

Chapter Five: Bullhead City



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Jack London's reference to the "dominant primordial beast" in *The Call of the Wild* is echoed by a graffiti quote found in the abandoned bus on the Stampede Trail.

Two Months in BC

- **No camera = no journal, for the time being. So, little is known.**
- **Here's what we do know, based on letters to Jan Burren and Wayne Westerberg:**
 - **Chris spends July and August in Oregon, along the coast. The fog and rain drive him back to California and then into the desert, once again.**
 - **Krakauer suggests McCandless likes Bullhead City because of the high population percentage of working class people and the stark desert scenery.**

Bullhead City 47 Vacation Guide

- **McCandless obtains a job at McDonald's**
 - **McCandless tries to disguise the fact that he is homeless, but the other employees complain about his body odor.**
 - **He is a hard worker, so the company keeps him on despite his poor hygiene.**
 - **It's revealed that Chris hates socks. Perhaps to him, socks represent society's rules. He'll put up with them as long as he has to.**

Best
Bullhead City
Hotel Rates

Living with a Lunatic

- **While in Bullhead City, McCandless is provided free housing in a vacant mobile home by a man, named Charlie.**
 - **McCandless describes Charlie as "a lunatic," who is difficult to get along with (41).**
- **Charlie describes McCandless as a decent young man, although moody and in apparent search of something.**
 - **Charlie does not believe McCandless knew what he was searching for, exactly.**

Plastic People

A map of the United States with a red dot marking Bullhead City, Arizona. Other cities labeled on the map include Salt Lake City, Denver, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Albuquerque, Lubbock, and El Paso.

- **In November, McCandless sends a postcard to Jan Burren.**
 - Thrilled that McCandless has a return address, Jan writes back right away, asking to come visit.
- **McCandless enthusiastically agrees and provides her detailed directions to the mobile home in Bullhead City, but before Jan and her boyfriend Bob leave for the visit, Alex turns up unexpectedly at their door!**
 - He tells them that he got tired of the "'plastic people'" he was working with, quit his job and left

The Slabs

- **The Slabs is a city of drifters, which has sprung up over the empty concrete foundations of an abandoned naval base.**
- **It is a seasonal city, where drifters of all types come to live for the winter.**
- **An impromptu flea market is up and running when Alex arrives, and he volunteers to help Jan Burrell sell her secondhand paperbacks.**

Ignoring the Real London

- Alex tells everyone he sees to read *The Call of the Wild*, as his fascination with Jack London dates back to his childhood.
 - Alex believes in London's condemnations of capitalism and his love for the unwashed masses.
- However, JK intrudes into the narrative to mention that McCandless seemingly overlooks the fact that Jack London's real life does not mirror his literary ideals.
 - London spent just ONE winter in the North. He was an

No Thank You

- **A seventeen-year-old girl, named Tracy, becomes infatuated with McCandless during his stay at the Slabs.**
 - **McCandless, however, appears intent on maintaining a celibate existence and does not take the teenager's crush seriously.**
- **McCandless is not anti-social, however, insists Jan Burres. During this time, he flirts with her constantly and makes many friends in the camp.**
 - **JK (and Burres) believe that Chris is totally focused on his future trip to Alaska, and he wants nothing to**

interfere

Burres Says Goodbye

- **When Alex leaves the camp, he accepts a fifty-mile ride from Burres to Salton City, where Alex has McDonald's send his final paycheck.**
 - **However, when Burres attempts to pay him for his work at the flea market, Alex is offended by her offer.**
- **She insists on giving him some knives as payment in kind that she hopes he might trade for necessities further down the road.**
 - **Burres tries to give him some warmer clothing to take to Alaska, but he hides the clothes in her van and leaves them there.**

- **This section demonstrates the inconsistency of Alex's belief system.**
 - He is offended that Burrell wishes to pay him wages for working at her flea-market booth, but he has *no* trouble asking her to drive a hundred miles roundtrip so that he can pick up his McDonald's paycheck.
 - Nor does he hesitate to accept goods from her in lieu of money, although the knives likely cost Burrell as much as a cash payment would have.
- **This double standard indicates Alex's romantic mindset about money.**
 - He denies himself money often at others' expense and feels that his self-denial puts him on higher moral ground than everyone else.

Today's Work

- The characterization and alter ego assignment is due at the beginning of class on Thursday.
 - You'll be able to work in small groups a bit today and tomorrow, but you'll most likely have to work on this at home.
- Tonight's reading is the first half of chapter 6, to the end of the first postcard (bottom of page 53).
 - If you finish the whole chapter, you have no reading homework tomorrow!

My Alter Ego: Harley

McChopper

- Harley McChopper will punch you in the face and *laugh*. He won't even think twice . He's a tough, no-nonsense biker with an eye patch and a blue backpack—don't ask what's in it, or you just might get punched in the face.
- Harley believes in nothing but his own happiness, and he definitely doesn't believe in reading. In fact, he never even learned how to read—he just punched his teacher in the face and was never seen at that school (or any school) again.
- Harley doesn't care about his own safety either, so he rides a big Harley without

