

The Adventures of Michael McMichaels, Vol 3: The Creepy Campers
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Day 1

MY LIFE STINKS!

It stinks worse than my dog on the day we finally decide to bathe him. We don't stick to a schedule, we just wait until he stinks and then my mother usually makes a face and tells me or my brother, Joey, to wash him.

What stinks about my life is my friend Kenny and I are at a really intense camp this week and I thought it would be relaxing, but it turned out to be really stressful from the moment we arrived. I didn't want to do anything during our week off from school, but Kenny asked if I would like to

join him in New Mexico at a camp he ASSURED me would be fun. My parents said it sounded like a good idea, and so off we went! Kenny's parents took the flight with us down here and neither of them could answer my question about how much 'newer' this Mexico was than the country of Mexico, which they don't call 'Old' Mexico for some reason.

Anyway, the camp is in the middle of nowhere, even though I don't know where nowhere ends and have no real way of knowing whether or not it is exactly in the middle, but you get the point. When we arrived at the camp, Kenny's parents said a big dramatic good bye to us like we were never going to see them again. It was super embarrassing, I'll be honest.

Our "Intake Counselors" Gene and Barbara, greeted us by scanning our eyeballs with their Apple Watches and then saying our names. I said, "You could have just asked, we speak English, you know," but they didn't hear because they were too busy looking at the screens of their iPads, iPhones and watches. They were very polite, but I got a weird vibe from them, and I remembered a word

my English teacher had taught us recently: foreshadowing. I had a feeling that this week was not going to go well.

Gene showed us to our tent, which was where we were going to sleep the first night. Each night we rotated with other campers to get the maximum “impact” from the “camp experience.”

Brother, here we go!



Gene explained to us the swim challenge would begin at noon, and to be punctual or we'd be disqualified. And, if we were disqualified from one event, we couldn't win Camper of the Week. That person supposedly gets a big mystery prize. That's all I needed to hear! I thought it would be a week of swimming in ponds and staring at ducks, but a PRIZE is involved so I set my sights on winning. Not coming in second place, but winning!

Kenny and I arrived at the pool on time and had begun to stretch on the side when I noticed a group of boys around my age with shifty eyes hobble over to the pool together. They all plunged in at the same time and had that guilty look on their faces which got me suspicious. With my goggles on, I walked to the edge of the pool to see what they were up to, but didn't see anything so I forgot about them.

You know what? I learned that day that I am not a very fast swimmer despite the fact that while I was swimming I kept saying **'MICHAEL PHELPS, you're MICHAEL PHELPS'** over

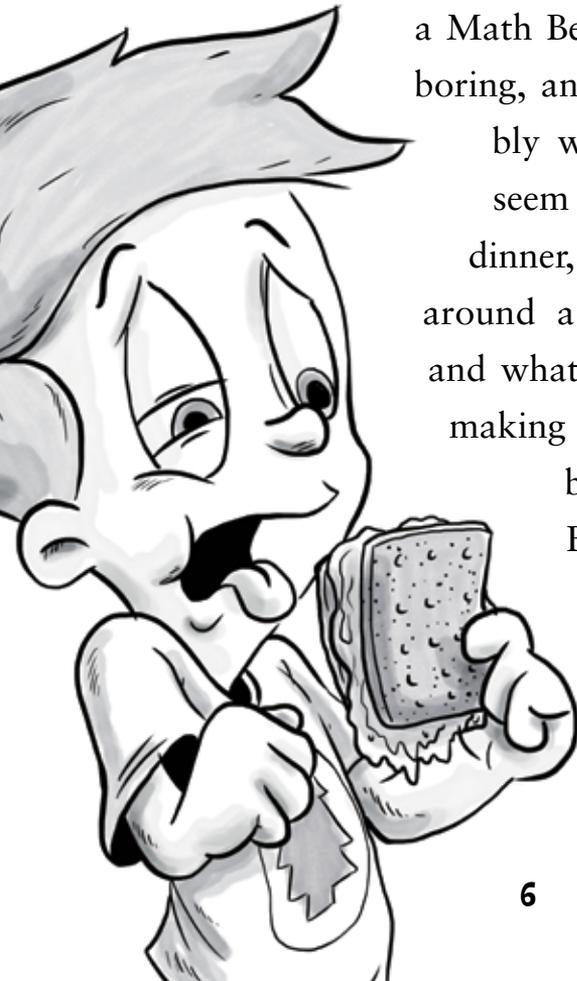
and over in my head. Didn't work. I got eliminated in the first round, but Kenny went a few more rounds (he's got a lot of nervous energy that really helps in these situations, I think) and I was in the bleachers cheering him on, looking through my nifty little pair of binoculars when I spotted a rat! (Not a real one. That would be gross!) No, this was a cheater!

Those four suspicious-looking kids kept beating everyone during every heat, and I got suspicious because who is that good all the time, right? Well, before one race I noticed one of them dove underwater, reached down for something at the bottom of the pool and attached it to his feet. It's a good thing my binoculars have a super intense zoom feature because I was able to see what he was attaching to his feet were transparent flippers. That's why he won, and that's why the other three kids in his little cheating posse won, too! No one else noticed except me, and I was fuming. I ran down to the edge of the pool to tell Kenny, but one of those crazy iPad people wouldn't let me get near the "active competitors." I squinted at the whole

gang of them and gave them the evil eye, which is something my grandmother had taught me.

I stared all four of those cheating campers directly in the eyes, letting them know I was onto them, only, I'll admit, I was scared and was reluctant to tell on them because then who knows what they would do for revenge.

That day there were a couple other challenges: a Spelling Bee, and a Math Bee, which really were boring, and then a long assembly which made the Bees seem interesting. After dinner, we all gathered around a fire for story time, and what I thought would be making and eating S'mores, but instead, Gene and Barbara said S'mores weren't considered "healthful," (Ugh, that word!) and so we were going



to make them with kale and quinoa (pronounced KEEN'wä), two things I had never heard of, let alone know what they were. They said they'd be called S'lesses. When I heard that I just lost it and screamed! **'KALE!!! QUINOA!!! Oh God, save me!!!'** And I threw myself dramatically on the floor which got a few laughs, but I think I freaked Gene and Barbara out because that wasn't written down on the agenda on their iDevices. "You should call them S'messes," I cried, still devastated.

Well, it turned out story time was a competition, too! It seemed to take forever and most of the stories were silly. When it was my turn, I told the story of the Angry Alligator and got a ton of laughs. Those conniving campers were fuming because they'd wanted to win that award, too. They each contributed a bit to a long story about an alien abduction that I could tell they worked hard on. But with stories, you know, there's that x-factor, and they didn't have it. So, ha! I won the badge, which apparently a college will care about when I'm asking for their permission for my par-

ents to spend a lot of money for me to go there. After the campfire was extinguished, those creepy campers approached Kenny and me as we were heading to our tent.

“So you think you’re all that for winning the story contest, huh?”

“I don’t think it,” I said, hoisting the certificate and the medal to show them proudly, “I KNOW it!” I was feeling good about myself because of my victory, but glancing over at Kenny who had run in the other direction, I could tell I may have gone too far.

“Yea, well, you’d better watch it. We’re going to win the rest of the challenges, got it?”

I could see Gene and Barbara not far away so I felt bold at that moment: “You mean you’re going to cheat like you did to win the swim competition today? Yea, I saw you down there with those invisible flippers. What if I told Gene and Barbara about your trick? Their iPads would NOT like that.”

Then the smallest, slimiest looking one of the bunch, with a distracting mole on his cheek,

approached me like a fearless little Yorkie.

“Well, you heard our story about the aliens, right?” he said.

“Yea,” I said, nervously.

“Well, we’ve got a few aliens on our side, kid, and they won’t like to hear that you’re thinking of telling on us.”

“Aliens! Ha. That’s funnier than S’mores made with whatever it was,” I said, turning my back on them and heading back to our tent.

Kenny and I were so darned tired after such a long day, and I was still thinking about those awful S’messes, that we both drifted off to sleep within minutes without saying a word.

I was sleeping soundly when I thought a dream was beginning, but I knew it was reality because I was sitting up and yawning and just then I saw it: A light shining on the side of my tent grew brighter and brighter, and I was paralyzed with fear. I couldn’t even muster the strength to wake up Kenny. So, I don’t even have a witness. Silhouetted in the light was the enormous, no, I mean, GIGANTIC bulbous head of an alien that

was making a scary “Ooooh,” sound.

“Ah, hello,” I managed to say, petrified.

“I am an alien,” the voice said, “just like the one in that story from tonight. Ooooh!”

“Christmas trees!” I cried (I learned that from my grandmother as a way to avoid saying something naughtier.)

“Yes, uh, Christmas trees,” the alien replied. “Anyway, I have come from the sky in my spaceship to tell you to keep quiet and not tell on those other campers for cheating in the swim meet... Oooh! Because if you do, they, uh, we will take you back to a far-away planet where there’s no AC and all they eat is kale and quinoa at every meal... Oooh!”

“Of course! I mean, no one cheated. We’re all honest Abe’s in here, right?”

“Right! Ooooh!”

Then the alien lifted its tiny arms like it was going to tackle the tent, and I ducked under the covers, trembling.

Kenny finally woke up all groggy and annoyed and pulled the covers off my head.

“Hey, Mikey, what’s going on? I was sleeping.”

“Kenny I just...I just...”

Tips & Questions

“All of this competition has led to rampant cheating. I am going to be honest with you all right now.”

I paused for a moment to gather the courage. “I cheated three times this week. I’m not proud of it, but the pressure got to me. And, as many of you know, Harriet and Kenny have also cheated. Who else has cheated because they felt overwhelmed by the pressure to win challenge after challenge? Come on, be honest now.”

Here are some helpful tips and discussion questions to share with children:

- 1. ASK** – Why is cheating wrong? How can it harm others and the cheater, as well?
- 2. ASK** – Is cheating confined to the classroom? What are other ways people can cheat that aren’t school-related? How are these other ways of cheating also harmful?
- 3. DISCUSS** – In *The Creepy Campers*, it turned out that all but one camper was cheating. Is cheating wrong if everyone or nearly everyone is doing it? Why?
- 4. SHARE** – Think of an instance in your life when you cheated. Why did you do it? How did you feel when you were doing it? If you were nervous, do you think that was a clue that the behavior was wrong? What did you gain from cheating? Who or what may have been harmed in the process? If you could go back in time, would you still have cheated?