

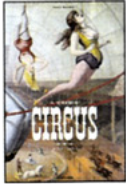
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THE CIRCUS

A lavish illustrated history of life in the big top

NOEL DANIEL

Taschen, £120



NOWADAYS, when the circus rolls into town, it's usually time for rival gangs of hoodies to have a ruck on the teacups, and for small children

to get their shoulders dislocated on suspect rides called 'Extreme Orbiter'.

However, in America during the turn of the 20th century, the travelling circus coming to town was the biggest showbiz event of the year. Crowds of up to 14,000 would flock to see performances from death-defying daredevils, fearless animal trainers, unsightly freaks, exotic beauties and mysterious conjurers from strange lands.

This exquisitely produced tome – so big it'll probably crush the coffee table

it was produced to artfully sit on – packs in nearly 900 photos and illustrations of the circus during its heyday. The accompanying text is informative, but sparse, giving breathing space to evocative photos of performers both on stage and behind-the-scenes. Best of all are the lush illustrated posters that would be printed and pasted up all over smalltown America. They promised punters that for a short period of time, their humdrum 'hood would be host to dancing girls, strange beasts, outrageous acrobatics – and the Greatest Show On Earth. **Nadia Shireen**

