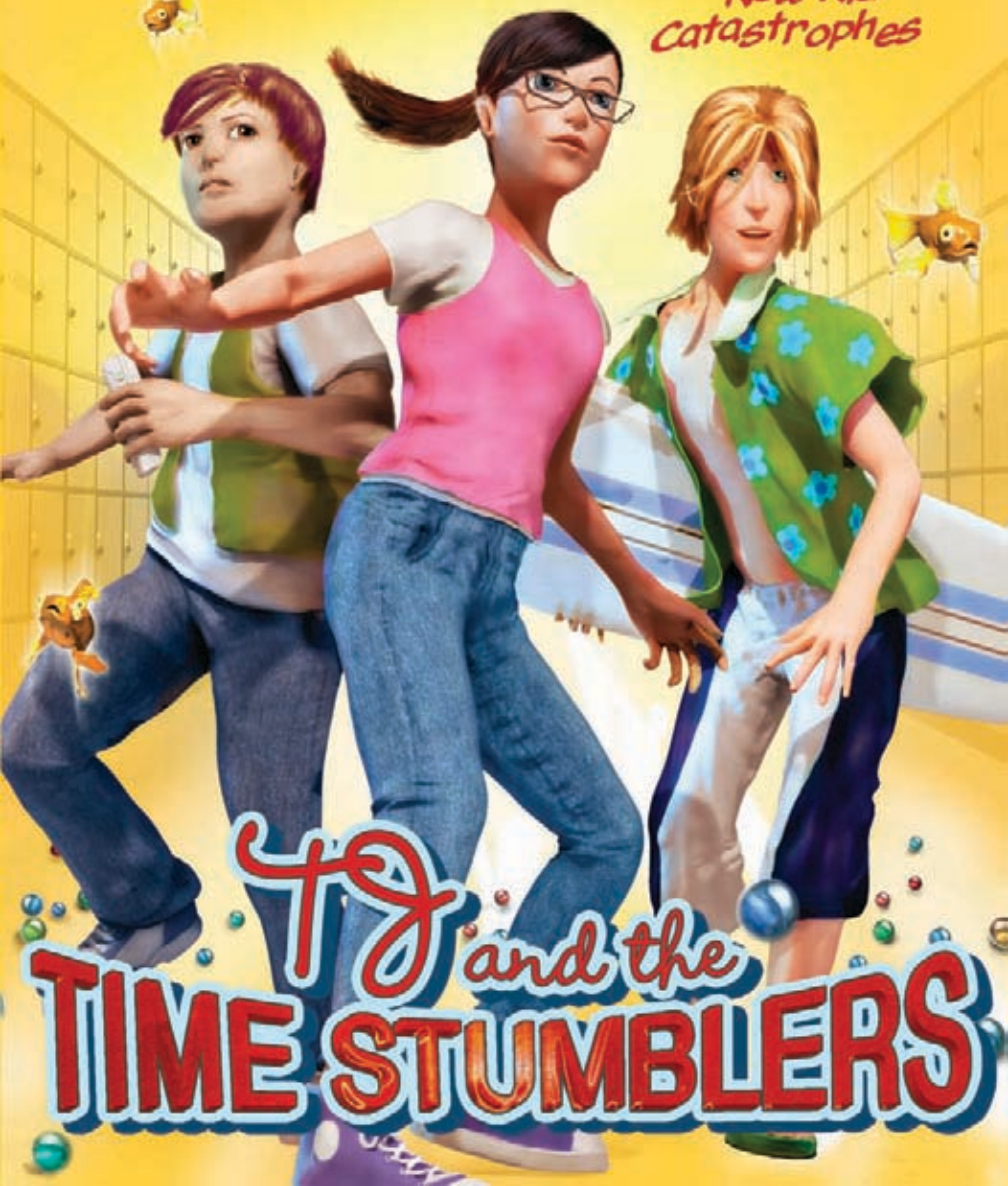


# BILL MYERS

*New Kid  
Catastrophes*



42 and the  
**TIME STUMBLERS**

# TD and the **TIME STUMBLERS**

*BOOK 1*

*New Kid Catastrophes*

**Bill Myers**



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Summary: After she accidentally makes an enemy of superstar Hesper Breakahart on her first day at Malibu Junior High, thirteen-year-old TJ's troubles multiply when two twenty-third century students, who have traveled back in time to observe her for a history project, decide to help her.

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*For Bruce Grimm . . .  
whose humor I've never forgotten*

# Prologue

“This is outloopish, dude!” Herby shouted. “We’re in the wrong century!”

“Actually,” Tuna argued, “according to my expert calculations, we have landed precisely where we intended in Malibu, California, during the 21st century.”

Herby looked out the window of their tiny time-travel pod. “Are you sure?”

“I am sure.”

“Then you might want to mention that to the giant Tyrannosaurus rex.”

“What giant Tyrannosaurus rex?”

“The one that’s about to eat us.”

“Don’t be ridiculous.” Tuna sighed. “There’s no Tyrannosaurus—”

Normally he would have finished his sentence, but it’s hard finishing sentences when you’re drowned out by a very loud and very bloodcurdling

**RAHHRRRR...**

which, of course, is the sound all hungry Tyrannosaurus rexes make just before they start eating. (It's kinda like saying the blessing, but without all the head bowing, talking to God, and amen stuff.)

Herby looked at Tuna.

Tuna looked at Herby.

Then both boys did what they do best. They

**"AUGGGHHH!"**

screamed for their lives.

"Hit reverse!" Herby yelled. "Get us out of here!"

Herby didn't have to ask twice (actually he didn't have to ask once) because Tuna was already resetting the time pod's coordinates. Stomping on the gas, he

**WHOOoosh-ed . . .**

them through time to the 21st century, where they originally wanted to go.

That was the good news.

Unfortunately there was a little bad news, and it sounded exactly like

***chug-a-chug-a***

***choke-a-choke-a***

***cough-cough-cough . . .***

“What’s that?” Herby asked.

“The sound all time-travel pods make when they run out of fuel.”

“Out of fuel?!” Herby cried.

“Relax,” Tuna said, glancing out his window.

“As you can clearly see, we’ve safely arrived at the proper coordinates.”

Herby opened his window to get a better view. It was true—Malibu beach was just 100 feet below them and 350 feet to the right. “Whew,” he sighed, “we could have been majorly zworked.”

“Yes, we could have,” Tuna agreed.

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# **SPLASH!**

Fortunately, an automatic life raft inflated around the time pod. So other than the 847 gallons of seawater pouring in through Herby's open window, they were perfectly safe. Now it was just a matter of paddling the pod to shore, turning on their cloaking device so no one would see them, and beginning their assignment.

There was, however, one other sound they had not counted on.

*crinkle-crinkle*

*krackle-krackle*

*zit-zit* *POP*

"What's that?" Herby asked.

"Nothing much."

"And by 'nothing much,' you mean—"

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"The sound of all our electrical equipment shorting out from 847 gallons of seawater pouring over it."

"Is that all?" Herby said. "I thought we were in major trouble."

"Oh, we are," Tuna said. "We're in major trouble, big-time."

**CHAPTER ONE**

# **Beginnings . . .**

***TIME TRAVEL LOG:***

**Malibu, California, October 9**

***Begin Transmission:***

*21st-century education is majorly weird. Kids sit in boring rooms listening to boring grown-ups talk about boring subjects. What a torked way to learn. Have encountered subject. She's as smoot as her holographs in the history museum. Soon she will encounter Chad Steel, her next-door neighbor. Bummer, 'cause she really is smoot. I think Tuna is in love. Me too. She's smooted to the max!*

***End Transmission***

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“TJ, look out!”

Thelma Jean Finkelstein glanced up just in time to see the family’s grand piano racing toward her. The moving guys were rolling it down the ramp of the moving van. Well, they *had* been rolling it. Now it was rolling itself, faster than a speeding bullet with TJ as the target.

The way she figured, she had three choices:

**CHOICE #1**—Become piano roadkill.

**CHOICE #2**—Leap to the left and into the pool. Usually no prob—she loved swimming (except her hair always frizzed out). The problem today was the pool was empty and she was near the deep end. Deep as in, *call the ambulance, ‘cause she’ll be breaking both of her legs* kinda deep.

**CHOICE #3**—Leap to the right. Again, no prob, except for that pesky sliding glass door. Somehow, regaining consciousness while attendants picked broken glass out of her hair (in that same ambulance) was not how she wanted to spend her first day in Malibu, California.

This left TJ with Choice #4. (I know she figured three choices, but she's never been good at math.) The ever-popular *leap on top of the gas barbecue and hope the piano somehow misses you* choice.

A great idea. Except the piano didn't somehow miss her . . . or the barbecue. Instead, it sort of

## ***CRASH-ed***

into the barbecue and sent TJ flying into the air.

Actually, the flying part was easy. It was the landing that wasn't so great. The good news was she didn't land in the pool or slam into the sliding glass door. The bad news was she landed on top of the piano . . . which was still rolling . . . straight toward the neighbors' fence!

By now her whole family had run around the house to see what all the hysterical screaming and pants-wetting was about.

Dad was giving his usual Dad advice: "TJ, quit fooling around and get off that piano this instant!"

Little six-year-old Dorie was jumping up and down shouting in her cute little six-year-old voice, "Yippee! Can I go next? Can I go next?"

Nine-year-old Violet (part-time genius and

## NEW KID CATASTROPHES

full-time pain in the neck) was already scheming. "If she dies, can I have her room?"

And what family get-together would be complete without Fido the Wonder Dog barking his little wonder-dog head off?

TJ would have loved to stick around and chitchat with everyone, but it's hard chitchatting when you're hanging on for your life and screaming your lungs out.

And the fun and games weren't exactly over. She still had to introduce herself to the neighbors. Unfortunately, this involved having to

# SMASH

through their fence and join the little pool party they were having.

Fortunately, they were kids her age and probably attended the same school she'd be starting tomorrow.

Unfortunately, they were kids her age and probably attended the same school she'd be starting tomorrow.

*Sigh . . .*

Of course, the guests did the usual screaming and shouting. "Run for your lives; it's a crazy girl riding a piano!" But they didn't have to worry. Their pool was full of water, which explains the

**SPLASH**

of the grand piano . . . and the

***glug . . . glug . . . glug***

of its sinking to the bottom. (With luck this would mean no piano lessons till Dad bought another one . . . or at least till he got TJ some cool scuba gear.)

She thought of sticking around and swimming a few laps (to work off that extra pizza she had for lunch), but there was something about 20 rich and snobbish 13-year-olds all staring down at her that made her change her mind.

Then there was the most gorgeous boy she'd ever seen in her life. He was stooping down and reaching out his hand to her.

"Hey, are you all right?" he asked.

After coughing up a gallon of water, she nodded and took his hand.

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"I'm Chad," he said. "Chad Steel."

She climbed out of the pool, a droopy, drippy mess, and looked into his incredible blue eyes.

He grinned. "It looks like we're neighbors."

She nodded, unable to take her eyes from his.

He kept smiling. "And your name is?"

She wanted to introduce herself but was having a hard time finding her voice, much less remembering her name. (Incredible blue eyes will do that to a person.)

He cocked his head, waiting for an answer.

*Come on, TJ,* she thought. (*It is TJ, isn't it?*)

His smile sagged a little.

It was now or never. She opened her mouth, but nothing came out.

Those beautiful blue eyes darkened with concern. Not concern like *I will love and cherish you until the day you die* concern. More like *What mental hospital did you escape from?* concern.

But TJ was determined to say something, anything. Unfortunately, she did: "You're . . . you're gorgeous."

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\* \* \* \* \*

**"Blah-blah-blah**  
**blah-blah-blah**  
**blah-blah-blah"**

At least that's what Chad heard over his cell phone as Hesper, his sorta girlfriend, kept talking and talking and talking some more. Honestly, did the girl ever stop to take a breath?

But Chad was a nice guy and didn't want to be rude, so he let her continue

**"Blah-blah-blah**  
**blah-blah-blah**  
**blah-blah-blah"-ing**

Of course, it would help if the *blah-ing* wasn't always about Hesper. Then again, it wasn't her

## NEW KID CATASTROPHES

fault that she had her own TV series on the Dizzy Channel. It wasn't her fault everyone made a fuss over her. And it wasn't her fault she thought the world revolved around her. (Actually, not the world; more like the entire solar system or galaxy or . . . well, you get the idea.)

The only good thing about her talking so much was that it drowned out his parents' fighting. It was like a rule or something. Whenever Dad visited, Chad's parents fought. Even though they'd been divorced for, like, forever, you could always plan on the world's biggest shouting match whenever he stopped by. Funny how people think having money makes you happy. As far as Chad figured, it was just the opposite.

Anyway, now he was sitting at his desk, slaving over a book report. Well, if you call staring out your second-story window at the house next door and thinking about your new neighbor "slaving." He guessed her window was the closest to his. And I do mean *close*. Houses on the beach were built so tightly together that if you sneezed, your neighbor could reach out the window and hand you a tissue.

But her window was closed and her lights were out. She was probably already in bed. And who

could blame her? It must have been a busy day for her. Busy and embarrassing . . .

First there was the crashing of his party—as in **CRASHING.**

Then there was making the big splash—as in **BIG SPLASH.**

Finally, when he pulled her out of the pool, all she could do was stand around shivering and stuttering. And trying to fix her hair. Lots of trying to fix her hair.

Girls. Go figure.

Once they'd taken her inside and she dried off, he had tried to help her relax by saying he'd see her in school tomorrow. She smiled, tried fixing her hair, and ran out the door.

(Well, she meant to run out the door. There was that little problem of forgetting to open it first.)

The best Chad figured, she had some mental issues. He'd never met a mentally challenged person before, but it was cool. If she needed his help, he'd be there to lend a hand.

In the meantime, there was his book report and, of course . . .

***"Blah-blah-blah  
blah-blah-blah  
blah-blah-blah"***

Hesper.

\* \* \* \* \*

"TJ?" Little Dorie whispered into her big sister's face.

"TJ, you awake?"

"No," TJ said, "I'm sound asleep."

"TJ?"

"Don't bother me."

"TJ, wake up."

Trying to ignore Dorie was like trying to figure out compound fractions: impossible. Her cute little fingers began prying open TJ's unhappy little eyelids. And a moment later, TJ was staring at her sister's blurry face two inches in front of her.

Knowing the routine, TJ pulled back the covers and said, "All right, get in, Squid."

Dorie crawled into the bed and scooted her back nice and close to TJ. Ever since Mom died, Dorie had a hard time sleeping by herself. And although

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TJ pretend to be annoyed by her (pretending to be annoyed is Rule #1 in the *Big Sister Handbook*), she understood.

Funny, it had been almost a year, but it felt like yesterday. People always said it would get better, but TJ had her doubts. It's like there was this big hole inside her chest that would never, *never*, go away. Dorie and Vi felt it too. And so did Dad.

In fact, though she would never tell anybody, one time she caught him down in the kitchen late at night. She stood there, unseen in the shadows, and watched him shuffling around, warming some milk in a pan . . . and crying. She'd never seen her dad cry before. And it broke her heart. Even now, when she thought about it, it made the back of her throat ache.

They never talked much about Mom's death. In fact, one of the reasons the family moved here from Missouri was to make a fresh start. But every once in a while, like when they heard the word *cancer*, you could see them get a little teary-eyed. That's why TJ didn't mind Dorie's nightly visits . . . no matter how freezing cold her little feet were.

"You scared?" Dorie whispered.

"About what?" TJ asked.

"Starting a new school tomorrow."

"Nah," TJ lied.

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"Me, too," Dorie said.

TJ pretended to yawn. "I met half the kids from school over at Chad's this afternoon. They already know what a klutz I am, so the hard part's over."

Dorie giggled. "You like him, don't you?"

"Who?"

"Chad."

"Good night, Squid."

"You do."

"Good night."

She snuggled closer, shoving those ice cube feet against TJ's legs. TJ was about to complain when Dorie's whole body stiffened. "What's that?" she asked.

TJ tried to ignore her. But as always, ignoring Dorie was impossible.

"Listen," she said. "Someone's whispering."

"It's just the ocean," TJ mumbled. "You'll get used to it."

"TJ?" Dorie squirmed around to face her. Her garlic-with-extra-onion breath told TJ she hadn't brushed her teeth since this afternoon's pizza.

Once again Dorie's hand was on TJ's face, feeling for her eyes. TJ saved her the trouble and opened them. Well, at least one of them. With the other she gave her world-famous *annoyed big sister* squint.

"Listen," Dorie said.

TJ squinted harder. But then she heard it too.

*"Return to the pod,"* a voice whispered.

*"I just wanna make sure she's safe, dude,"* a second voice answered.

TJ bolted up in bed.

*"You simply wish to spy on her,"* the first voice said.

*"Do not."*

*"Do too."*

*"Do not."*

TJ turned to Dorie, whose eyes were as big as Frisbees. She reached for her glasses on the nightstand, slipped them on, and scanned the room, trying to see into the darkness. As the oldest, TJ had talked Dad into letting her have her own bedroom. Which was extremely cool . . . well, except for the part about its being haunted!

TJ swallowed. "Who's . . . ?" Her voice squeaked like a rusty hinge. She tried again. "Who's there?"

*"Oh, man, now you torked it."*

*"How can she possibly hear us?"*

Dorie scooted closer. TJ barely noticed her ice feet. It's hard noticing ice feet when you're shivering in frozen fear.

*"She can't see us, can she?"*

*"How should I know?"*

## NEW KID CATASTROPHES

TJ took a shaky breath and shouted again. "Who's there?"

*"Don't answer her."*

*"What type of fool do you think I am?"*

*"How many types are there?"*

*"Ho, ho, you're a real comedian, dude."*

For ghosts, they didn't exactly sound like the scary type. TJ tried again. "Who's there?!"

No answer.

"Hello?"

Repeat in the no-answer department.

TJ strained to hear even the slightest sound, the slightest breathing, the slightest anything. She stared at the unopened boxes in the middle of her room.

Nothing.

She tried one last time. Lowering her voice so she sounded in charge, she bellowed, "Is anyone there?!"

And then, ever so faintly, she heard the answer:

*"No."*