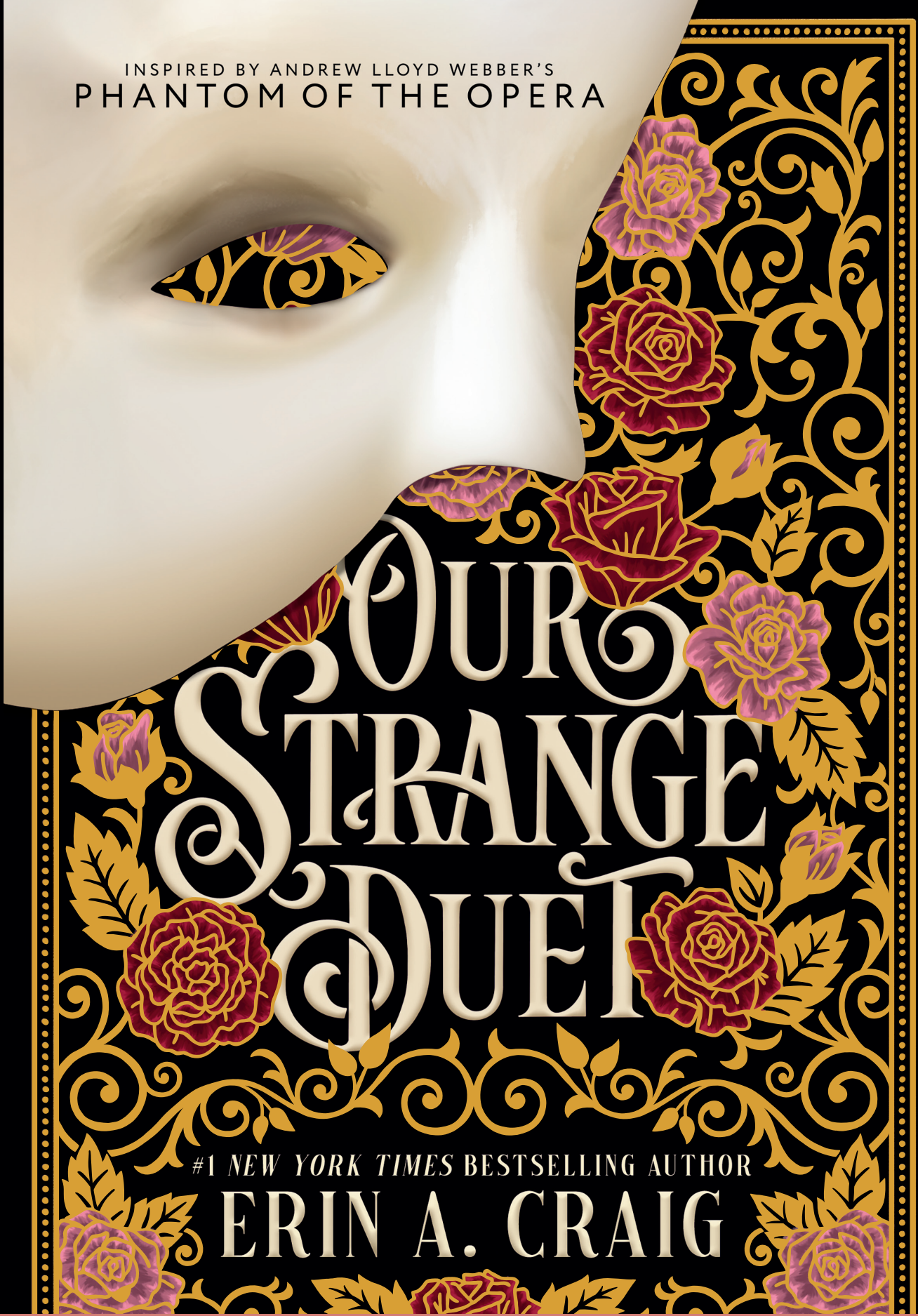


INSPIRED BY ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER'S
PHANTOM OF THE OPERA



OUR STRANGE DUET

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

ERIN A. CRAIG

DISCUSSION GUIDE

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ABOUT THE BOOK

A rising soprano with a gift she is only just learning to embrace, Christine Daaé has moved through the glittering world of the Opéra Populaire longing to find her purpose. Instead, she finds herself caught between two men who refuse to let her slip quietly into the chorus.

One is Raoul, her childhood friend turned devoted admirer, offering her a future filled with warmth, safety, and a love that feels like sunlight. The other is a mysterious masked figure who lurks beneath the Opera House: the Phantom. His brilliance, obsession, and dangerous devotion to nurturing Christine's talents ignite a dark and complicated passion in her heart.

As Christine's star rises, so does the tension between Raoul and the Phantom. She must decide who she is when the curtain falls—and what she's willing to risk for the life she wants.

Set against the sweeping, romantic world of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Phantom of the Opera*, *Our Strange Duet* allows Christine Daaé to take center stage to tell her own story: fierce, emotional, and unforgettable.



Themes: Love & Romance, Mystery & Suspense, Emotions & Feelings, Self-Discovery, Acceptance & Belonging

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Cynthia Whippley

ERIN A. CRAIG is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *House of Salt and Sorrows*, *Small Favors*, *House of Roots and Ruin*, and *The Thirteenth Child*. She has always loved telling stories. After getting her BFA in theatre design and production from the University of Michigan, she stage-managed tragic operas filled with hunchbacks, séances, and murderous clowns, and then decided she wanted to write books that were just as spooky. An avid reader, decent quilter, rabid basketball fan, and collector of typewriters, brass figurines, and sparkly shoes, Erin makes her home in West Michigan with her husband and daughter.

PRE-READING

- Review what you know about opera, musical theater, and other forms of live theater. Why do you think people love these art forms? Why do people want to work in these fields?
- What does the word *ambition* mean to you? Talk about the role of ambition in the world around you. What are the people you know striving for? What kinds of ambition do you see in the media? What kind of sacrifices do people make to achieve their ambitions, and why?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does the author focus on Christine? What is the impact of having Christine narrate the story? What are her hopes and dreams? How would you describe her personality? What are her strengths? What does she struggle with?
2. Describe the role that Christine's father played in her early life, and what he means to her now. What was he like? What was his work? What did he say about the Angel of Music, and how does it affect Christine? Discuss why, when the Phantom explains how to pursue a "chance at greatness," Christine calls the dedication it will take "the Angel's path. My father's path."
3. How does Christine end up at the Opéra Populaire? What does she do there? Who are Meg and Madame Giry, and how are they important to Christine? Describe the ups and downs of the friendship between Christine and Meg, and what causes the changes.
4. How does Christine first encounter the Phantom? Why does she assume he's her Angel of Music? What does she hope he will give her? Talk about the early stages of their relationship. Why does she keep her relationship with him secret? When does their mutual attraction seem romantic or sexual? What do others in the theater believe—or not believe—about the Phantom?
5. When does Christine start to see the Phantom's darker side and suspect he's not just her angel? What does he do that worries her? When does she realize he is a man, not an angel? How does that change her feelings about him? Why does she pull off his mask? How does he react? What is her reaction to seeing his face? Why does she call him "my tutor and tormentor"?

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6. Discuss Christine's remark, "Sometimes I felt like a marionette being puppeted about by strings I hadn't even been aware bound me." In what ways does the Phantom try to control her? When else in the story is he compared to a puppeteer? Relate this to his skill at making automatons. How does he try to control the theater's management? Describe his reactions, from silence to violence, when he doesn't get his way.
 7. What does Madame Giry's story tell you about the Phantom's past? How do you think it helps explain his actions and his anger? Why might he be considered a genius? Discuss Christine's observation about him: "Music, machines, art, and architecture. There was no limit to the heights his mind could soar."
 8. How does Christine know Raoul? Why had they lost touch? What is his position in life, and how does that contrast with Christine's? Discuss the scenes with his mother, how she treats Christine, and Raoul's reaction. How do you think their marriage would affect Christine's future? What would be the pros and cons of such a marriage for her?
 9. Discuss the theater as a physical setting for the story. What does it add in terms of drama and atmosphere? Why is there a lake beneath the theater? Describe where Erik lives. How has he transformed his space into something almost magical?
 10. Describe what happens in chapter 42 when Erik takes Christine back to his subterranean living space and has her put on a wedding gown. Talk about the verbal and physical fighting between Erik and Raoul. Why does Christine say then that she will stay with Erik? Why does Erik release Raoul from the noose? Discuss Erik's words, "Leave me alone . . . Forget all you've seen."
 11. What do you think happened in the last few pages of the epilogue? Discuss Christine's assertion about Erik: "I had left his dark kingdom behind. I had moved on and chosen the light." Talk about different ways that Raoul represents "the warmth of the sun" and Erik represents darkness. Is Christine still uncertain about her choice when the story ends? Why might she still be attracted to Erik?
 12. The epigraph quotes Andrew Lloyd Webber: "*The Phantom of the Opera* is about love. It's as simple as that." Do you agree, based on *Our Strange Duet*? Talk about the role of love in the story. To what extent is the story about the love of music? Do Christine and Raoul love each other? Do Christine and Erik? How are love and obsession related?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Read through the lyrics of the following songs from Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Phantom of the Opera*. Choose one of the songs and write an essay tying the lyrics to *Our Strange Duet*.
 - “Phantom of the Opera”
 - “Think of Me,” specifically Christine’s part
 - “Music of the Night”
 - “Learn to Be Lonely”
- Find the lyrics here: [The Phantom of the Opera Lyrics – Phantom of the Opera, The \(The Musical\)](#). You can also listen to them performed under the “videos” tab.
- Jot down your interpretation of the very end of the book, with a prediction of what will happen next in Christine’s life. Then meet in small groups to discuss why the author ends the novel on an ambiguous note. Compare ideas about Christine’s choices and future within the group.
- *Our Strange Duet* is inspired by Andrew Lloyd Webber’s internationally popular musical *The Phantom of the Opera*. The novel also refers to other operas such as Gounod’s *Faust* and Meyerbeer’s *Les Huguenots*. Do research and create a short multimedia presentation about one of these operas, a different opera, or a different musical. The presentation should include a summary of the work’s history, story, and its appeal. Share some of the music in your presentation.

*This guide was created by Kathleen Odean,
a long-time youth librarian, and chair of the
2002 Newbery Award Committee.*



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