

3 The extract below describes the bombing of a town.

(a) Comment on the style and language of the extract.

[15]

(b) Write a description (120–150 words) of another dramatic event (real or imaginary) where a peaceful environment is suddenly disturbed. Base your answer closely on the style and language of the original extract.

[10]

The town far below was asleep. It lay pillowed on the secure shore; violet shadows leaned against its pale buildings; there was no movement in its streets; no smoke from its chimneys. The ships lay still in the deep close harbour; their masts rose out of the turrets of the warships like strange plants among them. The sea was smooth as a silver plate; there was no sound anywhere.

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The aeroplane descended in slow spirals upon the town, tracing an invisible path through the pearly air. It was as if a messenger from heaven were descending upon the people of the town who dreamed.

Suddenly a scream burst from the throat of the church tower. For an instant the sky seemed to shiver with the stab of that wail of terror rising from the great stone throat. Surely the town would waken in a panic – and yet, no, nothing stirred. There was no sound or movement in any street and the sky gave back no sign.

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The aeroplane continued to descend until it looked from the church tower like a mosquito; then there dropped something from it that flashed through the air, a spark of fire.

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Silence had followed the scream.

The aeroplane, superbly poised now in the spotless sky, watched the buildings below it as if waiting for some strange thing to happen; and presently, as if exorcised by the magic eye of the insect, a cluster of houses collapsed, while a roar burst from the wounded earth.

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Still, the neat surface of the wide city showed no change, save in that one spot where the houses had fallen. How slow to wake the town was! The daylight brightened, painting the surfaces of the buildings with pale rose and primrose. The clean empty streets cut the city into firm blocks of buildings; the pattern of the town spread out on the earth, with its neat edges marked by walls and canals, gleamed like a varnished map.

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Then the siren in the church tower screamed again; its wail followed by a second roar and a ragged hole yawned in the open square in the middle of the town. The aeroplane circles smoothly, watching.

And at last signs of terror and bewilderment appeared in the human ant hill beneath it. Distracted midgets swarmed from the houses: this way and that they scurried, diving into openings in the ground: swift armoured beetles rushed through the streets; white jets of steam rose from the locomotives in the station yard: the harbour throbbed.

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Again there was a great noise, and a cloud of debris was flung into the air as from a volcano, and flames leapt after it. A part of the wharf with a shed on it reeled drunkenly into the sea with a splash.

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The white beach was crawling now with vermin; the human hive swarmed out on to the sands. Their eyes were fixed on the evil flying thing in the sky and at each explosion they fell on their faces like frantic worshippers.

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The aeroplane cavorted, whirling after its tail in an ecstasy of self-gratification. Down among the sand dunes it could see the tiny black figures of men at the antiaircraft guns. These were the defenders of the town; they had orders to shoot to death a mosquito floating in boundless heaven. The little clouds that burst in the sunlight were like materialised kisses.

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The face of the city had begun to show a curious change. Scars appeared on it like the marks of smallpox and as these thickened on its trim surface, it seemed as if it were being attacked by an invisible and gigantic beast, who was tearing and gnawing it with claws and teeth. Gashes appeared in its streets, long wounds with ragged edges. Helpless, spread out to the heavens, it grimaced with mutilated features.

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Nevertheless the sun rose, touching the aeroplane with gold, and the aeroplane laughed. It laughed at the convulsed face of the town, at the beach crawling with vermin, at the ant people swarming through the gates of the city along the white roads; it laughed at the warships moving out of the harbour one by one in stately procession, the mouths of their guns gaping helplessly in their armoured sides. With a last flick of its glittering wings, it darted downward defiant, dodging the kisses of shrapnel, luring them, teasing them, playing with them: then, its message delivered, its sport over, it flew up and away in the sunshine and disappeared. A speck in the infinite sky, then nothing – and the town was left in convulsions.

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