

2nd Runner Up of English Section

Senior Division

Name of Winner : LEI SIO PUI

Name of School : Yuet Wah College, Macau

Book Title : Defy the Night

Author : Brigid Kemmerer

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Defying the night

‘I keep my eyes fixed ahead, on the flickering torches of the arch, watching how embers fall in tiny bursts, defying the night before burning out in the water below.’

Love and duty, trust and betrayal, resignation and defiance – life has always been a never- ending tug-of-war between antithetical decisions. The book *Defy the Night*, as the title suggests, manifests humanity by elucidating its resolve to conquer the seemingly insurmountable quandaries that

lurk in our lives like an endless night, through pithily-written man-man and man-self conflicts. What does it take to defy the night? How do we brace ourselves into tiny embers, breaking free from our shackles valiantly?

The struggle of humanity

Defy the Night commences in the pandemic-struck kingdom of Kandala, where desperate Tessa Cade and prince-disguised Weston Lark stole and distributed Moonflower petals, the only known elixir yet in paucity, to the rank-and-file who were too impoverished to secure dosages. With incidents of medicine trafficking and purloining becoming commonplace, the King's Justice, Prince Corrick, mercilessly executed thousands of wretched smugglers without pardon all against his kind conscience just to prove to Consul Allisander, the only provider of Moonflower, that his shipments were firmly sheltered – otherwise, the Consul would terminate the supply, putting the kingdom onto an even tighter spot.

However, as the seemingly cruel prince resumed his inhumanity, the civilians heedless of his predicaments called for revolution abruptly. That was when Tessa came to know that his all-time comrade, Weston, was merely an alter ego of Prince Corrick – a tentative way to eschew the cruel reality he had no courage to confront.

As fires sizzled and corpses swathed, Corrick struggled in an inescapable dilemma – to resume being a cruel King’s Justice discriminately abhorred, yet maximising the Moonflower supply, or to acquiesce to his conscience and become a benevolent prince loved by all, but witnessing more deaths. Shunning from his predicament, Corrick resorted to subsisting his alter persona. As a rebel against nobody other than himself, he re-experienced the effulgence of humanity – Tessa’s love, the King’s trust and the crowd’s forgiveness – and ultimately stepped up to confront his dilemma.

The story continues with Corrick stout-heartedly interrogating Consul Allisander, whom he feared the most, after which he came to recognise that the so-called shipment attacks were solely self-directed deceptions of the Consul, trying to extend his manipulation by exploiting the Moonflower prices. Following the Consul's confession, the strife was halted temporarily with Corrick coercing the Consul to provide an eight-week supply of dosages as the Royal Sector and the rebels would negotiate on how the kingdom should progress.

The ember of breakthrough

In our lives, we usually scuffle in dilemmas due to our fear of the uncertainties in the future were we to overwrite the contemporary situation. In Corrick's case, his terror of the extirpating of the Moonflower supply had stalemated his progression. However, we will never get rid of our fetters if we do not face our plights assuredly. Taking Corrick's growth as a down-to-earth illustration, he in the end

submitted to neither side in his dilemma; instead, he quits evading and seeks a breakthrough that burnt his shackles like an ember, boldly stepping up to overturn the scenario. In succinct words, the only key to triumphing in a predicament is just ‘courage’. The courage to abandon your priorities, the courage to step up to the issue and the courage to be free from your shackles. If we can all prevail over our fear, abandon the cage incarcerating us and defy the night, we can surely see to the incoming of dawn and the vanishing of our hardships.

Alternating narrative perspectives

Defy the Night offers readers a novel narrative style of switching between the perspectives of the two protagonists, Tessa and Corrick, alternately across chapters. This has eased the solidification of the characters’ dispositions and the manifestation of their inner personas, which enables a multifaceted view of a conflict, allowing readers to empathise and immerse in the story while

feeling as if they are interacting with its characters. To illustrate, this alternating style has enabled readers to access Corrick's character from distinct angles; how Tessa, his long-time comrade, views his disposition, how the commoners, who are powerless, view him as a prince, how the consuls, who fight ground against him, view him as an enemy, and lastly, how he, himself, view his own nature.

As for a worth-mentioning arc of the story, the point when the rebellion commenced is especially spectacular. The struggle between Tessa's eagerness and fright, the apparently-stoic yet feeble mettle of Corrick, the scepticism of the King, the desperation of the rebels... they all vividly adhere and link congruently, delineating an authentic, show-stopping conception of love, duty and trust resonating the hearts of many.

Astute characterisation

Defy the Night also demonstrates astuteness in the depiction of characters. Without directly instilling images in readers' minds, this book alternatively enables readers to advance alongside the characters by avidly detailing the progression of their dispositions as they face, deal and resolve predicaments they encounter.

A phenomenal example is the characterisation of Corrick. The author primarily casts a foreshadowing of Corrick's alternate persona as an outlaw by exhibiting his captivating blue eyes and carrying on with his 'eyes' as a thread of the story.

From 'kind' and 'reserved', to 'cruel' and 'impassive', and lastly to 'intent' and 'eager', the depiction of his eyes utterly reflects his growth. First, he is merely hiding away from the brutal truth that he has always had to confront, resorting to being a hypocrite while judged by his conscience; next, he submits to the cruelty of the world,

becoming desperate as he struggles in difficulties; lastly, he breaks through both personas he has and defies the night with Tessa as his truest self, determined to save his kingdom and people.

Out-of-the-world plot twists

The plot twists in *Defy the Night* have also stepped the story up, spontaneously keeping readers' hearts pounding as tension is built up in the story. Three major plot twists are present in the story: The unveiling of the fact that Weston Lark is Prince Corrick, the brusque change of the hearts of the commoners, leading to rebellion and that Consul Allisander is behind all the cargo attacks having led to most of the conflicts in the story.

These twists have created intrigue and suspense, elevating the whole reading experience and compelling readers to read incessantly. In addition, the plot of the story has also been intensified thanks to the twists, leading to deeper

characterisations and a more brazen impression of the theme.

Conclusion

On the whole, *Defy the Night* is a well-written book exploring humanity, conscience and self-resolve. The book has demonstrated a well-designed plot with shrewd narrative and characterisation techniques and out-of-the-world twists, leaving thought-provoked readers in awe and lingering emotions of compassion, invigoration and zeal. This book is recommended for people who are currently lost in predicaments they cannot withstand in life; it provides insight and motivation for them to be free from fear, to break through and to defy the night.