the MiSADVeNTUReS of MICHAEL McMICHAELS

vol. 3

the CREEPY CAMPERS

by Tony Penn
illustrated by Brian Martin

BOYS TOWN Press

Boys Town, Nebraska

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

978-1-944882-10-5

Published by the Boys Town Press
13603 Flanagan Blvd., Boys Town, NE 68010

For a Boys Town Press catalog, call **800-282-6657**
or visit our website: **BoysTownPress.org**

Publisher's Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Penn, Tony, 1973-, author. | Martin, Brian (Brian Michael), 1978- illustrator.

Title: The misadventures of Michael McMichaels. Vol. 3 : the creepy campers / by Tony Penn ; illustrated by Brian Martin.

Identifiers: ISBN: 978-1-944882-10-5

Subjects: LCSH: Truthfulness and falsehood--Juvenile fiction. | Honesty--Juvenile fiction. | Attention-seeking--Juvenile fiction. | Peer pressure--Juvenile fiction. | Camping--Juvenile fiction. | Ghost stories. | Interpersonal communication in children--Juvenile fiction. | Interpersonal relations in children--Juvenile fiction. | Children--Life skills guides. | CYAC: Honesty--Fiction. | Attention-seeking--Fiction. | Peer pressure--Fiction. | Camping--Fiction. | Ghosts--Fiction. | Behavior--Fiction. | Interpersonal communication--Fiction. | Interpersonal relations--Fiction. | Conduct of life. | BISAC: JUVENILE FICTION / Humorous Stories. | JUVENILE FICTION / Readers / Chapter Books. | JUVENILE FICTION / Social Themes / Peer Pressure. | JUVENILE FICTION / Social Themes / Values & Virtues. | EDUCATION / Counseling / General.

Classification: LCC: PZ7.1.P456 M4723 2017 | DDC: [Fic]--dc23

Boys Town Press is the publishing division of Boys Town, a national organization serving children and families.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

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. 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 wanted to join

him in New Mexico at a camp he PROMISED 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 goodbye to us like we were never going to see them again. It was super embarrassing.

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 were doing stretches when I noticed a group of boys around my age, but with shifty eyes, hobble over to the pool. All four 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. I didn't see anything weird, so I forgot about it.

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

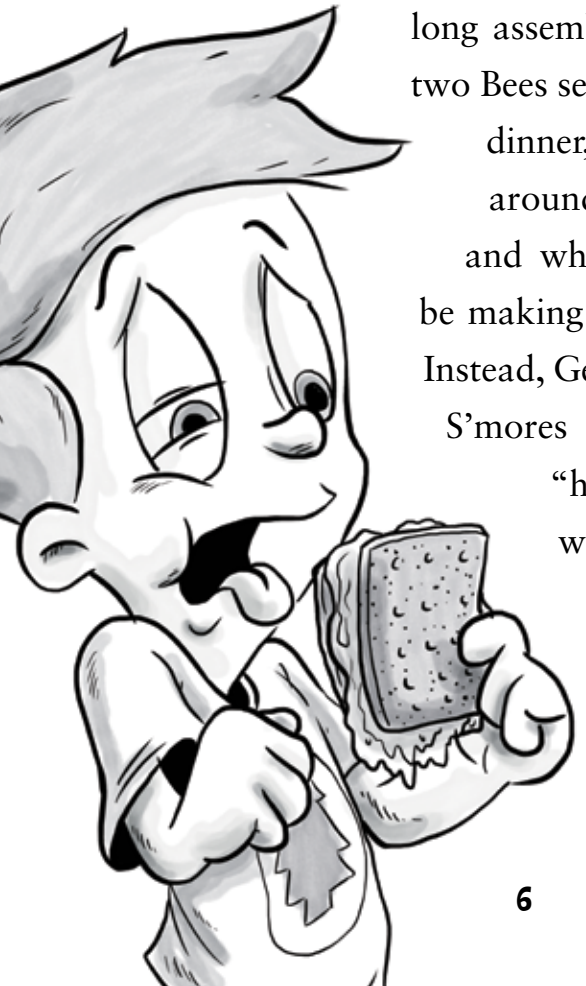
eliminated in the first round, but Kenny went a few more rounds. (He's got a lot of nervous energy that really helps in these situations, I think.) I was in the bleachers cheering him on, looking through my nifty little pair of binoculars, when I spotted a rat! (Not a real one. That would be gross!)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

Those four suspicious-looking kids kept beating everyone in 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 saw him attach transparent flippers to his feet. 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 goofy 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. 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 two 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. 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 knew what they were. They said they'd be called S'lesses. When I heard that, I lost it and screamed, **"KALE!!! QUINOA!!! Someone, save me!!!"** I dramatically threw myself 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 parents 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?" the one with the curly hair said.

"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.

"Yeah, well, you'd better watch it. We're going to win the rest of the challenges, got it?" said curly hair dude.

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 when you won the swim competition? Yeah, 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, came

at me like a fearless little Yorkie.

"Well, you heard our story about the aliens, right?" he barked.

"Yeah," I said and nervously stepped back.

"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.

I was sleeping soundly when I thought a dream was beginning, but I knew it was reality because I was sitting up yawning, and that's when 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 courage to wake up Kenny. So, I don't even have a witness. Silhouetted in the light was the enormous, no, make that, GIGANTIC bulbous head of an alien.

It was making a scary "Ooooh" sound.

"Ah, hello," I managed to say, petrified.

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

"Christmas trees!" I cried. (My grandma taught me to use that phrase instead of saying naughty words.)

"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 candy and the only thing to eat is kale and quinoa… Oooh!"

"Of course! I mean, no one cheated. We're all honest Abe's in here, right?" I said.

"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…"

"You just what? Peed yourself? Woke up craving those kale and quinoa things? What?"

"I just saw an alien, and it threatened to kidnap me!"

"Mikey, you know you are what people call NUTS-O!"

"What? You call yourself my friend? You're supposed to believe me?"

"I really, really, really need to go back to sleep, Mikey. Good night!"

Can you believe him? I need to Google, "How to get a new best friend," right after I Google about that whole New and Old Mexico thing, but the camp confiscated all of our phones when we arrived and only Gene and Barbara have internet access. Ugh.

I have to get some sleep because tomorrow is another day jam-packed with challenges against those double-crossing campers!

Day 2

Breakfast was annoyingly healthy, but still kind of tasty: oatmeal with nuts and shriveled little red fruits, and some sort of fluffy egg white concoction on the side. But what was really odd was that even breakfast was a challenge. There were little slips of paper on everyone's tray, and we had to guess the nutritional information of each food item. The person who came the closest would win and get 10 points toward **"Camper of the Week."** As much as I wanted to win, I knew I'd lose this challenge because who cares about calories except for those Weight Watchers people? So, on the paper, I just drew a fully decorated Christmas tree, which is surprisingly easy to do.

At the end of the meal, Gene stood on a table, which I thought was unnecessary and a bit too dramatic, and announced the winner of the breakfast challenge.

"Harriet Simpson!" he shouted. I thought I was hallucinating, but I pinched my arm and it hurt so I knew it was real.

"How did she get to New Mexico?" I asked Kenny.

"Probably in a plane, like us."

"I know that! But how did she know about this camp? I mean what are the odds, right?"

Then Kenny turned red and had that guilty look people get.

"Spill it!" I said.

"Well, I knew she was coming but I figured if I told you, you wouldn't want to come."

"You're right!"

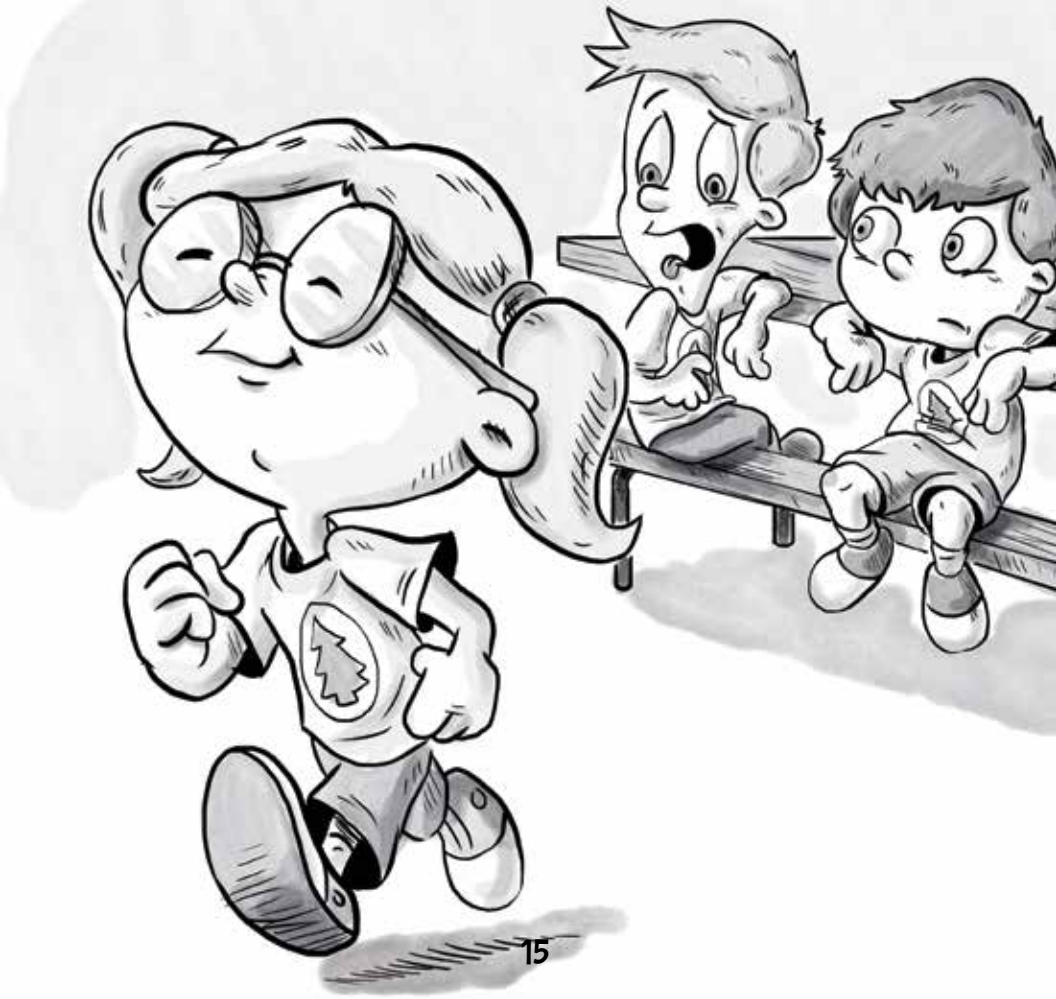
Just then, Harriet walked over to our table, showing off her little blue ribbon like a proud pony.

"Hellllllooooo!" she said, holding the ribbon in my face.

"So you know how many calories are in oatmeal and nuts. Big deal, nutrition girl!"

"I'm 10 points closer to winning now!" She was beaming. What a nightmare.

"Doesn't matter. That little tribe of creeps from wherever is going to win," I said, pointing to the dudes across the cafeteria.



"A group can't win unless they are all tied, and that isn't going to happen. It will probably be one person," Harriet said in a tone dripping with superiority and smugness.

I could hear blips and bleeps. Gene and Barbara were approaching with their technology. Not looking us in the eye, but at their screens, they told us that there's an archery challenge, but first there's a Bee Bee.

"A Bee Bee?" I asked.

"Yes," Barbara answered, pressing buttons on her fancy watch. "It starts in 17 minutes, and it's a challenge to see who knows the most about bees. It's kind of like a Spelling Bee, but about bees, get it?"

"Yeah, I get it. FUNNY!"

The Bee Bee was as exciting as you'd think it'd BE. I wish they hadn't taken all of our phones and iPads because sitting in the audience would have been the perfect time to play silly phone games. Those cheating campers got close to winning the Bee Bee, but some goofy little kid from Hawaii won, which was a big relief.

Pages 17-83 are not included in this excerpt.

JUVENILE FICTION /
SOCIAL SKILLS
AGES 7-12

A story about honesty, integrity, and friendship (with some strange aliens too!)

MICHAEL McMICHAELS, his best friend, Kenny, and the always-annoying Harriett are at a New Mexico summer camp. Imagine being stuck in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by spooky woods, and seeing strange flying saucers… and that's the least of their worries!

Some of their fellow campers are doing all they can to win camp competitions and all the glory, fame, and prizes that come along with it. They cheat, lie, bully, and intimidate. If Michael wants to win, can he bring himself to use those same underhanded tactics?

The Creepy Campers asks readers to think about their own ethical choices. Is winning at any cost worth it? Tony Penn's expertly-crafted plot twists and sharp dialogue help children clearly see the many real consequences of cheating and deception.

"I would like to thank Tony Penn for being the author who created me. Tony teaches French at an arts high school in New York City. He likes: reading, writing, restaurants, vacations, and Saturday mornings. Tony has an MA in Education, an MFA in Creative Writing, and an LMNOP in nothing—I just love saying those letters really fast!"
~ Michael McMichaels

BOYS TOWN Press
Boys Town, NE 68010 | BoysTownPress.org

$8.49
ISBN 978-1-944882-10-5
50849
9 781944 882105

1609-138, 58-003