

BILL MYERS

AAAARGH!

TJ and the
TIME STUMBLERS

49 and the **TIME STUMBLERS**

BOOK 2
AAAARGH!!!

Bill Myers



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For the Kristi Toler-Harding Family

CHAPTER ONE

Beginnings . . .

TIME TRAVEL LOG:

Malibu, California, October 19

Begin Transmission:

Time-travel pod still zworked. Subject is growing used to our presence. She barely groans when she sees us. Big-time improvement. Currently assisting her in studies, though she doesn't exactly appear grateful.

End Transmission

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!" TJ Finkelstein yelled

AAAARGH!!!

as she dropped the book she was reading and jumped up from her desk. "HERBY!"

Now, TJ really wasn't a yeller. But when your room is suddenly filled with two dozen pirates from the 1700s (and none of them are as cute as Johnny Depp), well, that's enough to make anybody a little irritable.

Actually, it wasn't the pirates that bothered TJ as much as their

cling-clang
clunk!

sword fighting.

"TUNA!?" she shouted.

And even that wasn't as bad as their

cling-clang
jab!
cling-clang

jab!

"AHHHHHHH!"

falling down all wounded on her floor.

"Great!" she cried. "How am I going to get those bloodstains out of my carpet? HERBY!"

There was still no answer, except for the

"Hardee-har-har . . ."

of another pirate as he swung toward her on a rope.

She screamed and dropped to the floor as he flew past, missing her by inches. Scrambling back to her feet, she searched the room—ducking this sword, dodging that saber as the pirates continued to

Cling-clang

clunk!

Once again she shouted, "TUNA! HERBY!
WHERE ARE YOU?!"

Suddenly two frightened heads popped out from under her bed. The good news was the heads were still attached to their bodies. (With all the swinging

AAAARGH!!!

swords and sabers, that *was* good news.) The first belonged to Herby. He had long blond bangs and was not the brightest candle on the birthday cake. (Sometimes he couldn't even find the party.) The second belonged to Tuna, who had red hair and was sort of chubby. They were both a couple years older than TJ and perfectly normal . . . except for the part about them coming from the 23rd century.

The 23rd century?!

That's right. And don't worry about the shouting—that was TJ's first reaction too. It was also her second reaction and her third . . . and her reaction every time she woke up in the morning to see them standing in line to use her bathroom. (Apparently even 23rd-century time travelers need to use the facilities.)

It seems she was the subject of their history project back at their school. Someday she would grow up to be a brilliant leader doing brilliant things (hard to believe, since she was still having a hard time opening her locker).

Anyway, the two boys had traveled back to her time to observe her.

The only problem was they got stuck. Their time-travel pod broke down and ran out of fuel. And until they could fix it, TJ Finkelstein had become their reluctant hostess. It wasn't bad enough that

she'd just moved to California from a small town in Missouri. Or that the kids at Malibu Junior High were the richest (and snobbiest) in the world. She also had to deal with all the catastrophes created by her brain-deprived friends from the 23rd century.

"What are you doing?" she demanded.

Tuna (aka Thomas Uriah Norman Alphonso the Third) cleared his throat. "You appeared to be having some difficulty with your *Treasure Island* book report."

"It's due tomorrow, and I haven't had a chance to—"

"Step lively, mateys! Comin' through!"

The boys ducked back under the bed and TJ jumped aside as two pirates rolled a heavy black cannon up to her window. She could only stare in disbelief.

Herby was the first to pop back out. Flipping his bangs to the side, he explained, "We figured the coolest way to read a book is to, like, live it."

TJ glanced around. "You mean to *watch* it, like a movie."

Suddenly a gnarled hand reached around and covered her mouth, while another shoved an old-fashioned pistol into her side. Her eyes widened in terror as she turned to see a pirate with a wooden leg and a parrot perched on his shoulder.

AAAARGH!!!

“Uh, no,” Tuna corrected, “we mean to actually live it.”

The pirate growled, “And who might ye be, missy? Someone out to steal me treasure?”

“Pieces of eight!” the parrot squawked.

“Pieces of eight!”

Of course TJ screamed: “Mmumoumrrmform-mumrormf!” (Which might have sounded more like *“Excuse me, I’d appreciate not dying at this particular time in my life!”* if his hand weren’t still over her mouth.)

“Are you saying you wish for us to stop?” Tuna asked.

TJ glared at him.

“I think we should take that as a yes,” Herby said.

TJ gave a huge nod.

“Well, all right, if you’re certain.” Tuna pulled out a giant Swiss Army Knife (the type sold at time-travel stores everywhere). He opened the blade labeled Story Amplifier and

Zibwa-zibwa-zibwa

absolutely nothing happened. (Well, except for the cool sound.)

“Try it again, dude!” Herby shouted.

Tuna shut the blade and reopened it. Again, nothing happened, except for the still very cool

Zibwa-zibwa-zibwa

Meanwhile, one of the pirates with the cannon at the window shouted, “Stand by!”

His partner produced a giant wooden match and yelled, “Standing by!”

Only then did TJ notice that the cannon wasn’t just pointing out her window. It was pointing out her window directly at her neighbor Chad Steel’s bedroom!

“Nuummmermumblemuffin!” she shouted. Only this time she made her point clearer by raising her foot high in the air and stomping hard onto the pirate’s one good foot.

“ARGH!” he shouted, letting her go and jumping up and down on his other foot (which, unfortunately, was not there). So, having only a peg for a foot, he did a lot more

ker-plop-ing

AAAARGH!!!

onto the ground than jumping. And with all the *ker-plop*-ing came a lot more “ARGH!”-ings followed by a ton of “*Bleep-bleep-bleep, bleep-bleep-bleep*”-ings (which is all pirates are allowed to scream in a PG-rated book).

Meanwhile, the other two pirates were preparing to fire the cannon.

“Ready!” the first pirate shouted.

TJ raced to the window. “Don’t shoot! Don’t shoot!” She turned to the boys still under the bed. “Tuna! Herby! Do something!”

“As you have no doubt observed,” Tuna explained, “our equipment is once again experiencing technical difficulties.”

“Ready!” the second pirate echoed his partner’s command as he struck the giant match. But before he could light the cannon’s fuse, TJ spun around and blew it out.

He frowned. “What ye be doin’ that for, missy?”

She twirled back to Tuna and Herby. “Hit it on the ground again! Hit the knife thingy on the ground!”

Once again the pirate lit a match and once again she spun around and blew it out.

“ARGH,” the pirate *argh*-ed. (He would have

BILL MYERS

thrown in a few *bleeps* of his own but figured his mother might be reading this book.)

Tuna called back to TJ, "I fail to see how hitting the knife upon the—"

"It's worked before!" Herby shouted at Tuna. "Give it a try."

The second pirate struck a third match, and this time blocking TJ from it, he managed to light the fuse. It started smoking and sputtering.

Tuna continued arguing with Herby. "I fail to see the logic in *thwack*-ing the Story Amplifier on the ground."

"Guys!" TJ shouted.

"That's how we fixed it before, dude."

"Guys!" TJ whirled back to the fuse, watching it burn toward the cannon.

"This is extremely expensive equipment," Tuna argued. "Such handling would be foolish and—"

"Aim!" the first pirate shouted.

"Aim!" the second pirate repeated as he adjusted the cannon so it would clearly destroy Chad's house.

"Fire!"

"Fire!"

Both men plugged their ears and closed their eyes . . . which gave TJ just enough time to throw herself at the cannon and

AAAARGH!!!

grrrr, arrrrr, ugghhh . . .

move it 6¼ inches before it finally

k-blewie-ed

The good news was the cannonball missed Chad's house by mere inches. (Close, but when it comes to total demolition of a neighbor's house, every inch counts.)

The better news was Tuna finally agreed to

thwack, thwack, thwack

the knife on the floor until the Story Amplifier

Zibwa-zibwa-zibwa

DING!

finally shut down.

Suddenly everything in the room was back to normal. No fighting pirates, no shooting cannons. Everything was gone . . . well, except for one or two

parrot feathers floating to the ground and the gentle sound of

whhhhhhuuuuuuuuuuuuuu . . .

a light evening breeze blowing through the new hole in TJ's bedroom wall. The new hole that was roughly the size of a very large cannonball.

* * * * *

It had been a rough day for Hesper Breakahart, too. Besides the usual problems that came with being a super-rich, super-spoiled, and super-famous TV star on the Dizzy Channel, she had a terrible headache. There were three whiny reasons for her suffering:

WHINY REASON #1

The thirteen-year-old beauty queen had found a split end in her perfectly styled and perfectly blonde (because it was perfectly dyed) hair.

But that catastrophe was nothing compared to

WHINY REASON #2

Hesper had nearly broken a nail—which is a danger you risk when your PTB (Personal Tooth

AAAARGH!!!

Brusher) calls in sick and you have to brush your teeth by yourself.

But even that was small potatoes (or in Hesper's case, very small portions of caviar) when compared to

WHINY REASON #3

She was still having to talk to the common people. (Insert gasp here.) That's right, the great Hesper Breakahart, star of stage, screen, and her own ego, actually had to pretend to like her fellow students.

It had all started last week when the new girl from Memphis—or Miami or whatever that Midwest state that starts with an *M* is called—embarrassed her in front of the entire school. For five terrifying minutes, every student at Malibu Junior High had heard Hesper's real thoughts broadcast through the school's PA system. Now they *all* knew how much she loathed them. (It's not that Hesper was a snob, but when you're as big a winner as she is, it's hard to ignore how big a loser everyone else is.)

So for the last week, she'd had to go around school telling those awful, average people how much

she respected them (insert second gasp here). Talk about embarrassing. Talk about humiliating. It was almost as bad as when she had to share the cover of *Teen Idol* with some stupid brother band that everyone was all gaga over.

But now it was

PAYBACK TIME

Hesper Breakahart was going to think up a plan so nasty and so evil that TB—or BLT or whatever that new girl's name was—would wish she'd never been born.

"So what will it be?" Hesper's very best friend since forever asked while sitting at Hesper's feet. (All of Hesper's subjects—er, friends—sat at her feet. Usually around the pool, working on their tans.)

"I don't know," Hesper said, drawing her perfectly plucked eyebrows into a perfectly plucked frown.

"Make her drink regular tap water?" Hesper's other very best friend since forever asked. (When you're a TV star, you've got plenty of very best friends.)

"Take away her credit cards?" another very best friend asked.

AAAARGH!!!

“Make it so she can’t get a pedicure for a whole month?”

All the girls shuddered.

“EEEEEEewww . . .”

“Oh, I know; I know,” the first very best friend said.

Hesper turned to her. “Yes, er, um . . .”

“Elizabeth.”

Hesper flashed her recently whitened, glow-in-the-dark-teeth smile. “Yes, of course it is. What’s on your mind, um, er . . .”

“Elizabeth.”

“Right.”

Elizabeth didn’t need Hesper to know her name. Just letting her hang at the pool and breathe the same air was enough. “You know how weird stuff seems to be happening whenever the new kid is around?”

“Yes,” another very best friend since forever said, “like the book that flew across Mr. Beaker’s class when she came into the room?”

Another very best friend (I told you she had plenty) added, “Or that dodgeball that made a U-turn and hit you when she was in PE?”

“Or how ‘bout when she—?”

“Please, please.” Hesper held up her perfectly manicured hand. “Must we always be talking about her?”

Elizabeth frowned. “But I thought—”

“We were talking about what *I* was going to do to her.”

“Oh, right.” Elizabeth glanced down, embarrassed. If there was one thing you didn’t talk about when you were around Hesper Breakahart, it was other people.

Hesper reached out an understanding hand and patted Elizabeth on the head. “That’s okay, um, er, whoever you are.”

Another very best friend since forever spoke up. “What if *you* hired a private detective?”

Hesper turned to her, waiting for more.

“*You* could have him find some dirt on her for *you*, and then *you* could tell everybody what *you* learned.”

“*I* could?” Hesper asked. She was already liking the plan. (Well, not so much the plan as the *star* of the plan.) “But where would *I* find a detective to do that for *me*?”

Elizabeth’s hand shot up in the air. “I could do it! I could do it!”

AAAARGH!!!

Hesper scowled.

Immediately, Elizabeth realized her error. "That is, for *you*. I could do it for *you* so *you* could tell everybody what *you* learned."

"Hmm . . ." A smile slowly crept around the corners of Hesper's all-too-perfect lips. "I like that . . . what's-your-name. Yes, I like that a lot."