

CAMP  
**SECRET**

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# CAMP **SECRET**

by  
**Melissa Mahle & Kathryn Dennis**

This material has been reviewed  
by the CIA to prevent the disclosure  
of classified information.  
(really)





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# 1

## **The Deception Begins**

At first glance, Camp International looked almost normal. Buried deep in the woods of Virginia, it might have been mistaken for any of a dozen teen summer camps in the area. To the untrained eye, that is.

If the campers arriving on this particular Friday paid attention, they might have noticed that the cardinal sitting above their heads did not chirp or sing. Or the rock several of them tripped over while leaving the bus wasn't really granite, but lightweight polyurethane. Bolted to the ground, the concealment device hid a sensor that gave each arrival a full body-scan. If any of them bothered to look past the leaves skipping by their feet, they would have realized some of the trees did not move in the wind. But

then, a great deal of effort had gone into making sure no one would notice, not even Lee Wong, the best watcher among them.

Lee did notice the departure of the buses with 98 percent dread, two percent curiosity. As the last bus left the parking lot, two metal gates slid across the opening, cutting off access to the outside world. A man dressed in camouflage pants and a green T-shirt and carrying a large chain emerged from a shack next to the gate. He wrapped the chain around the posts and secured it with an odd-looking lock with five push buttons instead of a dial.

While the other campers picked up their nametags and bunk assignments, Lee continued to watch. The gate secured, the guard walked to an electrical panel mounted on the side of the shack. He flipped a switch. Out of the ground rose a metal barrier and spikes. Lee studied them. Even if the gate were open, no car could leave the area without losing all four tires and most likely its entire underside, unless maybe it was one of those gigantic trucks from his favorite video game, *Monster Madness*. The man hit a second switch and a light on the panel turned from green to red. Lee studied the gate. Other than the light change, he couldn't see what the switch did. Green to red? On to off? Or safe to danger?

Loudspeakers blared overhead, calling the campers to the mess hall for the official opening of Camp International. At the mere suggestion of food, Lee's

stomach rumbled at full volume. If it wasn't for the chaos and noise around him, Lee was certain everyone would have heard it. His hands reached for his belly—a second before he found himself on the ground, his mouth full of dirt.

A sturdy boy with two oversized duffle bags smiled down at him. The boy was about Lee's age, 13, or maybe 14. He wore a faded leather jacket despite the humid weather and black cowboy boots, and he had a thick head of sandy blond hair.

"Sorry dude," he said with a distinctive Texas drawl. "I gotta watch where I'm going." He dropped one of the duffels and gave Lee a hand. "My name's Tex. Tex Shaker."

Lee brushed the dirt out of his dark hair, which poked out in all directions in Tex's reflective sunglasses. "Lee Wong," he said, jabbing his finger at the gritty nametag stuck to the front of his shirt. But the boy and the duffels were on the move. Lee didn't even have the chance to explain this was his fault, that he had an unfortunate habit of being in the way.

He trailed behind the leather jacket like a lab rat following a piece of cheese. If he stayed close, maybe some of the cool would rub off on him. He needed some SWAG, according to his brothers. Something We Asians Got. Even his brothers made fun of his bulky frame, which made his head look too small and his hair a startled afterthought. His thick glasses magnified his black eyes to bug-like orbs.

His parents had been talking up this camp for the past year despite Lee's insistence that he was perfectly happy with his life. He didn't need to be "exposed" to new influences. Every day in the lab was a day of discovery. He did not want to go to camp even if the brochure said it was the top hands-on science programs in the nation.

The real problem was his dad. He thought Lee spent too much time holed up by himself. He knew his dad wanted him to be more like his brothers—sports champions and popular. Lee was a total failure at all things athletic. Perhaps he should be happy his dad hadn't sent him to wrestling camp. The thought of being grabbed by someone and thrown to the ground and twisted into unnatural positions made Lee shudder. Yep, it definitely could be worse.

Lee stood at the entrance of a whitewashed, wood-plank building after Tex dropped his bags and went in. There was no sign over the door, but as the smell of tomatoes, basil and garlic wafted toward him; he knew he had found the mess hall. A second sniff suggested meatballs. Lee was already salivating when he finally stepped inside. Tex had disappeared into the cavernous space. Lee's hope of making friends with fellow scientific minds faded as he studied the chaos in front of him.

The shouting started in the food line. A boy with short, dark hair and knobby knees poking out below soccer shorts tried to cut to the front of the line. Two boys ejected him.

Lee couldn't see who threw the first punch, but the fight was on. It was like a huge magnet, drawing in boys, including the one in the leather jacket. Lee held onto the door and dug his fingernails into the wood in case the magnetic pull turned his direction.

Then the food started flying. Lee ducked to avoid slices of garlic bread, which bounced off the wall behind him. A supersized portion of spaghetti splattered against a girl, turning her white blouse red, matching her ponytail and flushed face. Her tears left streaks through the sauce as a second wave of pasta hit. The girl looked at Lee and yelled something Lee could not understand over the taunts and screams.

"Save the spaghetti," Lee yelled back. It was his favorite, and the sight of it being wasted before he could get some made his stomach roar even louder.

The girl must have misheard him because she started toward him, but slipped, taking down a camp counselor. Eyeing the growing pile of arms and legs wrestling on the floor between him and the pasta, Lee calculated the odds of reaching the pot before it was too late.

As he let go of the door, a force field of a different kind hit the campers. A woman at least six feet tall stood on the raised podium in front of them, her sharp, angled face motionless. Her pale blue eyes pierced the room, daring anyone to move another millimeter.

“ENOUGH!” the woman shouted. Her voice had the edge of a drill sergeant.

Words froze on lips, and even the food seemed to stop mid-air as the commanding voice ended the free-for-all. “I wanted to welcome you to Camp International, but I am beginning to have my doubts about all of you. Food-fights, fistfights and the behavior I have witnessed tonight are a first for this camp. I expect each of you to start cleaning.”

A girl with a mass of dark ringlets dropped to her knees scooping gobs of green beans off the floor, grumbling that she was not going to be sent home because of a bunch of stupid boys. The girl splattered with spaghetti joined her, and soon the other campers were sweeping away the spent ammunition. Lee recovered the garlic bread slices and shoved them into the pocket of his cargo shorts. He could not bring himself to throw good food away.

When the room fell silent again, the woman continued in such an icy tone that Lee double-checked to see if her hair just looked white, or was actually covered with frost.

“I only hope the counselors, many now covered in food, will be treated with the respect they deserve over the next eight weeks. I’m Ms. Markum, your camp director. I will now turn the floor over to Mr. Corwin, who will be overseeing your daily classes and programs.”

Mr. Corwin bounded onto the stage to join Ms. Markum. It was so quiet Lee could once again hear his stomach complain. The man with wire-framed glasses and

bushy red hair reminded Lee of a clown. He wore a fat tie decorated with red and green jellybeans. Lee liked him instantly. Eyes on the platform, Lee inched his way toward the food line, hoping the funny-looking guy would hold everyone's attention long enough for him to score the last of the spaghetti.

"Welcome to each of our 100 campers coming from 48 different states, many with multi-cultural backgrounds. Tomorrow you will begin with aptitude tests," Mr. Corwin announced. "We will use the tests to learn more about your interests, as well as any special skills each of you might possess. Attitude and aptitude are the keys to your success here. I will see you in the morning."

"Thank you, Mr. Corwin. You will find the camp rules and welcome packet in your bunkhouse. Understand the rules are for your safety. No climbing the water tower, do NOT touch the perimeter fence, and stay away from the waterfall on the far side of the lake. Trespassers will be sent home in a box, if there is anything left after the bears finish with you." With that, Ms. Markum instructed them to finish their dinner in a civilized manner and then head to their bunkhouses for a mandatory lights out at 9:00 pm.

Lee couldn't tell if Ms. Markum was serious about the bears, but he wasn't about to test her. He was going to eat. Lee did not need any encouragement. With his mom not there to ration his portions to a maximum of 1800 calories, he heaped his plate full of spaghetti and meatballs, garlic

bread, and two pieces of apple pie. He passed on the squishy looking green beans—he didn't need green calories—and grabbed two glasses of juice.

Balancing the heavy tray, Lee scoped out the room looking for a good place to sit. There was still an open seat next to the boy with the leather jacket and the cool sunglasses. Lee walked slowly toward them, watching and listening.

The girl with wild curls leaned across the table from Tex, her hands always moving.

"Why'd you stupid boys have to ruin our first night?" Curls said.

"Who died and made you camp monitor?" Tex was now nose-to-nose with Curls.

"I'm Ria Santos," she said. "And I don't have to take any lip from a muscle-head like you." She grabbed her tray and stormed off, while Tex mimicked her wild movements.

Lee reversed direction, hunkering down at an almost empty table. He focused on the plate in front of him. The noises in his stomach died down as mouthfuls of noodles, sauce and meatballs hit the spot. The food was great. According to the weekly menu, tomorrow would be German night. If the labs are as good as advertised, maybe he could find a way to fit in and the summer wouldn't be a complete loss.

Lee scanned the room for the possibility of seconds. The food line had closed, but cafeteria workers were



circulating around the tables. Maybe he could still snag a little something extra. The workers moved in pairs and wore latex gloves. One carried a roster of names, checking each camper's nametag against the list. Lee watched with growing curiosity when the worker carefully took each camper's drink glass as they got up to leave. The first worker handed the dirty glass to the second, mouthing the number from the roster. The second worker dumped the contents of each glass into a plastic bin before slipping the glass into a bag marked with the corresponding number. The bag looked like the sterile ones he used in his lab at home.

Hellooo Einstein! No one else seemed to notice this strange collection of glassware. Should he say something? No, he'd be branded a paranoid weirdo on his very first day. Lee decided to test a hypothesis instead by grabbing his glass with his napkin and sliding it under the table. There he wiped it clean inside and out with a discarded napkin, before placing it back on the table in front of him.

That's when Lee saw the leather bomber jacket on the move. Tex, and a boy who made Tex look tiny in comparison, grabbed their trays and headed out. Figures Tex would hang out with him. Probably a football or a soccer player, like all the popular guys at school. It was not mathematically probable they would hang around with him. They were two steps away. Now was Lee's chance to join them. But the magnetic force was back, holding him down.

So he dug his fork into a piece of cake rejected by the kid across from him. Only Lee's arm and fork were free to move.

— • — • • — • • — — • — — — — — • •

As the campers drifted off to sleep, behind a vaulted door in a windowless lab a man in a white lab jacket finished his report. CONTROL had ordered the utmost attention to the specimens. The man was pleased with his discoveries. However, he knew CONTROL would have a different reaction.

**Memo for the Record**

**Date/Time:** 15 JUN/0345Z

**To:** CONTROL

**From:** BIOLAB

**Re:** Operation Mess

DNA samples were successfully collected from all campers by way of biosensors and saliva specimens, with one exception. All samples were verified against security database with two exceptions.

Data sent to security to investigate and eliminate possible infiltrators.