

STRIKER

JONES

and the
Midnight Archer

2



By MAGGIE M. LARCHE

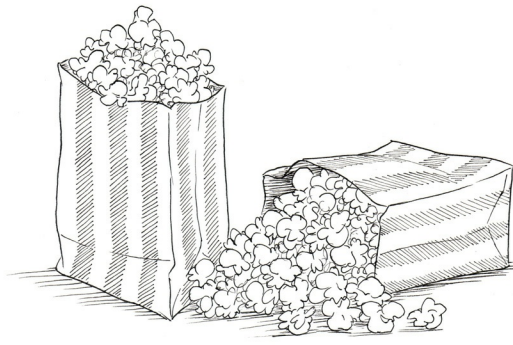
Striker Jones and the
Midnight Archer

By Maggie M. Larche

Copyright 2013 Maggie M. Larche

Smashwords Edition

Cover Illustration by Nilah MaGruder
Interior Illustrations by Melissa Bailey
Cover Design by Courtney Marcilliat



Chapter 1: Pop Secret

“Let’s do this!” said Bill Flannagan. “Six weeks of swimming, sports, canoes, campfires, and no parents!”

Striker Jones laughed with his best friend. The two boys were in line with 20 other kids in the school parking lot, waiting to load a bus that would take them to Camp Leopold for part of the summer. There they would join up with kids from across the county.

This was Striker’s first year to attend the camp, but Bill had attended five years in a row.

“You’re gonna love it,” said Bill.

“I’m just glad I get to go,” said Striker, thinking back to his mother’s goodbye that morning. She hadn’t exactly cried, but Striker had noticed some definite sniffing. Now, he kept glancing over his shoulder, expecting to spot his mom hiding in the azalea bushes or on the school roof, simply to sneak a few more looks before he left for camp.

“Look, there’s Amy and Sheila,” said Bill, pointing to their two friends, Amy Beckham and Sheila Meyers. Striker and Bill had known Sheila for years, and Striker had had a crush on her for almost as long. Amy moved to their school the previous year, and the four friends had been inseparable since.

The two girls were getting out of a car driven by Sheila’s dad. He jumped out of the car and lifted Sheila high into the air in a big hug.

“Dad!” Striker heard Sheila say with a red face. “I’m too old for this!”

“Bill! Striker!” yelled Amy. She waved the one hand that wasn’t loaded down with her canvas bag and pillow.

“Hey!” called Striker and Bill.

Amy ran over, while Sheila gently disengaged herself from her dad’s arms. Striker watched as she kissed her dad quickly on the cheek and ran to follow Amy, waving behind her as she went.

“I’m so excited,” Sheila said as she and Amy joined the boys. Her blue eyes sparkled. Like Bill, Sheila had also attended the camp for years.

“Me, too!” said Amy as she quickly pulled her red hair into a ponytail. “I’ve never been to camp before. This is the first time we’ve lived in one place long enough for me to go!”

“It’s fabulous,” said Sheila. “The cabins are so cute, and we get to decorate our bunks however we want.”

“And there’s every sports competition you can think of,” said Bill, “plus a bonfire every night.”

“And we get to do adorable crafts,” continued Sheila.

“And kayak and canoe and snorkel,” said Bill.

“And the lake is just gorgeous,” finished Sheila with a sigh.

“Don’t forget the best part,” added Striker. “No Ralph!”

“Yes!” they all shouted together. They threw high-fives and laughed. They were thrilled for the summer away from the class bully, Ralph Johnson.

“All right, kids,” said a counselor at the front of the line. He held a clipboard and pencil. “Time to load up!”

Sheila and Amy squealed and ran to add their luggage to the pile of bags beside the bus. Striker and Bill hoisted their backpacks onto their shoulders. They were off!

The bus ride passed fairly quickly between jokes and choruses of “100 Bottles of Beer on the

Wall.” The kids never seemed to get past 85 bottles before the song petered out, only to be started anew five minutes later.

Sheila and Amy were sitting in front of Bill and Striker. Both the girls turned backwards in their seats to chat with the boys.

“So, lots of kids come from other schools, right?” said Amy.

Bill nodded. “Yep. Why?”

“I was just thinking, since I don’t know any of them, maybe I’ll pretend to be someone else for the summer.” She turned to Sheila. “Do you think I could pull off a French accent? How’s *theez*?”

“Terrible,” said Sheila with a laugh.

“Okay. No French. Then maybe I’ll be the daughter of a millionaire. Or an orphan!”

Striker laughed. “Try all you want, Amy, but I don’t think you could ever pull off being anyone but yourself.”

Amy looked at Striker. “You could pretend to be someone else this summer. It must get tiring being ‘Striker Jones, Boy Detective.’”

Striker was known for solving mysteries that left others in the dark. He had discovered solutions to many sticky problems in the past and now had a reputation among his classmates as a real detective.

“Don’t be silly,” Sheila answered for him. “Striker’s the best detective around. He shouldn’t hide his gift!”

Striker felt red creeping up his neck. Time to change the subject.

“Look,” he said. “We’re leaving the highway. Are we getting close?”

“No,” said Bill, looking out the window, “but we are almost to my favorite part of the bus ride!”

He explained as the bus rumbled around country roads. “There’s this lady that sells bags of flavored popcorn by the side of the road. We always stop, and everybody always buys a bag and eats the popcorn on the way to camp. Look! We’re here!”

The bus pulled off at a roadside stand.

“Oh, no,” said Striker. He patted his pockets as kids jammed the bus aisle. “I didn’t realize I’d need money. I didn’t bring any.”

“No problem,” said Bill, sliding out of the seat. “You can share my bag.”

They piled off the bus with the other kids and joined the line at the stand.

“One small bag, please,” Sheila said to the old woman behind the stand when it was her turn.

“Butter, cheese, caramel, or kettle?” asked the saleswoman, tucking a stray gray hair underneath the bandana she wore on her head.

“Kettle, of course!”

“Me, too!” said Amy.

“Here you go, sweethearts.” The woman handed two bags over and smiled.

“Thanks!” The girls gave the lady their money before turning away.

Bill stepped up to the stand.

“I’ll take a small cheese, please.” He turned to Striker. “Sound okay?” Striker nodded. “I’d get two, but I don’t have enough money. There’s still a decent amount for us to share though.”

“Thanks, buddy!”

Striker and Bill loaded back onto the bus behind Sheila and Amy and headed for their seat. But when they reached their spot, they found something interesting waiting on them.

Sitting on the cracked green vinyl of Striker’s seat was a small paper bag filled with popcorn.

Striker guessed from its sweet smell that it was the caramel variety.

“What’s this?” he asked the girls.

“We don’t know,” said Amy, opening her bag. “It was there when we got on.”

“Did someone misplace it?” asked Sheila.

“Who misplaces a bag of popcorn?” said Bill. “Maybe it’s for you, Striker.”

Striker gave one last look around the bus and then shrugged his shoulders. “Well, I’m certainly not going to turn it down!”

He picked up the bag and plopped into his seat. Amy and Sheila turned back around and began chatting with one another.

“Who do you think put it there?” asked Bill quietly. “One of the girls?”

“How could they? We were with them when they bought their bags, and they each only got one.”

He peeked over the seat in front of him. “And they both still have their bags.”

Striker glanced around the bus again. Most of the kids were either still in line or standing outside the bus, munching their popcorn. There were only five other campers already back in their seats.

“My guess,” he continued, “is that it was one of those two boys.” He pointed first ahead a few seats, where one brown-haired boy with glasses tipped his large bag upside-down into his mouth, and then behind him, where a red-haired kid licked cheese powder from his fingers as he held his own large bag.

“Of course,” Striker went on, “I don’t know either one of them, so I don’t know why they’d buy me popcorn. And I don’t understand why they would keep it a secret.”

“Why those two in particular?” asked Bill. “Every kid on here has a bag of popcorn.”

“Yes,” said Striker, popping his first fluffy kernel into his mouth and grinning. “But those guys are the only ones that bought the large bag.”

Why does that matter?

Solution

The more you spend on something, the more likely you are to spend just a little bit extra on a related purchase.

People do this all the time. When your family is already taking a long vacation, they're more likely to spring for a fancy hotel than they would if they were going on a short trip. Or when you're already paying \$10 for a movie ticket, you're more likely to buy a \$3 candy bar to go with the show than a 50-cent pack of gum.

So when Striker realized that someone had overheard that he couldn't buy his own popcorn, and then had been nice enough to give him a bag, he guessed that it was someone who probably had already bought a lot of popcorn for himself. That person would be more likely to spring for the extra little bag for Striker than someone who had spent less money in the first place.

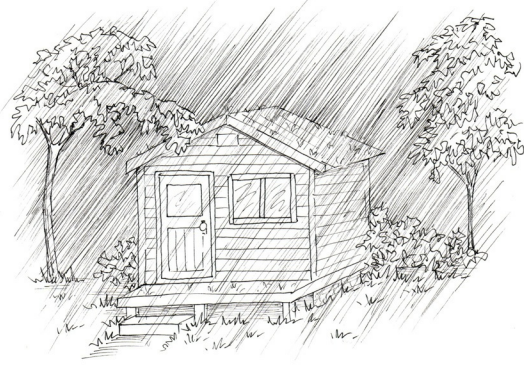
Striker never did find out that it was Charlie Johnson who had secretly given him the popcorn – the red haired boy who sat a few seats behind them on the bus.

Charlie had had a rough year at school. He'd been the target of the school bully from the first day of class, and he was fed up after months of teasing.

Charlie's cousin Ralph was always tough, and Ralph never got picked on. So Charlie decided to copy him. And when better to try his new macho approach than at summer camp?

Unfortunately for his plan, when Charlie heard that Striker couldn't buy any popcorn, he felt sorry for him. He chose to put off becoming No-More-Mister-Nice-Guy for just a little bit longer in order to help Striker out.

But, Charlie told himself, he would keep his good deed quiet. He couldn't ruin his new "bad boy" image on the very first day! He'd try again to be tough tomorrow.



Chapter 2: Mysterious Roommates

When the buses arrived, counselors stood by as the campers filed off and picked up their luggage. Striker's bus was one of a few filling the dirt road in front of the camp entrance.

"Looks like a lot of kids," he said to Bill.

Bill nodded. "Yep. Even after coming here so long, I've had some years where I didn't know any of the guys in my cabin." He picked up his duffel bag from the pile of unloaded luggage. "But don't worry. You and I should be together. My mom requested it when she registered me."

Sure enough, both Striker and Bill were assigned to Cabin 9.

Each cabin was sparsely furnished, with two sets of bunk beds, one regular twin bed, a linen closet, and five dressers. The clapboard walls were bare.

"Dibs," said Bill, vaulting onto the top bunk of the bunk bed nearest to the door.

"Hi," said a stocky boy with light blond hair. He was leaning back on the lone twin bed reading a comic book, his stuff piled on the floor beside him.

"Hi," said Striker. He placed his backpack on the lower bunk and then introduced himself and Bill.

"Richard Moseby," said the boy, pointing to his chest. "How ya' doing?"

Just then, two more boys entered the cabin: one very short, and one very tall.

"Hey," said the tall one. "I'm Jared Wiczorek." He turned to the boy next to him. "What was your name again?"

"Chris Patinski." Chris kicked his shoes off and jumped onto the remaining lower bunk.

"Hi," said Bill, and the boys introduced themselves.

"Hey, awesome!" said Richard, looking at Jared. "A guitar!"

Striker and Bill exchanged an impressed look.

"Yep." Jared patted the guitar case slung over his back. "Like I could leave it home for all of camp. I need my baby by my side."

"Cool," said Bill.

He turned to Striker, rubbing his hands together. "Well, I guess let's unpack. Then we can go get some grub."

"Sounds like a plan. I'm starved."

Striker quickly pulled his clothes out of his bag and haphazardly threw them into dresser drawers.

Bill turned his own bag upside down over an open dresser drawer and let the clothes tumble in.

He shoved his last pair of socks into the overstuffed drawer so that he could close it. "Done! Now let's eat."

Both Chris and Jared were still unpacking, so Striker turned to Richard. "Want to come?"

"Sure," said Richard. He shut his comic book and jumped up from the bed.

The three boys walked to the dining hall.

"Looks like Amy and Sheila aren't here yet," said Bill, surveying the room.

"That doesn't surprise me," said Striker. "I had the feeling they'd spend more time settling in than us."

"Should this poster go here or here?" asked Bill, cocking his head to the side and squinting. "And what color curtains look good with my eyes?"

Richard and Striker laughed as Bill batted his eyes.

“Are those friends of yours?” asked Richard.

Striker nodded. “We all go to school together.”

“Come on,” said Bill. “I think I see hot dogs!”

After a delicious lunch of hotdogs, fries, and fresh peaches the boys walked back to the cabin.

“We should hurry,” said Striker, looking up. The sky was rapidly darkening as thunderclouds rolled in.

“Yikes,” said Richard. “I hope the storm doesn’t cancel tonight’s welcome bonfire. It’s one of my favorite events.”

“Me, too,” said Bill. CRACK! An enormous thunderclap suddenly shook the ground. “Uh oh . . .”

The three boys broke into a run as fat drops began falling from the sky.

They burst through their cabin door minutes later, already soaked.

“Let’s see if we can find a towel or something,” said Striker, shaking the water off his head.

Bill opened the closet door and began pulling out items.

“Sheet, pillowcase, sheet.” He yelled to be heard over the noise of the storm. “Hey, what’s this?” Bill pulled his head out of the closet and turned to Striker and Richard. He held a crumpled red item.

“It was stuck in the bottom corner,” he said, opening it. “Hey, cool shirt!”

“Someone must have left it last summer,” said Richard. He grabbed a sheet and toweled himself off. “Geez, listen to that wind!”

Bill held the shirt out at arm’s length. “The Philosophy Club,” he read. “Huh.” He turned the shirt around and continued. “Josh Weaver. Kari Martin. Jared Wieczorek. Chris Patinski.”

“Wait a minute,” he said. “Jared Wieczorek. Chris Patinski. Aren’t those the two guys who are staying with us?”

“Yeah, I think so,” said Striker, walking beside Bill. “But I thought they didn’t know each other.”

The room suddenly flashed white with a lightning strike, throwing the boys’ faces into sharp relief.

“Maybe it’s a different Jared and Chris,” said Richard.

“Wieczorek? Patinski?” said Bill. “They’re not exactly common names.”

The room shook with a massive thunderclap.

“So they’re in a club together,” said Striker, taking the shirt to examine it. “That’s not a big deal.” He paused. “But why pretend they’d never met?”

The three boys stared in silence at the shirt. Rain pounded the roof of the cabin. Richard was the first to speak. “You don’t think there’s something . . . sneaky going on, do you?”

“What do you mean?” asked Bill.

“Well, I can’t think of many reasons why they’d lie about knowing each other. And the ones I can think of seem kind of, well, underhanded.”

“Like what?” asked Striker.

“Like,” said Richard, “maybe they’re planning to cheat in some competition, where they’ll make everyone think they’ve never worked together before, but they’ve actually been practicing with each other for months.”

“And so they’ll take everyone by surprise and win!” said Bill. “It could happen.”

“Or maybe they’re going to run some sort of scam,” continued Richard, warming to his subject. “One of them gathers information and passes it back to the other. And no one would suspect them of being in cahoots.”

Bill gave a low whistle.

The wind lashed rain against the windows, sounding like several gunshots hitting the glass. All three boys jumped.

“Or,” Richard said, lowering his voice to a dark whisper, “maybe they’ve sworn revenge on someone who’s at this camp. And the best way to get that person is to work as a team, but they’ve got to hide that they’re cooperating, so they pretend they don’t know each other.”

Bill nodded solemnly. “That is usually how it happens in murder mysteries.”

The three boys looked at one another with wide eyes.

BAM!

The door to the cabin burst open, just as lightning lit the sky. Two dark figures stood in the opening – one very tall, one very short.

“Ahhhh!” screamed all three boys.

“Whoa!” said Chris, as he and Jared came into the room, dripping with water. “What’s up with you guys?”

Striker, Bill, and Richard drew close together and backed away from the doorway as one.

“It’s just a thunderstorm,” said Jared. He sat on the floor and pulled off his wet sneakers. “We’ll probably have lots of them this summer, so you might as well get used to it.” He laughed.

Chris emptied his pockets onto his dresser. He threw down some spare change, a couple of guitar picks, and a package of mints.

“It’s not the thunderstorm,” Richard finally said. He ignored the shushing sounds that Bill was making and squared his shoulders. “It’s this.” He pulled the red t shirt out of Striker’s hands. “We found this in the closet.”

Bill clapped a hand to his forehead. “Now we’re done for,” he moaned quietly.

Chris and Jared stared at the shirt.

“Darn,” said Jared after a moment. “Chris, I knew we should have hid it under the bed.”

“So you do know each other?” said Bill, gulping.

“Yep,” said Chris. He raised his hands. “You caught us.”

Bill threw a worried look at Striker, but Striker wasn’t paying attention. He disengaged himself from the huddle with Bill and Richard and walked over to Chris’s dresser.

“Why’d you lie?” asked Bill, turning back to Chris. He straightened up and put on a brave face. “You can tell us.”

“It’s not . . .” Richard leaned forward and whispered, “illegal, is it?”

Striker turned to face the room and laughed. “Bill, Richard. Relax. It’s not what we thought.”

How do Chris and Jared know each other?

Solution

Chris and Jared are in a band together!

When Chris emptied his pockets, Striker saw that he had been carrying some guitar picks. But Jared was the one with the guitar!

When two items go together, they are called complements. Peanut butter and jelly, a left shoe and a right shoe, a tennis racket and tennis balls – these are all pairs of complements. Having one item allows you to get more use out of the other.

A guitar pick on its own is not much use. It needs to be paired with a guitar in order to fulfill its purpose. A guitar and a pick are complements.

When Striker saw that Chris had an item that Jared would need, and vice versa, he guessed that they were connected through music. He wasn't sure why the two had lied about knowing each other, but it seemed much more likely that it had something to do with a band than with some of the dastardly plots Richard dreamed up.

“You guys would have found out tonight,” said Chris. The boys were standing around the room, drying off with some towels that they had finally found in the closet.

“The Philosophy Club is our band. Me and Jared are the only two members here at camp, but we're still pretty good. We can both play the guitar, and I play harmonica when we perform together. When we got here, a counselor I know from church asked us if we would mind playing at the welcome bonfire tonight. He wanted it to be a surprise for the campers, so we couldn't tell anyone.”

“We figured,” said Jared, “that rather than lie to you guys about how we knew each other, we'd just pretend we'd never met. We were afraid we'd give it away otherwise.”

“Well, I guess we won't hold it against you,” said Bill.

“Even if you did almost give us heart attacks,” said Striker, laughing.

“I'm just glad you're not really up to some evil plot,” said Bill. Striker nodded.

“I don't know if I can forgive so easily,” said Richard.

Jared and Chris exchanged uneasy looks. “Look, man,” started Jared, “we really are sorry –” but Richard cut him off.

“Nope. Sorry. There's no way I can get past this.” He paused, a wide grin spreading across his face. “Unless, of course, you're willing to let me play your guitar.”

The guys all laughed.

“Deal.”