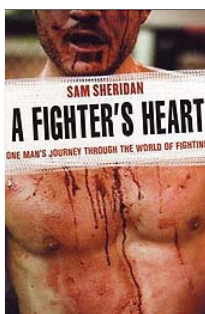


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“The world of fighting is dizzying and delirious, adrenaline-addled and addictive.”

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A Fighter's Heart

by Sam Sheridan

Atlantic Monthly Press, 320 pages, Hardcover | \$25.00

By Bradley Lincoln

A Fighter's Heart: One Man's Journey Through the World of Fighting is a whirling, no-holds-barred account of Sam Sheridan's expedition into the blood-and-guts arena of professional pugilism. With gutsy, participatory reportage he takes us behind the scenes of Muay Thai kickboxing, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, tae kwon do and plenty of other vowel-heavy fight club disciplines around the world. Sheridan lives and trains with the masters in a quest to figure out what about beating down opponents and pushing his body to the puking, bloody limit is so damn compelling, and why so much of the world likes to watch.

Sheridan's wanderlust led him from a sheltered Massachusetts prep school to a stint in the merchant marines, where he first encountered tattooed badasses and brutal boot-camp discipline. He traded push-ups for paintbrushes and graduated from Harvard with an art degree, but his taste for adventure didn't let up, so he took a gig on a yacht sailing rich folks around the world. Jumping ship in Australia with a healthy bank account and time to spend it, he embarked on the adventures that make up the bulk of the book. We get Tokyo cage fighting, mixed martial arts in Iowa, smoke jumping in New Mexico, insanely icy construction work in Antarctica and a stint as Paul Walker's body double on the set of *The Death and Life of Bobby Z* (the money's great but the sittin' around sucks). Oh, and cockfighting -- bloody, bladed cockfighting in the Philippines. It's a wild ride, and Sheridan goes into minute detail about the history and rituals of fighting, peppering the pelting with the relevant and disparate insights of everyone from Lao-tzu to Joyce Carol Oates.

Sheridan's fight discipline is admirable and his exploits are enviable for any weekend warrior or armchair UFC fan, but the writing would sometimes benefit from the restraint he exhibits in his own training rituals. It's jarring to go from a snowy Buddhist meditation retreat to the panicked thoughts of a dog thrust into his first death match in a matter of pages. But perhaps that's the point. The world of fighting is dizzying and delirious, adrenaline-addled and addictive. Plus this dude likes getting hit in the head.

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