

A gold ribbon-shaped logo with an open book icon and the word "GOLD" written below it.

GOLD

From the Newbery Honor author of
THE MOSTLY TRUE ADVENTURES OF HOMER P. FIGG

RODMAN PHILBRICK

A painting of a man carrying a child on his shoulders. The man is wearing a red and black plaid shirt and blue jeans. The child is wearing a dark shirt and has their arms raised. They are standing on a grey surface with a dark background and white clouds. There are some small objects on the ground, like a can and a ball.

**Freak
the Mighty**

SCHOLASTIC

1. *The Unvanquished Truth*

I never had a brain until Freak came along and let me borrow his for a while, and that's the truth, the whole truth. The unvanquished truth, is how Freak would say it, and for a long time it was him who did the talking. Except I had a way of saying things with my fists and my feet even before we became Freak the Mighty, slaying dragons and fools and walking high above the world.

Called me Kicker for a time — this was day care, the year Gram and Grim took me over — and I had a thing about booting anyone who dared to touch me. Because they were *always* trying to throw a hug on me, like it was a medicine I needed.

Gram and Grim, bless their pointed little heads, they're my mother's people, *her* parents, and they figured whoa! better put this little critter with other little critters his own age, maybe it will improve his temper.

Yeah, right! Instead, what happened, I in-

Freak the Mighty

vented games like kick-boxing and kick-knees and kick-faces and kick-teachers, and kick-the-other-little-day-care-critters, because I knew what a rotten lie that hug stuff was. Oh, I *knew*.

That's when I got my first look at Freak, that year of the phony hugs. He didn't look so different back then, we were all of us pretty small, right? But he wasn't in the playroom with us every day, just now and then he'd show up. Looking sort of fierce, is how I remember him. Except later it was Freak himself who taught me that remembering is a great invention of the mind, and if you try hard enough you can remember anything, whether it really happened or not.

So maybe he wasn't really all *that* fierce in day care, except I'm pretty sure he did hit a kid with his crutch once, whacked the little brat pretty good. And for some reason little Kicker never got around to kicking little Freak.

Maybe it was those crutches kept me from lashing out at him, man those crutches were cool. I wanted a pair for myself. And when little Freak showed up one day with these shiny braces strapped to his crooked legs, metal tubes right up to his hips, why those were even *more* cool than crutches.

"I'm Robot Man," little Freak would go, making these weird robot noises as he humped himself around the playground. *Rrrr . . . rrrr . . . rrrr . . .* like he had robot motors inside his legs, going *rrrrr . . . rrrr . . . rrrr*, and this look, like

The Unvanquished Truth

don't mess with me, man, maybe I got a laser cannon hidden inside these leg braces, smoke a hole right through you. No question, Freak was hooked on robots even back then, this little guy two feet tall, and already he knew what he wanted.

Then for a long time I never saw Freak anymore, one day he just never came back to day care, and the next thing I remember I'm like in the third grade or something and I catch a glimpse of this yellow-haired kid scowling at me from one of those cripple vans. Man, they were death-ray eyes, and I think, hey, that's him, the robot boy, and it was like whoa! because I'd forgotten all about him, day care was a blank place in my head, and nobody had called me Kicker for a long time.

Mad Max they were calling me, or Max Factor, or this one butthead in L.D. class called me Maxi Pad, until I persuaded him otherwise. Gram and Grim always called me Maxwell, though, which is supposed to be my real name, and sometimes I hated that worst of all. Maxwell, ugh.

Grim out in the kitchen one night, after supper whispering to Gram had she noticed how much Maxwell was getting to look like *Him*? Which is the way he always talked about my father, who had married his dear departed daughter and produced, eek eek, Maxwell. Grim never says my father's name, just *Him*, like his name is too scary to say.

It's more than just the way Maxwell resembles

Freak the Mighty

him, Grim says that night in the kitchen, the boy is *like* him, we'd better watch out, you never know what he might do while we're sleeping. Like his father did. And Gram right away shushes him and says don't ever say that, because little pictures have big ears, which makes me run to the mirror to see if it is my big ears made me look like *Him*.

What a butthead, huh?

Well, I *was* a butthead, because like I said, I never had a brain until Freak moved down the street. The summer before eighth grade, right? That's the summer I grew so fast that Grim said we'd best let the boy go barefoot, he's exploding out of his shoes. That barefoot summer when I fell down a lot, and the weirdo robot boy with his white-yellow hair and his weird fierce eyes moved into the duplex down the block with his beautiful brown-haired mom, the Fair Gwen of Air.

Only a falling-down goon would think that was her real name, right?

Like I said.

Are you paying attention here? Because you don't even know yet how we got to be Freak the Mighty. Which was pretty cool, even if I do say so myself.

*To the real Kevin, and the real Gwen,
with love.*

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