



The Mad Cook of Pymatuning: A Novel

Christopher Lehmann-haupt

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In this chilling novel about a 1950s boys' summer camp gone awry, the former *New York Times* literary critic has created a brilliant coming-of-age story with undertones reminiscent of *Lord of the Flies*.

Christopher Lehmann-Haupt's novel is at once a fantasy, a barbed portrait of boyhood in the dawning of the Eisenhower era, and a no-holds-barred story of terror of the sort that won him praise for his previous novel, *A Crooked Man*.

Jerry Muller has been a regular at Camp Seneca for years. Now that he's a teenager and counselor, things don't seem quite right at his traditional summer haunt. As Jerry plunges into the mysteries around him, he finds himself growing up fast -- maybe too fast.

He's attracted to T.J., a pretty girl who might have a boyfriend but who flirts anyway, and he's shocked by the truth about his friend Oz, who's more interested in Jerry than in the likes of T.J. He sees something is strangely amiss with the husband and wife who own the camp. But above all, he's scared of the cruel game masterminded by Buck.

Of Seneca ancestry, Buck is a sinister, bigger-than-life expert on Indian lore. He is also an organizer of scary games who may just possibly be a psychopath and a killer, and in whose hands the camp's make-believe, designed to scare the kids, becomes first a savage and brutal test of strength, then, by small steps, genuinely dangerous.

As Jerry unravels the mysteries surrounding the ordinary-looking camp, he struggles to understand how "the Forbidden Woods," which have always been off-limits to campers as a kind of game and dare, have somehow become genuinely frightening -- all the more reason to discover the secrets that lie behind Camp Seneca's facade.

The story reaches its climax in a shocking scene that neither Jerry nor the reader is likely to forget. Christopher Lehmann-Haupt's new novel is a wicked, suspenseful, and deeply original tale.

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