

Character Sketch:

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Xavier Bird

Xavier Bird is the name of the main protagonist from *Three Day Road* written by Joseph Boyden. In the book, Xavier bears some of the same looks as his aunt, Niska, who describes him from a vision saying, “there was no doubting that he was of my relation. His nose was mine, his eyes carried the same sharpness. His ears stuck out from his head.” (Boyden 216). Xavier is also described with “hair long and black” that he, “wore braided” and woven, “into a strip of rawhide and a thin red length of yarn.” (Boyden 265). With Xavier also being of

Aboriginal decent and raised with Aboriginal influences for much of his life, we can use stereotypes to guess that he likely also has a darker skin tone, brown eyes, and is lean and muscular.

Xavier’s history is also explored in the novel and we learn much about his past life. Xavier’s earliest history dates back to Niska’s, his aunt’s, visions which, “from what [she] knew,” Xavier was, “only four or five winters.” During that time Xavier had lived his entire life at a christian school in town because his mother, Rabbit or Anne, was a helpless drunk who, “was in no condition to keep Xavier,” (Boyden 216). Then Niska came and stole Xavier away from the school, starting Xavier’s life in the bush. “That winter and the following summer and the winter and summer after that were plentiful and very happy,” Xavier had, “adjusted to the ways of the bush better than [Niska] had

hoped.” (Boyden 220). Xavier spent many years living in the bush until he, “and Elijah had reached the age where [they]... decided to paddle to a town where they could join the army.” (Boyden 293). Xavier and Elijah are successful in their desire to join the army and they stay overseas for, “their big holiday... in a week or so, the one they call Christmas that celebrates the birth of their *Gitchi Manitou*. Already I have spent two with them, This Christmas will be my third... the new year that begins they call 1918.”(Boyden 307). From this point on all we know is that Xavier will eventually make it home and take a three day long trip with his aunt, back into the bush.

In the story Xavier is very quite and talks with a few people or only when directly spoken to. As a result of this Xavier believes that he is, “becoming a ghost,” (Boyden 97) to his fellow comrades as they stop noticing and speaking to him. Xavier also proves himself to be very calm and collected in the book by proving his sniper skills to the men and winning them over: “I breath in, breath out, breath in... if I can do this I will no longer be so much the outsider. I will gain respect. I let half my breath out and place the very tip of the sight on what must be the tip of the match. The world has gone silent. My body feels as steady as it ever has. I squeeze the trigger and if by some magic the match flares and then lights... the men cheer.” (Boyden 109). Finally Xavier is quoted by a coronal, as exhibiting, “the best traits for an officer. The ability of judgement under duress, the will and strength to carry out unpleasant and dangerous duties, decisiveness.” (Boyden 190).

Xavier’s surroundings throughout the story are largely split into two main places, his home in the Canadian bush, and the trenches of WW1. At his homeland in Canada he is surrounded by the thick bush, where the, “branches of the trees were covered and glittering,” (Boyden 259) with snow and “the wild animals,” (Boyden 95) surrounded him. The bush is a very quite, peaceful, place where the birds can be heard singing. This is

of stark contrast to Xavier's war time surroundings. Here, "Rain without stop for weeks and now in front of us lies a stretch of mud and shell-holes filled with water and bodies of the dead. This place is one vast field. Not a tree or a bush left standing. The trenches are not so much trenches as shallow water-filled craters joined to one another by slimy, caving-in walls," (Boyden 302) not only that but these trenches are also pounded by enemy shells, and overrun with rats and lice. This place is loud, uncomfortable, and potentially deadly.

In the book Xavier acts very differently from the characters around him, and he often speaks volumes through his actions. An example of this his performance of his sniping post. In the book, "it's Elijah that's the killer... Xavier just spots for him," (Boyden 97), which shows that Xavier does not want to shoot the enemy and increase his 'kills' in the same way that Elijah does. Eventually Xavier does start killing the enemy but only in extreme circumstances where it is necessary for him to defend his comrades or himself, otherwise he continues spotting for Elijah. This shows that he is just too peaceful or moral to kill without just cause. An extension of this occurs later in the book when Breech, a commanding officer, orders Xavier, "to stand up and sweep down [a] nest!" (Boyden 258) belonging to a peaceful swallow, and Xavier refuses to do so.

Xavier talks very little throughout the book and when he does he prefers to speak in Cree and have Elijah translate for him. Despite this we can learn a lot about Xavier from his speech, using progressive quotes like, "'the other is dead too,' I say in English. No choice. Legs broke." (Boyden 189) to his return home were when, "he dreams, he speaks aloud in English," even though, "he once claimed he would never speak the *wemistikoshiw* tongue." (Boyden 89). These quotes show that Xavier's english has actually gotten quite good and that he is slipping between the two languages; Cree and

English. Another thing we can pick up from these quotes is that Xavier chooses to speak in very straight forward bursts, which tells us that he might not like english, or the English speaking people around him, and that he pretends not to know english so that he will not have to speak it.

Xavier's opinions of others are also made clear in the book. One person whom Xavier has a particular dislike for is a man nicknamed 'Grey Eyes.' Early on in the book Xavier discovers that 'Grey Eyes' is addicted to morphine and by what he says and does Xavier quickly decides "he's a liar" (Boyden 14). Another person that Xavier begins to watch is his best friend Elijah. Since the war started Xavier has witnessed his friend fall deeper and deeper into a malicious, blood thirsty, fever that twists him into a mad man. It all began with Elijah's desire to raise his kill count, but slowly, he began scalping the bodies of the men he had killed for proof of his kills. Even further in the book Elijah tells Xavier that the meat they are eating, "is human. German, to be exact." This causes Xavier to puke, and Elijah quickly says, "X! Calm down!... I am only joking. What? Do you think I'm crazy? I was kidding. It's just horsemeat." then his "forehead creased innocently and the gleam of the trickster is in his eyes. He popped some meat in his mouth, chewed it and swallowed." (Boyden 330). This sequence from the book clearly shows that Xavier has witnessed Elijah's changes and that he now believes that Elijah is capable of eating humans, a big shift from Elijah once being his trusted best friend.