

SYNOPSIS

A student, Dan Kahn, in his last high school semester goes to gym class in which there is a new gym teacher, Bill Johnson, an ex-boxer of some note. The teacher pairs off the boys, gives them boxing gloves and, after a few pointers, has them fight one another. Dan Kahn, is paired off with Shamaz, a Mike Tyson look-alike, and becomes anxious over the possibility of suffering serious damage resulting from the encounter.

When Bill Johnson rings the bell for the bout to begin, Dan notices that, instead of facing Shamaz, the Mike Tyson look-alike, he is facing a Caucasian in his thirties who is wearing a Roman-type toga and holding a massive knife with a heavily etched handle. The man is heading toward Dan with knife poised for a strike. Calculating that turning and running would put him at a disadvantage against a man already in motion toward him and would net him a knife in the back, Dan decides to heed the French statesman Clemenceau, who believed in "L'audace, l'audace, toujours l'audace," and runs toward the knife-wielder, diving at him in the manner of a football tackle, managing to land a right overhand on the toga-man's nose just before crashing to the floor in a belly-flop. When he opens his eyes, he finds Shamaz lying motionless on the floor with the teacher, Bill Johnson, kneeling over him and the students surrounding them, looking on in shock. The knife-wielding toga-man is nowhere in sight. Dan is confused and wants to know how Shamaz came to be lying on the floor unconscious. "You're not aware of having knocked him out?" Bill Johnson asks. Quickly realizing if he told about the toga-man he would be considered cuckoo, Dan says, "Oh, sure, I know I knocked him out."

Bill Johnson sends the other students to their homerooms and, as they're filing out, they look at Dan as if he were the Elephant Man

AND I HAD DONE A HELLISH THING,
AND IT WOULD WORK'EM WOE
FOR ALL AVERRED, I HAD KILLED THE BIRD
THAT MADE THE BREEZE TO BLOW
'AH WRETCH!' SAID THEY, 'THE BIRD TO SLAY,
THAT MADE THE BREEZE TO BLOW!'

Bill Johnson tells him how unusual it is to have the ability to knock someone out and tries to get him to fight Shamaz again both because Shamaz is going to come after him anyway and also to see whether the ability to knock out someone who is strong and has experience boxing is real or a freak accident. Dan, however, is interested in college and show business, he has never fought in his life and wants nothing to do with fighting. At home, Dan's mother is upset over a growth on her breast but is afraid to have it checked and Dan threatens to leave unless she goes to a doctor and has it taken care of.

A couple of months later, when Dan and his friends are walking from school, Shamaz and his gang surround them. One of the gang members has a .38 and they force Dan and his group to go to the playground. At the playground, Bill Johnson, the gym teacher, and a number of students from the school are waiting.

Johnson has brought his boxing gloves and Dan and Shamaz have another bout.

The same thing happens. The knife-wielding toga-man takes Shamaz's place at the bell and Dan Kahn runs at him again and when he opens his eyes on the pavement, where he is lying, Shamaz is unconscious again, his nose broken.

Dan still won't have anything to do with fighting, gets through the term, he and his mother and grandmother move uptown and he goes to Hunter College. There, he gets involved in the drama club and sends out letters to summer stock companies, one of which offers him a job involving doing various clean-up tasks in the theatre and an occasional bit part.

Back in New York he realizes there is too much competition in the acting field and it would take too long to reach a prominent position. He thinks, since he seems to have the ability to knock people out, boxing might be a short-cut to fame, which, in turn, would allow him to parlay it into becoming somebody in show-business.

Bill Johnson agrees to train him but at the end of six months, Dan does exactly what he'd done before the training: runs at the opponent, dives and knocks him out. Bill Johnson feels this can't work in the upper echelons of boxing and, concerned about his reputation, tells Dan he doesn't want to train him any more.

Through a high school friend whose uncle is a gangster, Dan gets an introduction and the gangster, Mangiacavallo, agrees to set up a private exhibition fight to see if Dan has the goods.

Dan knocks the opponent out and Mangiacavallo becomes his manager.

Eventually, Dan wins the middleweight championship.

He feels it's time to start moving over into show business, as he had planned, but Mangiacavallo has other ideas. One of these is for Dan, since the odds are on him, to lose the next fight.

Dan, then, concocts an elaborate scheme to outwit the gangster while, at the same time, goes on a spiritual quest to resolve the mystery of the apparition which appears whenever he's facing danger.

The scheme against the gangster, though risky, pays off as does his spiritual quest in which he comes face to face with the source of his apparition and finally understands why and how the apparition surfaced and kept resurfacing.

Weaving their way through the book are various characters with whom Dan comes in contact: Sandy Williams, an Ashley Judd look-alike with whom Dan has an affair, Mangiacavallo, a big bear of a killer, two Arab terrorists who threaten to blow up Dan, Sandy and a group of movie people, Hagit Albahari, an Israeli journalist who propositions Dan while he is in Greece, Brad Pitt, Julia Roberts and other movie stars and producers with whom Dan travels in Europe. There is Dan's mother and grandmother and various other characters who come in and out during the story. Finally, there is a Jamaican woman journalist with whom Dan falls in love and who disappears from his life only to reappear at the end when the two dance at a New Year's Eve party to:

LET'S GET TOGETHER AND FEEL ALL RIGHT