

The Sava Crossing

a novel by Brian Stanley

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Dee ends the novel as a man who built a life “on different ground.” What parts of the boy from Krapje do you think survived the war, and what didn’t?
2. Hap tells Dee: “You didn’t kill that boy. The war did.” Do you agree or disagree? Where do you draw the line between personal responsibility and the moral chaos of war?
3. At the train, Hap deliberately lets go of Dee’s hand so Dee won’t be pulled down with him. How does this single act reverberate through the rest of the story? How does it shape who Dee becomes?
4. The novel humanizes characters on both sides of the war: the German soldier who whispers “Anna” as he dies, Klaus’s mother’s letter, the young soldier at the checkpoint who shows Dee mercy and is later killed by him. How did these moments affect your reading? Did they complicate your feelings about the war, or clarify them?
5. Claudia Metzger tells her children their father died a hero. Is this a mercy or a lie? What would you have told them?
6. Several characters make impossible choices between competing loyalties: Gunther betrays Yedi to protect his daughters, Bridgette abandons Metzger’s children to save her own son, Claudia kills her husband to stop what he’s become. Choose one of these moments. Do you believe the character made the right choice? Was there another way?
7. In Chapter 69, Dee confronts his father about abandoning the wounded. Who was right? Did Dee earn the authority to challenge his father, or was he being unfair to a man who’d already given everything?
8. Miri tells her cell: “They use rage as fuel. We use purpose. They kill from hate, and we kill to save.” Is this distinction real, or is it something soldiers tell themselves to survive? Does the novel support or complicate Miri’s claim?
9. Yedi and Gunther both quietly worked against Metzger for over a year without telling each other. What do you think kept each of them going in isolation? Is quiet resistance as meaningful as open defiance?
10. Several objects carry enormous weight in this novel: Jakob’s wooden top, Miri’s handkerchief, Kapetan’s insignia, the oilcloth packet of evidence. Which one stayed with you after you finished reading, and why? Is there an object in your own life that carries that kind of weight?

11. In the final dream, Klaus stands at the edge of the forest—“not a ghost, not a victim, just a boy, like they’d all been children, before the world told them who to kill.” Why do you think the author placed Klaus in this moment? What does his presence say about how Dee has processed the war?
12. The epilogue tells us who survived but also who didn’t—and who simply vanished. Miri says, “Some stories the war keeps.” How did the novel’s handling of unresolved fates affect you? Is it more honest to leave some stories untold?

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