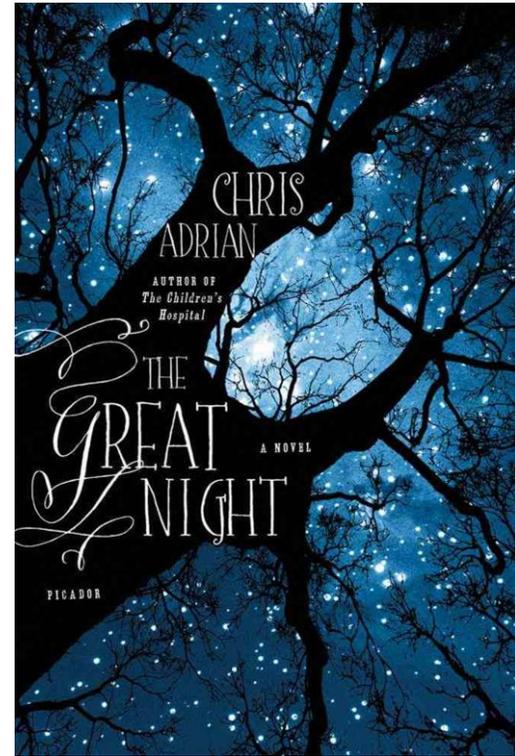


# Reading Group Gold

## *The Great Night* by Chris Adrian

Chris Adrian's magical third novel is a mesmerizing reworking of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. On Midsummer's Eve 2008, three broken-hearted people become lost in San Francisco's Buena Vista Park, the secret home of Titania, Oberon, and their court. On this night, something awful is happening in the faerie kingdom: in a fit of sadness over the end of her marriage and the death of her adopted son, Titania has set loose an ancient menace, and the chaos that ensues upends the lives of immortals and mortals alike in a story that is playful, darkly funny, and poignant.



978-1-250-00738-4 | 384 pages  
\$15.00

### Questions and Topics for Discussion

\*Questions courtesy of Farrar, Straus & Giroux

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?

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?

## About the Author

**CHRIS ADRIAN** is the author of two previous novels, *Gob's Grief* and *The Children's Hospital*, and the story collection *A Better Angel*, which was a *New York Times* Book Review Editors' Choice. Selected by *The New Yorker* as one of their "20 Under 40," he lives in San Francisco, where he is a fellow in pediatric hematology-oncology.



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