective. He has always had a fascination with spiders and as a child loved being scared. At school Darren is very interested and skilled at sport. He plays football 4-5 times a day. He and his three other best friends find a leaflet advertising a touring show 'Cirque Du Freak'. After attending the circus, Darren's curiosity of weird and strange creatures grows. He decides to steal the main attraction- the spider. When the spider bites Steve with a poisonous bite, Darren feels incredibly guilty. He decides to sacrifice his happy, family life, in order that his friend can live. However, this has a disastrous outcome for Darren as he must live the remainder of his life as a Vampire's assistant.</p> <p><b>Steve Leonard-</b> Steve is Darren's best friend. He has quite a reputation in school and is 'feared and despised' wherever he goes. When he was younger, he was considered a 'wild child'. He got into lots of fights and shop lifted. Because of this he has been given the nickname Steve 'Leopard'. He also has an obsession with frightening things, such as Vampires and blood. Steve is the one who convinces the group it is a good idea to attend the circus. He contributes the most money, so he automatically gains one of the two tickets. After he and Darren watch the 'Cirque Du Freak' show, Steve remains behind to speak to the main act Mr Crepsley. He has recognized him as a vampire from one of his books and wants to be turned into one himself. Crepsley refuses, stating that Steve has 'bad blood' and accuses him of being evil. When Steve is poisoned as a result of Darren stealing Crepsley's spider Madame Octa, Darren agrees to become a half-vampire and Crepsley's assistant in exchange for the cure.</p> <p><b>Alan Morris &amp; Tommy Jones-</b> Darren's two other friends from school. Alan Morris is responsible for providing the flyer which advertises the 'Cirque du Freak'. He steals it from the coat pocket of his older, scarier brother, who was handed it on the way home from a night out.</p> <p><b>Mr. Dalton</b> - An English teacher at Darren's school. He is very wise and knows the boys well. He can tell if they are faking illness to get out of his class. Steve Leonard is his favourite pupil. Mr Dalton discovers the flyer advertising the 'Cirque du Freak'. He provides the boys with information on the history of the Circus freakshow and advises them to stay away from it. He states that they are 'cesspits of evil' and that anyone who attends them are 'just as bad as the people running them'</p> <p><b>Annie Shan-</b> Darren's little sister. Although Darren finds her annoying, they do get on well and he trusts her not to carry tales to their parents. When Darren is showing Steve the wonderful tricks Madam Octa can do, Annie bursts into the room, making Darren lose concentration. This results in the spider biting Steve. As it is a poisonous bite, this puts Steve immediately into a coma and he fights for his life.</p> <p><b>Mr Tall</b> - .Is the conductor of the 'Cirque Du Freak' show. He introduces all the acts to the stage. When he meets the two boys at the door, he collects their tickets. He has telepathic powers and seems to know all about them and their lives. He is described as the 'tallest man in the world' with 'huge, bony hands and eyes as black and coal and black teeth'</p> <p><b>Mr.Crepsley</b> -is the vampire that convinces Darren Shan to fake his own death and then makes him his assistant after he saved Darren's friend, Steve. He is over 6 ft tall with orange cropped hair (which was dyed when he was a child), is illiterate, and has one long scar running down the his left cheek. He is suspected to be about 180-200 years old.</p> <p><b>Madam Octa-</b> Crepsley's telepathic spider, and can do many different tricks. She is highly intelligent and poisonous.</p>

### KEY QUOTES

***‘I’ve ALWAYS been fascinated by spiders. I used to collect them when I was younger. I’d spend hours rooting through the dusty, old shed at the bottom of the garden, hunting the cobwebs for lurking, eight legged predators’***

This is the opening lines of the novel. It is written in past tense and first person narrative and provides the reader with information on the main character, Darren Shan. From this, we are aware that his interests of strange and creepy characters has lasted for years and that he dedicates a lot of his time to looking for them.

***“She flew forward, up into the air, jaws open, fangs ready, hairy legs twitching – straight at my unprotected face!”***

The vivid description of how Madam Octa greets Darren when he first lets her loose from her cage. By using violent verbs and aggressive adjectives to describe the spider, the reader is given a clear image of how dangerous she is. We are also made aware of how unprepared Darren is for the task of looking after her.

***“First, I saw his wrinkly hands holding the cage. Then his long red clothes. Then his cropped orange hair. Then his long ugly scar. And, finally, his sharp toothy grin. It was Mr Crepsley. The vampire. And he was smiling at me’***

This quote provides the reader with information on Mr Crepsley and how he looks, acts and dresses. The fact he has wrinkly hands is indicative of how old he is. The fact he is smiling at Darren creates an uneasy atmosphere, almost as if he is surprised by this fact. It is unusual for this character to smile, and creates a sense of something evil.

***‘Vampires are always saying goodbye. We never stop anywhere for long. We are forever picking up our roots and moving on to pastures new’***

This statement is Mr Crepsley’s piece of advice to Darren at the end of the novel after he has been turned into a half vampire. It signifies that Mr Crepsley himself has lived a long and lonely life. They are now about to begin their new adventures together, Darren will no longer be able to see his friends and family.

### THEMES

**Friendship:** Loyalty and betrayal among friends. Darren is loyal to his best friend Steve. He feels it is his fault that Madame Octa, the spider bit Steve. Darren begs Mr Crepsley to save his friend. Mr. Crepsley says that if he does it then Darren has to give up his human life. Darren accepted the consequences to save his friends life.

Steve and Darren both betray each other. Steve wants to become a vampire and leave everyone behind including Darren even after Darren tells him not to. After that Darren goes and meets with the vampire and then steals his spider. Also as well as saving Steve’s life, he becomes a vampire when he knows this is Steve’s dream and he had told him not to.

**Vampires:** There is a strong element of Vampire literature within the novel. The characters of Darren and Steve are fascinated by them.

In folklore, the literary vampire is sustained by drinking blood. They do not need either food, water, or even oxygen. They are sometimes portrayed as being unable to eat human food at all, forcing them to either avoid public dining or mime chewing and eating to deceive their mortal victims. The fictional vampire, often has a pale appearance.

Some tales maintain that vampires must return to a coffin or to their "native soil" before sunrise to take their rest safely. This is something which occurs in ‘Cirque du Freak’ as Mr Crepsley lives in his coffin.

**The History of the ‘freak show’:** A ‘freak show’ was an exhibition of rarities and performances intended to shock the audience. They were extremely popular in Europe and America in Victorian times. The shows also included displays of talent. One example was Madame Rosina, who had no arms but used to crochet with her feet and paint using her mouth. Other artist might include Siamese twins, bearded ladies, contortionists or people covered in tattoos. In ‘Cirque Du Freak’ Darren and Steve witness all these characters at the Circus show.

### WRITER’S INTENTION & CONTEXT

Darren Shan, whose real name is Darren O’Shaughnessy, wrote and published the first book of the series, [Cirque du Freak](#), as a side project between two adult books.

The literary vampire first appeared in 18th-century poetry, before becoming one of the main figures of gothic fiction in the likes of Mary Shelly’s *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. Most recently Vampires have become popular through fiction such as in Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight Saga*.

### KEY TERMINOLOGY

Character  
 Writer  
 Setting  
 Narrative  
 Chapter  
 Predict  
 Inference  
 Interpretation  
 Analysis  
 Foreshadowing  
 Suspense  
 Mood  
 Atmosphere  
 Tone  
 Relationship

