Every morning the Night Eater runs through the sky, gobbling up all the
darkness. He eats cloudy nights as light and sweet as cotton candy, and
deep dark nights that taste like bitter chocolate. His favorites are bright
clear nights -- the stars tickle his nose as he swallows! But what if the
Night Eater doesn't come? Without him to devour the dark, the night
animals won't go back to their dens . . . the earth and all the people grow
very pale and cold . . . and children everywhere long to play in the sun.
Can they convince the Night Eater to return to the skies?

Features:
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My Personal Review:
I review so many picture books for children that after a while it becomes
difficult to separate the books that I think are "good" from those that I think
are "spectacular". I tend to gush over good books. I'm a gusher. But once
in a while I hit upon a book, author, or illustrator that is so original and
engaging that it is all I can do not to sing their praises in a never ending
burst of la-la-las. Ana Juan is one such artist. I'd loved her picture book
biography of Friday Kahlo ("Frida" by Jonah Winter) and her illustrations for
"Elena's Serenade" by Campbell Geeslin were awe-inspiring. Still, nothing
completely worked perfectly well until Ms. Juan came out with "The Night
Eater". A kind of commedia dell-arte for the kiddies (complete with a
"Harlequin"-like protagonist) the story is a sweet little fable with pictures so
jaw-droppingly engaging that I've had hard-core teenagers cooing over the
colors. And what greater enticement can I give you than that, I might ask?

The story stars a plump little long-eyed fellow eternally clothed in soft
pink long-johns, a matching pink nightcap with an iridescent light at its tip,
and a red pointed nose that ties nicely onto his face. This would be The
Night Eater, and his job is to munch and devour the night-time so that the
day can dawn everywhere. Wherever the Night Eater runs (and one
assumes that he runs eastwards) that is where the sun comes up. One day though it becomes clear that The Night Eater has eaten so much night that the buttons on his long-johns are fit to burst. The moon mocks his plump status and in a huff our hero refuses to eat any more night. Initially the perpetual darkness amuses the people of the world and they explore the "nocturnal animals and perfumed flowers, whose petals opened only at night". However, a little darkness goes a long way and when the children complain to the Night Eater, he accidentally chews on a bit of star and before you know it he's forgotten why he stopped eating the night in the first place. So the daylight comes back, the world is back to normal, and the Night Eater makes sure to place a little piece of night in his hat, so that he might always remember its sweetness.

Cute enough story. It sort of has the feel of promising children that no matter how dark the night is, there's an adorable little flouncy-trouncy fellow out there who's more than willing to gobble up the darkness. Ms. Juan, a native of Spain, wrote this book herself and her voice shines through with the utmost clarity. That is not why you should buy it though. You should buy it because with this title Ms. Juan has pulled out all the stops and has let her acrylics go absolutely wild. The book is a visual bombshell. You get a small hint of this when you look at the cover and title page, but about the time The Night Eater has skipped past a vibrant green mermaid brushing out her hair, you're hooked. The story almost feels like Juan's gentlest ode to Federico Fellini. In one instance the sun is given the pleasure of saying "Good morning" to everyone. In this shot a babushka, a hat-wearing rabbit, a nun with a birdcage (or possibly just a woman in white), a penguin in a top hat covered in streamers and confetti, a pajama wearing man in a nightcap, a pig, a chicken who has just laid an egg, a 1955 Italian businessman late for work, and a small child with a bowl of porridge all stand in line to say hello to a beaming smiling sun. The sun tips the point of its nose to that of the child with the porridge and the image is so sweet and yet also so stunning that you're left hungry for more. This is a world where animals and children interact constantly. Playing constantly with light, you can see Juan's Picasso and Frida Kahlo influences shining through. The book is a carnival of deepening shades and remarkable tones. Prettiest darned book I ever had the pleasure to own.

Now here's the kicker. Kids will like this book too. I sometimes go on and on about how pretty a book is and completely ignore whether or not children will actually enjoy the story. In this case they'll be just as happy with the tale and mesmerized by the pictures as their adult contemporaries. How could they not be? It's funny and a true treasure on a shelf. I'm not a gambling man by nature (I'm not a man at all, come to think of it) but I'd wager good money that years and years from now copies of "The Night Eater" will still be found in countless homes, libraries, and personal memories.
After some quick on-line research (which is to say, I went to Ms. Juan's website) I determined that she has lots of children's books out there that have not yet been translated into English and offered to the American public. This is a shame and a bother. I call upon every available American publisher to go out there, get her permission, and crank out as many Juan illustrated puppies as they can get their hands onto. She's a treasure, this woman, and "The Night Eater" is one of her loveliest creations. If you cannot for the life of you figure out what to get your niece, nephew, grandchild, or offspring of your former college roommate, this would be your best bet. I love Ana Juan.

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The Night Eater (Ezra Jack Keats New Illustrator Award) by Ana Juan - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!