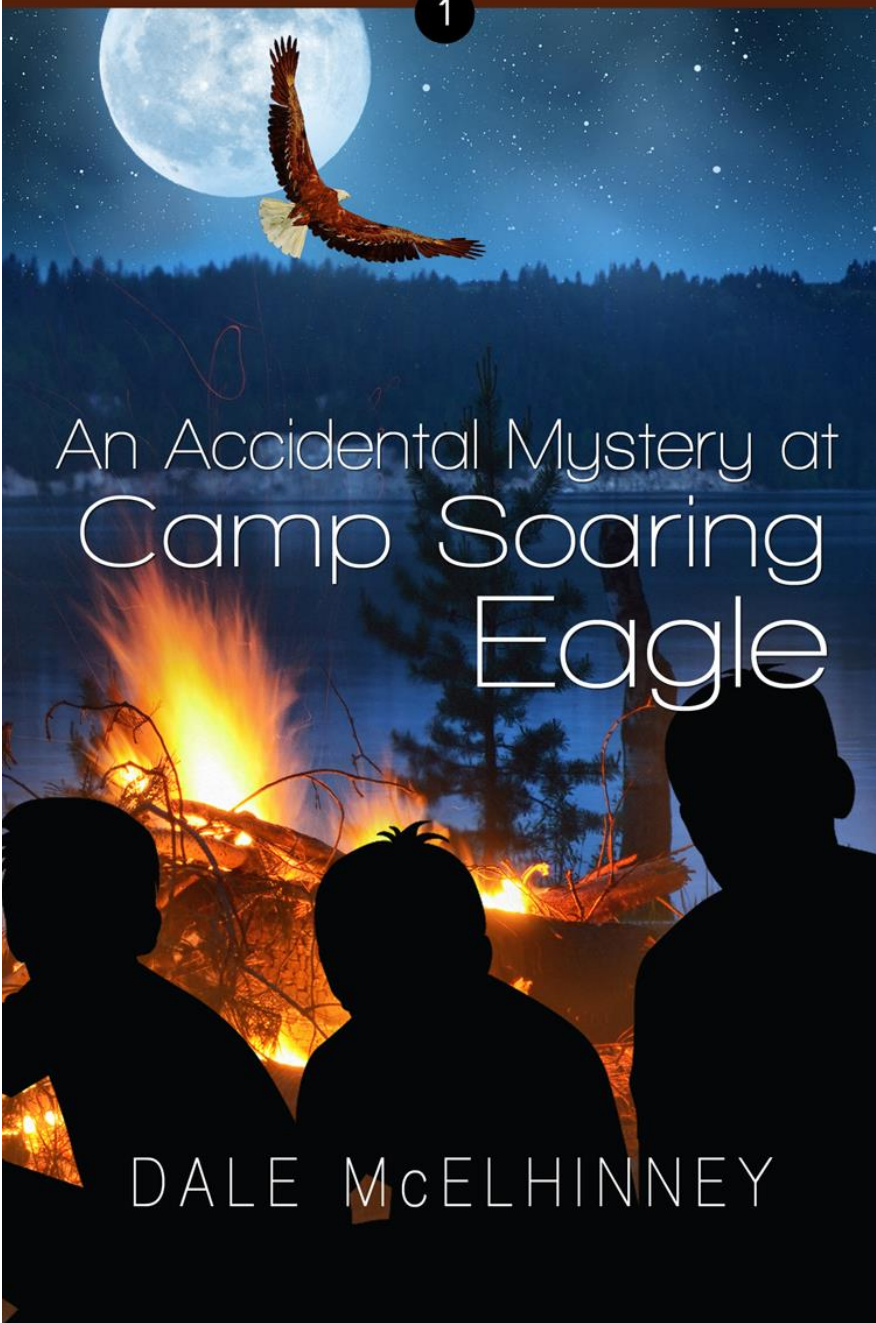


A CAMP SOARING EAGLE MYSTERY

1

The book cover features a night scene at a camp. A large, bright full moon hangs in a dark blue sky filled with stars. An eagle is shown in flight, its wings spread wide, positioned in the upper left quadrant. Below the eagle, a line of dark evergreen trees stretches across the horizon. In the foreground, a large campfire burns brightly, casting a warm orange and yellow glow. The silhouettes of three people are visible in the lower foreground, looking towards the campfire. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and serene.

An Accidental Mystery at  
Camp Soaring  
Eagle

DALE McELHINNEY

# **AN ACCIDENTAL MYSTERY AT CAMP SOARING EAGLE**

*Dale McElhinney*

*The Camp Soaring Eagle Mystery Series  
Book 1*

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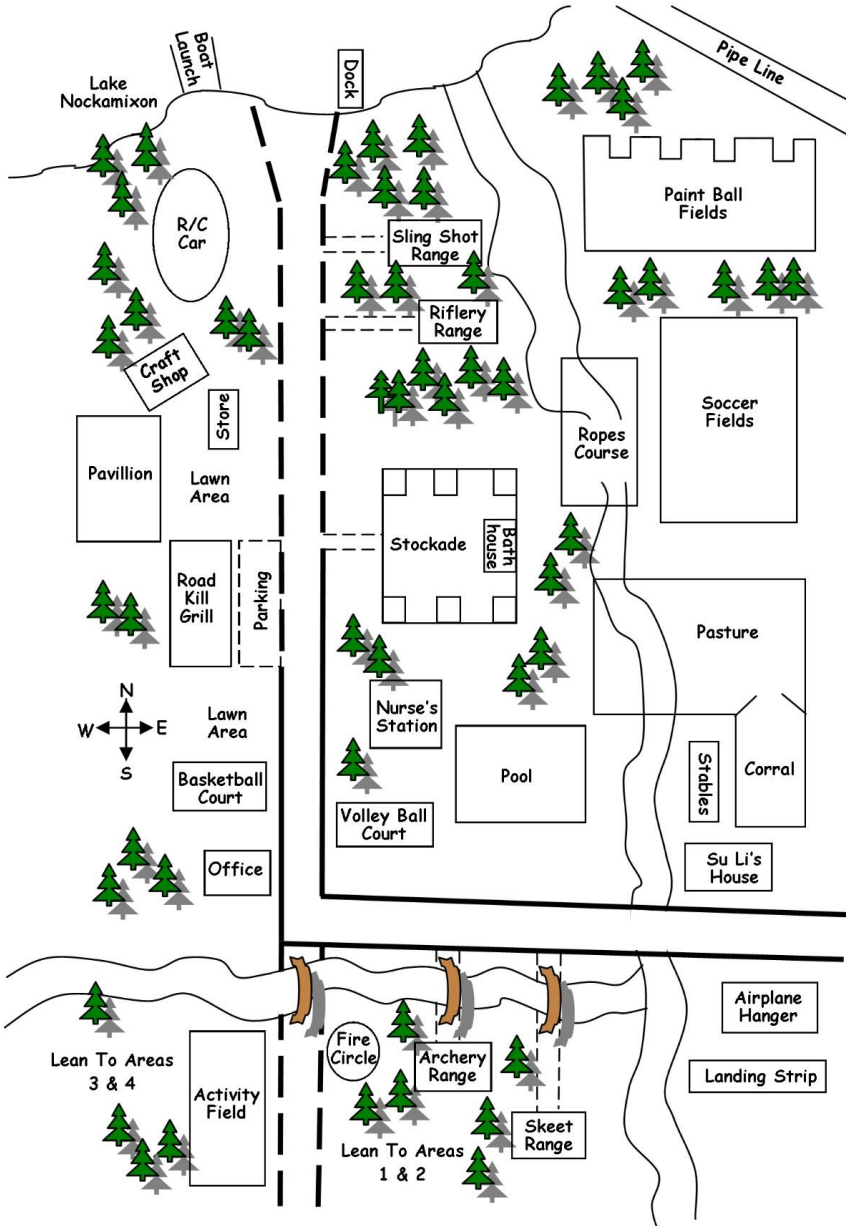
“Hang onto your backpacks because this book is *not* your average camp story. Get ready for real mystery, actual danger and dilemmas you’re sure *nobody* could get out of. And it’s told the way only this storyteller can tell it – which means can’t-breathe-because-you’re-laughing-so-hard humor and, kids, you’ll wish lived in your camp cabin. The even better news is: this is only the first book in the series.”

— Nancy Rue, award-winning author of over 100 children's books

“Some people will do anything to keep a secret buried — even if it means killing. A carefree week at camp turns deadly when Shaun and his friends uncover the truth behind a series of ‘accidents.’ *Camp Soaring Eagle* comes out swinging from page one, and packs a wallop that will keep you reading long after the campfire has died down. Perfect for boys, but girls will love it, too!

— Tim Shoemaker, author of *Code of Silence*, *Back Before Dark* and *Below the Surface*

# Camp Soaring Eagle



# **DEDICATION**

For Shaun,  
whose endless curiosity about everything  
makes the thrill of being your father a grand adventure.

*“...those who hope in the LORD...will soar on wings like eagles.”*

Isaiah 40:31

 **BONUS MYSTERY** 

So you think you are good at solving mysteries? Let's see how good a detective you really are. Hidden throughout this story are the names of five famous fictional detectives! Can you find all five? For clues, the correct answers, and more, please visit my website at [campsoaringeagle mysteries.com](http://campsoaringeagle mysteries.com).



# CHAPTER ONE

## *A Scary Start*

“Dad, look out!” 13-year-old Shaun McWarren shouted. He clenched the back of his father’s seat with one hand and pointed to the windshield as a 60-foot Norway spruce plunged toward them.

“It’s gonna crush us!” Shaun’s mom screamed.

Mr. McWarren white-knuckled the wheel and slammed on the brakes. The seat belt dug into Shaun’s chest, violently forcing the air from his lungs. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw his friend Mack Daniello’s tablet boomerang off the seat in front of him and bounce into the back of the van. A soda cup sailed through the air and exploded against the dashboard, orbiting ice everywhere.

“Assume crash positions,” Mack yelled.

The van lurched to the right, slamming Shaun into the side door. He tasted blood in his mouth. *We’re heading for the ditch—we’re gonna roll.* He hunkered down and covered his head with his arms in anticipation.

“C’mon, c’mon, stop already.” Frustration, edged with fear, tinged his father’s voice.

Suddenly, the van made a final swerve before screeching to an abrupt halt in a shallow section of the ditch on the side of the road. Shaun waited a minute to make sure it was really over before he glanced up. The Norway spruce crashed with a thunderous roar ten feet in front of them. Its branches whipped the air and thrashed around like an enraged octopus.

"Is everyone okay?" Mr. McWarren turned to his passengers as he pushed his glasses back up on his nose.

Shaun's mother checked herself in the visor mirror.

"I'm...okay...I...I thought that tree was going to kill us."

Mr. McWarren reached over and squeezed his wife's shoulder. He turned to the boys in the back seats. "You guys all right?"

"Yeah... I guess." Shaun studied his reflection in the window. He brushed his chocolate brown hair off his laser blue eyes. He didn't see any cuts or scratches. "How 'bout you, Mack?"

Mack slowly raised his head from under his arms and looked around. He shot Shaun a shaky smile. "Well...I'm alive. That's a good start, right?"

Shaun undid his seat belt and yanked open the sliding door. The awful smell of burning brakes mixed with the sweet scent of pine flooded the van. He jumped out and clutched the door handle to keep from slipping into the ditch.

"Mack, get out here. You gotta see this!"

Mack climbed out, and the two friends picked their way toward the front to check out the damage.

"Hey," Mack said, "the air bags didn't go off."

"Nope, they're wired with three separate sensors." Shaun grabbed the rearview mirror to steady himself as the boys inched forward. "I read all about it in the owner's manual. If at least two sensors don't detect an impact of 15 miles an hour, nothing happens."

"You actually read the owner's manual for your father's van?"

"Sure, there's all kinds of cool stuff in there like—"

"Yo, Einstein, stop right there." Mack shook his head. "Sometimes I really worry about you, pal. I mean, reading the owner's manual for your game system is one thing, but a family van?"

Shaun's dad joined the boys and scowled. The right fender was mangled, and the front tire was embedded in eight inches of mud. He bent over to examine the damage more closely. Workmen in hard hats rushed from the woods. Several carried chainsaws. A man with a lime green construction hat approached the family.

"I'm Carlton Spencer." The man hastily wiped his dirty hand on his bright purple shirt before extending it to Shaun's dad. "I'm foreman on the site. Is anyone hurt? Should I call for an ambulance?" He reached for the cell phone clipped to his belt.

"I don't think so." Mr. McWarren glared at the construction worker. "What are you guys doing bringing down trees across the road like that? We could've all been killed."

"I'm terribly sorry about this," Mr. Spencer said. "Didn't you see the 'Road Closed' and 'Detour' signs down at the bottom of the hill?"

"Would I drive my family up the road if I knew we'd be in danger?" Mr. McWarren's voice simmered with anger.

"Jack!" Mr. Spencer barked to one of the crew nearby. "Go down to the bottom of the hill and check on those signs. You!" He pointed to a group of men standing near the fallen tree. "Cut up this tree and get it off the road."

While Mr. Spencer hollered orders at his crew, Shaun's dad called to his wife. "Honey, would you put the van in neutral, please?"

Mrs. McWarren crawled over the center console into the driver's seat and shifted the van into neutral. Mr. McWarren and the boys tried to rock the van, but it wouldn't budge.

"Don't worry about that," Mr. Spencer hollered over to him. "As soon as we get this tree cut up, one of the guys will get a truck."

We'll hook a chain up to your car and winch you back on the road in no time." He walked over and handed Mr. McWarren a business card. "Have your repair shop fax us an estimate of what the repairs will cost, and we'll take care of everything. I'm really sorry about this. Where y'all headed?"

"Camp Soaring Eagle," Shaun and Mack answered together.

"Hmmm," Mr. Spencer said, "that's the camp right up the road."

"Yeah." An ear-to-ear smile spread across Shaun's face. "We have a great time there every summer. Remember last year, Mack, when it rained—"

"—and we made a giant mud slide right through the center of camp and held all different kinds of mud slide competitions."

Mack's whole face lit up. "That was so totally awesome."

"I'll bet your moms weren't any too happy with all those muddy clothes," Mr. Spencer said.

"Uh, no, not really." Shaun brushed his hair away from his eyes.

"Anyway," Mack said, "we had a blast. I can't imagine going to camp anywhere else."

Mr. Spencer fidgeted with the spinner on his belt buckle. "Well, I hope you guys have a good time there *this year*." His eyes narrowed and his mouth twitched as he spoke.

*Wonder what he meant by that?*

Shaun's thoughts were interrupted by the return of Jack from the bottom of the hill. "Hey, boss, can I speak to you? Over here?"

Mr. Spencer left the boys and walked over to learn what Jack found out about the signs. Shaun and Mack watched the two men as they talked, but Shaun couldn't hear what they said over the roar of the chainsaws.

Jack was shaking his head "no" and gesturing in the direction of the ditch. Mr. Spencer frowned as he removed his hard hat and

swiped some sweat off his forehead with the back of his hand. His brow furrowed. Both men walked slowly toward the family.

"I don't know what happened," Mr. Spencer said, "but somehow the 'Road Closed' and 'Detour' signs were laying in the brush on the side of the road. That's sure not where I told the guys to put them. We're running a little behind with the project, but... I'll check into this right away."

Mr. McWarren used a tire iron to pull the crumpled fender off the tire. He decided it looked safe to drive, so as soon as the work crew cut a passage through the fallen tree and winched the van back onto the road, the family resumed their trip.

"Hey, what's that?" Shaun said as they passed a large trailer parked in the middle of a newly cleared stretch of ground a few hundred yards further up the mountain.

"Oh, I bet that's the office for the construction project," Mack said. "My dad takes me to them all the time. Whenever they build houses or things he designed, he goes there to answer questions and make sure they follow his blueprints correctly."

"Wonder what they're building?" Shaun watched out the side window until the trailer disappeared from sight. "Hey, d'ya think they're building an indoor remote-controlled car track for camp or something cool like that?"

"I'm afraid not." Shaun's mom smiled a mom-trying-to-let-you-down-easy smile. "I talked to some of the crew while Dad dealt with the van. They're building big, fancy homes for people who work in Philadelphia or New York but want to live in the country. By next year, this part of Eagle Mountain will be covered with multi-million dollar mansions." She fidgeted with her ear. "I sure hope it doesn't hurt your camp."

"Huh?" Shaun leaned forward to ask the question. "How could it hurt camp?"

"As long as they don't develop too much of the land, it will be all right." Mr. McWarren stroked his goatee. In the rearview mirror,

Shaun saw his father's face scrunch up the way it did when he tried to share something that bothered him. "But if they're building big, expensive homes, that makes all this land on Eagle Mountain worth quite a bit. There's a lot of money to be made by someone, and the love of money can lead to all kinds of trouble."

When they reached the entrance to Camp Soaring Eagle, Shaun and Mack leaped out almost before the van was parked. They spotted their friends, Riley and T.J., heading for the pool. Riley tossed an empty chip bag at a trashcan.

"Riley! T.J.!" both boys called out as they raced over to greet them.

"Hi, Shaun!"

"Hey, Mack!"

The friends exchanged their cabin's secret handshake from last summer.

"Whoa, Mack, what's that ridge down the middle of your head. You turning into a dinosaur or something?" T.J. ran his dark hand through his own short, black hair.

"Very funny," Mack said. "What can I tell ya? All my fans expect me to be on the cutting edge of cool... and my parents absolutely ruled out letting it grow down to my shoulders, so I settled for this fauxhawk."

"Yeah," T.J. said, "I know what you mean. I was thinking of not cutting my hair all year and coming back with like a two foot 'fro... but my parents freaked out and wouldn't let me do that either. It would've slowed me down too much for sports anyway, aerodynamics and all."

"Hey, Riley, you're almost as tall as T.J." Shaun looked up at his friend who had grown several inches taller since last summer. "Did you discover some secret stretching routine or something that you haven't told us about?"

"Nope," Riley said, "it's all those pizzas and snack cakes I've been storing up for a few years. They finally hit maximum

combustion capacity this winter, and I shot up. My mom says I'm still growing, so I'm making sure I keep myself well fueled." A lopsided smile spread across his face as he pushed his haphazard brown hair back from his dark eyes.

"You guys registered yet?" Mack asked.

"Yeah." Riley nodded. "We're going to the pool to take our swimming tests. Meet us there."

"Did ya hear they've got a great new high diving board," T.J. said. "We're gonna check it out!"

"Great." Shaun flashed them a thumbs-up. "We'll be there as soon as we can."

Shaun, Mack, and the McWarrens headed to the mess hall to register. The camp verse, "...those who hope in the Lord...will soar on wings like eagles—Isaiah 40:31," was carved on a wooden plaque that hung over the door. Shaun raced past it with barely a glance and into the mess hall. They waited in line for what seemed like forever to turn in their medical forms, deposit money in their camp accounts, and receive their cabin assignments.

Shaun tried to get away with giving his parents a quick 'goodbye,' but he was forced to endure the humiliation of being kissed and hugged by his mom in front of everybody. As his parents drove off, Shaun wiped his mom's lipstick off his cheek, and he and Mack headed toward the cabins. Duffel bags, pillows, and sleeping bags hung over their backs and bulged out from under their arms.

"Oooh, look out. We're being watched," Mack said with mock fear as they approached the two totem poles that guarded the entrance to the stockade where the cabins were located. They paused for a minute to readjust their gear.

"Yeah, I know," Shaun said. "It's really eerie the way their eyes seem to follow you when you walk past them."

Two-story cabins stood in the corners and the middle of each side of the stockade. A carved wooden eagle, with a genuine Indian

arrow clutched in its talon, hung over the entrance. The boys were assigned to Seneca as usual.

"Seneca would have to be at the far left corner," Shaun said. He and Mack half-carried, half-dragged their gear through the entire stockade and into their cabin. They unrolled their sleeping bags, changed into their swimsuits, and headed off to meet their friends.

They reviewed the pool rules, as instructed, while they waited their turn to take their swimming tests.

"Look out below," shouted Riley as he cannonballed off the high dive.

"Yo!" cried a gang of voices.

"Nice dive," Shaun said. He wiped the water from Riley's splash off his face and eyes.

"Yeah, I think you got everyone in line." Mack shook the water off his hair.

"Bombs away," the next cannonballer shouted. Another shower of water exploded over the campers waiting their turn.

Shaun and Mack passed their swimming tests and joined the impromptu cannonball competition. As Shaun stood on top of the high dive, a disturbance in the clearing below camp caught his attention.

At the construction trailer site, two men appeared to be on the verge of a fight. One of them wore a lime green hard hat and purple shirt. *That's that Spencer guy.* Shaun shielded his eyes with his hand and squinted but couldn't recognize the other man at that distance. The second man shoved Mr. Spencer down on the ground and waved his arms wildly, holding something dark in his right hand. Mr. Spencer did not move as the guy pointed his right arm straight at him. Shaun tensed as he waited to see what would happen next.

Suddenly, the friendly chatter and playful commotion of a summer afternoon at the pool was shattered by a sound that could be heard above everything else.



## CHAPTER TWO

### *The Face in the Window*

The shrill, piercing shriek of the lifeguard's whistle overpowered all the other sounds and signaled the end of swimming for the day. Jolted by the unexpected blast, Shaun lurched sideways and scrambled to keep from falling off the board.

*Stupid lifeguard whistle.* Shaun regained his balance. *They should let you know when they're gonna blow that thing.* He looked back at the two men in the clearing and then seized the opportunity to steal one last dive before heading to the cabin.

As they changed out of their swimsuits, Shaun told the guys what he witnessed.

"Wow." Mack tossed his damp towel at his bunk. "Ya mean they actually started a fist fight?"

"Not really a fist fight," Shaun said. "They were shoving each other when that Spencer guy got knocked down. He was sprawled out on the ground with the second man towering above him—"

"When the gun went off?" Riley leaned so far forward on the edge of his bed he fell off.

Shaun raised an eyebrow and looked at Riley. "Who said anything about a gun?"

"The thing he was holding in his hand and pointing at Mr. Spencer." Riley shoved his sleeping bag so he could sit further back.

"Oh, that. That was a cell phone. I wasn't sure exactly what it was either until he put it up to his ear."

"So then what happened?" A few beads of water still glistened in T.J.'s dark, curly hair.

"I'm not sure. The lifeguard's whistle went off, and I nearly took a header off the side, so I didn't see much after that—except the one guy talking on his cell phone."

As Shaun pulled on his slightly used t-shirt, a wailing sound like a bull moose with a serious case of indigestion filled the camp. It was the ram's horn that summoned campers to meals and meetings.

"Race ya to the Road Kill Grill!" T.J. cried.

He burst out of the cabin and charged through the stockade and up the hill, with the others in hot pursuit. The screen door to the mess hall slammed shut as the boys entered.

When they were all seated, they picked up their silverware and pounded the table, chanting, "Food, food, food!" Soon the whole mess hall rocked with the noise of hungry campers.

Greg Hardy, the camp director, held up his hand signaling for silence. His ultra-cool shaved head had inspired several of the counselors to shave their heads as well. "After I thank God for this..." He sniffed the air with a puzzled expression on his face. "...food, each table can send two campers up to the kitchen window. If you're brave enough. And no running, walk. There's plenty for everyone...believe me." He said a brief prayer and started toward the staff table when he paused. "Oh, and if anyone's seen Beamer, our camp dog, let me know. He's been missing since the cooks started making dinner."

Shaun noticed that when Greg smiled, his ears wiggled.

T.J. and Riley went to get the food for Seneca. When Riley returned, he plopped a platter piled high with fried chicken sitting in a pool of dark yellow oil on the table. T.J. followed with big bowls of mashed potatoes with gravy and peas.

Seneca dug in.

"I've been finking about how ta improve our strategy fer capture-va-flag thith year." T.J.'s mouth was half full of food. "Shwaun, do you hwave a pen stwuffed somewhere in one of ththose pockets? I cwan show you gwuys my stwategy on a napkin."

Shaun rifled through the pockets of his cargo shorts, where he kept all kinds of stuff stashed. "I should —"

"Yo, what's up with this?" Mack interrupted Shaun as a pea splashed down in the middle of the forkful of mashed potatoes and gravy headed for his mouth. He looked over at the next table. The guys from Mohawk grinned back. Jerry Jerkowicz waved his spoon, an ear-to-ear grin connecting the freckles on both sides of his pale face.

"Well, guys..." Mack looked around the table. "The first shots in this year's war with Mohawk have officially been fired. Grab your spoons and man your battle stations."

"No, wait," Shaun called out in a hoarse whisper. "I have an idea." He fished through his pockets and piled a bunch of pens on the table. "At first glance, these look like old ballpoint pens, but take them apart and remove the ink cartridge and they become precision-guided pea shooters."

"Great idea," Mack said.

"Load up—we fire on the count of three." Shaun passed out the pens. When the guys had transformed them into pea shooters, he held up three fingers and quietly began the countdown.

"One...two...three..."

With a *thwut*, the peas shot through the air like tomahawk missiles.

"Did you see that?" Mack pounded the table with his fist. "I got Jerry right in the ear. That'll teach him to mess with my mashed potatoes and gravy!"

Shaun and the guys from Seneca flashed the campers in Mohawk a big thumbs-up. Several were still searching their dinners for further evidence of Seneca's pea blitz.

"Round one goes to Seneca." Shaun made an imaginary tick mark in the air with his index finger. "Gentlemen, I am proud of each and every one of you. Today peas, tomorrow lima beans!" He saluted his co-conspirators, who erupted in laughter.

As the campers shoveled down big chunks of chocolate cake with fake whipped cream piled on top, Greg explained Soaring Eagle's competition between the cabins to the new campers.

"Each cabin will compete in all sorts of cool activities like glow-in-the-dark volleyball, capture the flag, soccer, diving, photography, outdoor living skills, and Bible verse memorization. Campers in the winning cabin at the end of the first week will each get this seven gadget pocket tool." He held one up.

"Cool as a moose." Shaun unleashed a rapid-fire volley of punches on Mack's arm. "Seven gadgets! Wonder what all it has?"

"I don't know." Mack rubbed his arm. "But if you break my arm, we won't stand much chance of winning, no matter what it's got."

"Huh? Oh...sorry."

"The cabin that has the most points at the end of the summer," Greg continued, "will win a very special mystery trip. All I can say for now is there will be camping, hiking, water, and tons of fun."

"Now you're talking!" Mack said.

The mess hall erupted with shouts of "Seneca," "Mohawk," "Iroquois," "Hopi" as the various cabins pounded their tables and shouted their names as loudly as they could.

After Greg made a few more announcements, he went around to all of the tables to welcome the boys personally. He greeted the campers from Seneca with their secret handshake. Each cabin had one, and Greg knew them all. "Hope you guys are ready for an amazing time at camp this summer."

"Shaun and Mack had an exciting time just getting to camp," Riley blurted out. "They almost didn't survive." He stood up and waved his hands while he talked. "See, they were attacked by a humongous killer pine tree. It was like 80, maybe 100, feet tall."

Shaun filled Greg in on the details with help from Mack and interruptions from Riley.

"It *probably* was an accident." Greg's brow furrowed, and he stroked his chin with his thumb and index finger.

*Hmm, he acts like he thinks it might not have been an accident.*

"Well, I'm glad you guys all made it here in one piece. I'm sure God has great things planned for all of us at camp this summer. Don't forget to take your dishes to the dirty dishes window before you head out to your evening activity."

Greg moved on to the next table to greet the guys from Sioux.

Shaun, Mack, Riley, T.J., and the others headed off to dump their dishes. "Here's that capture the flag strategy I tried to explain earlier." T.J. arranged peas on his plate to illustrate his plan. "If we position two guys twenty feet in front of our flag and two more guys five feet behind them but better hidden, and—"

"Hey, watch where you're going!" an angry camper said as Shaun crashed into him and splattered the remains of mashed potatoes and gravy down his back.

"Sorry." Shaun offered the camper the cleanest used napkins off his plate. "Didn't see ya."

"Well, that's great." Steve Schmolztz, a kid from Mohawk with short black hair and cold gray eyes, looked at Shaun and smirked. "If you can't see us when we're right in front of you with like a zillion fluorescent lights on, you guys should be a *real* threat when we play glow-in-the-dark volleyball or capture the flag at night."

Several of the campers from Mohawk snickered. One pretended he was having trouble seeing the dirty dishes window by banging into the wall with his plate a few times.

"What's *their* problem?" Shaun nodded toward Mohawk as they headed outside.

"Ah, they're still sore," Mack said, "because we almost beat them last year. They were so confident. I think it really ticked them off that we came so close."

"They better watch out," T.J. said, "because we *will* beat them this year!"