

Soon to Be a Minor Motion Picture (excerpt)

by Cooper Renner

From PART ONE: THE SON OF THE GODS MEETS HIS MATCH

ONE

It's the same old story you've heard a million times: We met on the first day of kindergarten. We got into a fight. The teachers made us make up, and we've been best friends ever since.

What a load of manure! Sure, we went to the same schools, but we were never in the same class until junior high when the heavenly blessed marvels of the gods -- like him -- had to be in P.E with merely human boys and even the rejects of mankind -- like me. And yes, we got into a fight, but not until the third day when Coach made us suit out for the first time and then shower up afterwards.

Oh, yeah, that's right. And you got all hacked just because of a little joke.

Haha. I walk into the shower room where he and his gifted princelings have already snagged all eight of the nozzles, taking their time soaping up their divine fleshy morsels while everybody else is standing in a clump in the middle of the square hoping to have ten seconds to hose off sweat, dirt and grass before the bell for third period rings and they have to fly down the halls to beat the tardy bell.

Everybody's probably still a little embarrassed about being naked in the middle of a big crowd, even though we've all got the same equipment down below and nobody's got the kind of upper body musculature likely to get the girls' chests heaving. But I'm different of course, in another way.

Come on, dude, you couldn't blame me for being a little surprised.

I don't blame the idiot for being a little surprised. I'm used to that, and I don't have to be completely naked for it to be obvious, anyway. I didn't fight him because he was surprised. I fought him because he was a jackass.

I step into the shower room, maybe the last guy in, and, sure, I've already had a couple of the little guys -- you know, the ones who still look like fifth-graders -- kind of nudge each other and point, but they didn't make a big scene. Leave that to the divine Mr. Gilbert Gamesh.

He's facing the big rectangular opening that serves as doorway to the room, so he sees me immediately. He makes his eyes all gaga, like some stupid kid on a baked beans commercial, and drops his jaw as far as he can. "Dig it," he says. "Homo neanderthalensis isn't extinct after all."

I'll give him this. He isn't just one of the pretty boy blessed ones. He's got an actual vocabulary and some portion of a brain. So if it'd just been him and me in the showers, I would have given him a snarly haha, slugged him halfheartedly in the solar plexus, grabbed the bar of ugly-ass soap he was hogging, and gone on about my business. I mean, face it, I'm hairy. I can see myself. I know what I look like. Even my little kid peach fuzz was dark. When I was only six or seven, the girls used to sneak up on me in the summer, when I never had a shirt on, and stroke the dark line of hair that ran down my spine. I used to get all huffy and angry at them, but deep down I had to admit it: even then I liked the feel of those smooth fingers.

And then, you know, puberty. I wasn't marking days on a calendar or anything, but I'd guess no more than six months passed before I had the body hair of a twenty-year-old. And damned if I minded! How could it hurt me to look six or seven years older than I was? I thought. But I wasn't reading teen heartthrob magazines, now was I? It took me a while to figure out that the girls were all googoo over boys who looked like girls. Tough luck.

But here's the trick, right? Pretty boy Gilbert here -- who was, by the way, one of the slick boys, except for a curl or two you know where -- didn't call me Neanderthal man, which I would've just laughed off while I called him a girl with a wiener. No, he couldn't do that: that would've been kind. He had to get all elegant and intellectual and call me homo neanderthalensis. And all the other wet, naked and stupid boys understood nothing but homo.

Man, you never ceased to crack me up! If you thought you'd just been called a homo, you probably wouldn't want to try to disprove it by grabbing hold of a naked guy and wrestling him to the floor of a shower room.

He may be right about that. But I hadn't spent seven or eight years in the retards classes (because I couldn't read) without learning how to use my fists when some wise-ass decides to take issue with my intelligence, or anything else.

So I went for him. The waiting guys in the middle of the room sort of moved aside, and Glory Boy's bodyguards sort of closed in, but hey, we were all wet with water or sweat, and I slipped right through, and he's standing there laughing at me, holding his hands up like he's begging forgiveness for something that wasn't wrong anyway, and he's having such a good time being his wonderful self that I get a good solid left into the middle of his hairless gut.

Sucker punch!

My ass!

I thought we were all just a bunch of guys having a good time --

At my expense!

Nothing you hadn't heard before!

That makes it worse, not better, which you would know if weren't a complete idiot.

Anyway, you sucker punched me and pretty well knocked the breath out of me, but I managed to get an arm around your neck, and even while I'm trying to learn to breathe again, I'm clawing at your head with one hand and trying to get a grip on your arm with the other hand.

Well, all the guys start chanting. You know how that goes. "Kill him, Gil!" coming from most of 'em, but I have to admit I hear some "Jack him, Inky!" too.

Inky? I'm thinking.

And then the coach comes wading in. He's dressed of course and in his brand-new beginning-of-the-year sneakers, wading into an inch of soapy, dirty, grassy, sweaty water swirling around the drain in the middle of the floor.

The guys shut up immediately, but we don't notice because we're really getting into it by this time. And then we've each got a thick hairy forearm around our head and a mouth practically exuding coffee-breath tells us to freaking stop right NOW or spend the rest of the year cleaning urinals with our tongues.

So we stop.

He's got both of us by one bicep. Dude, his hands were like vices! And he's goose-stepping us to the enormous locker room dryer where he orders us to wrap a towel around ourselves, and then he drags us to his office where he can cuss us out in Marine without forty-five pubescent witnesses.

As he shuts the door behind us, I hear two things: the third period bell, and some wanker back in the shower room asking, "What's a homo neoturdicus?"

"You, butt face," somebody answered.

Even I laughed at that. There's no bottom to the well of junior high boy stupidity. Or, for that matter, junior high coach stupidity. Coach Caldwell went right for the obvious.

Yeah. He was all "Good holy lord, it's only the third day of school and you [bleep]ers are already at it. Let me guess: you're in the shower room so somebody insulted somebody else's pecker. Am I right?"

I couldn't help it. I looked over at you and we both busted out laughing. I mean, I was staring at hair. I couldn't have even said for sure if you had a pecker.

You caught your breath before I did and got all serious and said, "He called me homo neanderthalensis, sir."

Coach's face kind of pinched all up --

Of course! Because he thought the same thing all the other boys did.

And Coach says, "Now that's one thing we are not going to have in my gym. You guys can get all steamed and pissed off in a game and cuss each other till your lips fall off, and I won't hear a word of it. You wanna call each other [bleep] or [bleep] or even mother[bleep]ing [bleep], I don't give a fat hot damn. But I'm not having a bunch of horny peckerwoods calling each other faggot in my gym class. I will not stand for that."

I think he got the idea we were kind of staring at him, and he realized he'd sort of gone off the rails. His face even got a little red, but maybe that was just his normal color for screaming at kids. "All right," he said, putting his hands flat on the desk, "all right. I have a gay cousin, and he took a lot of crap growing up, and -- Okay. That doesn't matter."

"Sir," I said, "he didn't call me a faggot. He called me Neanderthal man. The scientific name."

"Oh," Coach said. He stared across the desk at Gil.

"Come on, Coach. I didn't mean any harm," the pretty boy says. Man, he just flips the switch and turns on the charm. Woman teacher, man teacher, principal, preacher, you name it. He'll flirt with any adult on the planet to get what he wants. "You gotta admit," he says, "he's pretty hairy."

Coach took a deep breath and looked at me. "What's your name?"

"Enkidu Sanchez."

"In-kid-"

"EN-kidu," I said, over-accenting it for him.

So that's where Inky comes from. Well, that plus all the hair.

Coach sighed and said, "I wish these parents would name you boys Jack and Frank. Dammit, son, I'm going to call you Kiddo. That's close as I can get."

"Sir, it's easy. EN --"

He stopped me. "I know my limits. Sorry. And Kiddo, I can't contradict him on the hair thing. I've been coaching for nineteen years, and you're the hairiest kid I've ever seen. You're gonna get stared at. Can you deal with it?"

"Sure, sir, as long as Cro-Magnon here doesn't act like I'm some kind of yeti."

Coach frowned and switched his glare back to him. "I thought your name was Gilbert."

Gil does his best butt-worshiper smile again. "It's just a joke, sir. I don't mind."

Coach gets to his feet and says, "Then this is what we're gonna do. It's the first week of school and I don't wanna bother Old Man Kirk with a fight already. So I want you two to get back in there and get showered and dressed and get to class. You'll have to get a tardy pass, unexcused, from the office, but that's all. But if anything like this happens again, I'm putting you both in the middle of the gym floor with the whole class in a circle around you, and you're going to have a slap fight till neither one of you can feel your palms anymore. Got it?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Yes, Coach!"

"Then get the hell out of my face. I've got another class waiting."

And we really did become best friends.

But not right any time soon.

