

Night Book Review

1 Plot Summary

At the start of the memoir, it's 1941 and Eliezer is a twelve-year-old Jewish boy in the Hungarian town of Sighet. He's deeply religious and spends much of his time studying the Torah (the Bible) and the Talmud and praying. His parents and sisters run a shop in the town, and his father is highly respected in the Jewish community. Eliezer begins to study the Cabbala, the book of Jewish mysticism, with an immigrant named Moché the Beadle. When the Hungarian police deport all of the foreign Jews, Moché is sent away, but he returns with a terrible and fantastic tale: the Gestapo stopped the train and slaughtered the deported Jews. Moché escaped with a leg wound and has come to warn the Jews of Sighet to leave. The Jews of the town can't believe what Moché is saying and think he's gone mad.

The war continues through 1943. In 1944, the Jews of Sighet still don't really believe Hitler intends to exterminate them. Eliezer wants his father to relocate the family to Palestine, but his father says he's too old to start again. The Fascists come to power in Hungary and German soldiers enter the country. Before long, German officers are living in Sighet and then arresting the Jewish leaders of the town. Soon, the Hungarian police round the Jews up into two ghettos. Next, they force the Jews like cattle onto trains headed to an unknown destination.

With the front lines of the war getting closer, the prisoners at Buna are evacuated on a long, nightmare death march to a camp called Gleiwitz. People die continuously along the way as the SS forces them to run for hours and hours in the snow, shooting people who fall behind. The survivors of the march are kept without food and water for several days, more are separated from the rest to be killed, and the remaining prisoners are crammed onto trains in open-roofed cattle cars. The train ride is endless. The Jews have nothing to eat but snow, and people die left and right. Doctors won't help, the camp doesn't want to waste food on sick people, and Eliezer can only offer his own rations to his father, who is soon delirious. The night before Eliezer's father passes away, an SS officer beats the dying man on the head. Eliezer is unable to cry or mourn. He spends another two and a half months at Buchenwald in a daze before the Nazis begin another prisoner evacuation. This time there is an armed uprising among the prisoners and the remaining SS flee. American tanks arrive, followed by food, although Eliezer gets food poisoning and spends two weeks in the hospital, near death. When he looks at his face in the mirror for the first time since he left the village of Sighet, he sees a vision he will never forget: the face of a corpse.

2 Review

Upon completion of this book, my mind is as numb as if I had experienced this suffering myself. So much pain and suffering are thrown at you from the pages that one cannot comprehend it all in the right perspective. One can only move forward as the victims in this book did. Step by step, page by page. Initially, numbness is the only way to deal with such anguish.

Humanity has the capability of extreme strength, but also of extreme weakness (which often hides under the guise of self-righteousness and need for power over others). This book is necessary in order to remind us of this. These things must not be forgotten. Read it as a reminder of how fortunate we are to have a free society and how we must preserve this freedom at all costs.