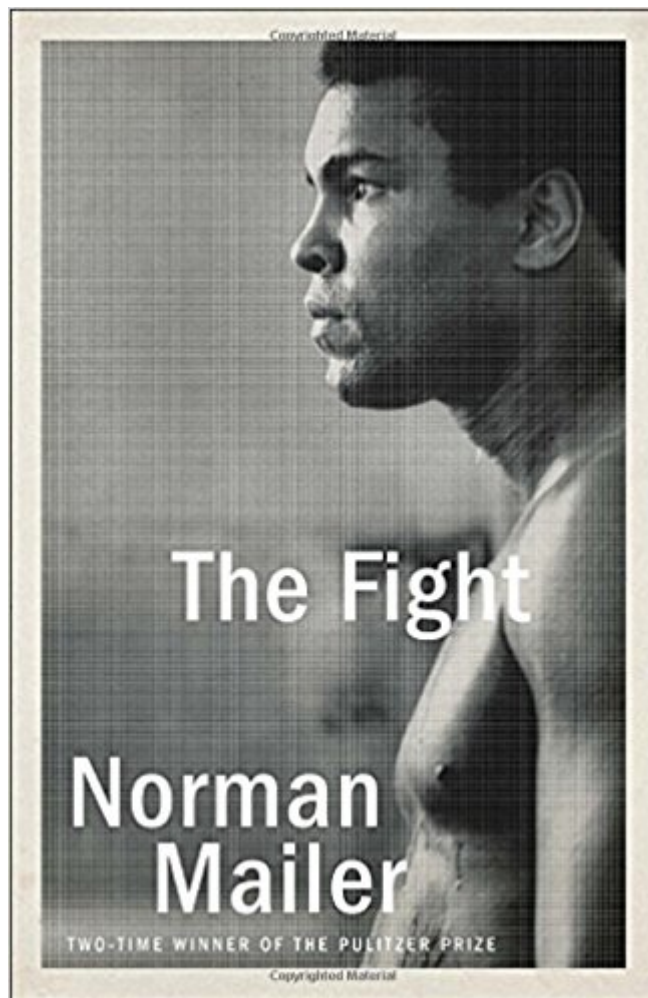


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# The Fight



## Synopsis

In 1974 in Kinshasa, Zaïre, two African American boxers were paid five million dollars apiece to fight each other. One was Muhammad Ali, the aging but irrepressible professor of boxing. The other was George Foreman, who was as taciturn as Ali was voluble. Observing them was Norman Mailer, a commentator of unparalleled energy, acumen, and audacity. Whether he is analyzing the fighters' moves, interpreting their characters, or weighing their competing claims on the African and American souls, Mailer's grasp of the titanic battle's feints and stratagems and his sensitivity to their deeper symbolism makes this book a masterpiece of the literature of sport. Praise for *The Fight* "Exquisitely refined and attenuated . . . [a] sensitive portrait of an extraordinary athlete and man, and a pugilistic drama fully as exciting as the reality on which it is based." *The New York Times* "One of the defining texts of sports journalism. Not only does Mailer recall the violent combat with a scholar's eye . . . he also makes the whole act of reporting seem as exciting as what's occurring in the ring." *GQ* "Stylistically, Mailer was the greatest boxing writer of all time." *Chuck Klosterman, Esquire* "One of Mailer's finest books." *Louis Menand, The New Yorker* Praise for Norman Mailer " [Norman Mailer] loomed over American letters longer and larger than any other writer of his generation." *The New York Times* "A writer of the greatest and most reckless talent." *The New Yorker* "Mailer is indispensable, an American treasure." *The Washington Post* "A devastatingly alive and original creative mind." *Life* "Mailer is fierce, courageous, and reckless and nearly everything he writes has sections of headlong brilliance." *The New York Review of Books* "The largest mind and imagination [in modern] American literature . . . Unlike just about every American writer since Henry James, Mailer has managed to grow and become richer in wisdom with each new book." *Chicago Tribune* "Mailer is a master of his craft. His language carries you through the story like a leaf on a stream." *The Cincinnati Post*

## Book Information

Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: Random House Trade Paperbacks; Reprint edition (October 15, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0812986121

ISBN-13: 978-0812986129

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.5 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 6.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 67 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #38,543 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #3 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Miscellaneous > Journalism #4 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Sports & Outdoors > Boxing, Wrestling & MMA > Boxing #5 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Individual Sports > Boxing

## Customer Reviews

There are sporting events that transcend the world of sports, and the 1974 heavyweight title fight in which Muhammad Ali regained his crown by improbably kayoing George Foreman in the middle of the African night was certainly one of them. Metaphorically, it was a writer's dream: two imposing black warriors, one all grace, the other brute force, one the iconoclast, the other the blind patriot, battling each other. Fatefully, the appropriate writer threw his pen into the ring. Norman Mailer's masterful account goes far beyond the ropes to capture the primal ethos of the sport, the larger social canvas this particular fight was drawn on, and the remarkable cast of personalities--not the least of which is Mailer himself--who converged to make this "Rumble in the Jungle" a landmark in sports history and a clear knockout in Mailer's journalistic portfolio. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The "fight" is the 1975 world heavyweight championship bout in Zaire between then reigning king of the ring Muhammad Ali and up-and-coming George Foreman. Mailer relays the events of the actual fight and includes the observations of George Plimpton, Hunter S. Thompson, and others. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Mailer's New Journalism here serves up a real feast, a smorgasbord of topics such as masculinity, economic dictatorship, journalism, the African climate, the African 'nature' and American stewardesses - er, flight attendants - mixed into the slow-heating but ultimately succulent and rewarding narrative of the boxing match that simmers in the background. A very New Journo sentence that!Zaire, from 1971 and 1997 what is now the highly unstable Democratic Republic of the Congo, is the Portugese word for the Congo River, itself taken from the Congo word nzere (river that swallows all rivers). The river, nature and weather are ever present here - will it rain before the fight (the rains came after the fight and flooded the whole concrete stadium, dressing rooms,

everything). Zaire was a military dictatorship under Joseph Desire Mobuto, who then "Africanized" his name (getting rid of Belgian colonial influence) to Mobuto Sese Suko Kuko Ngbendu Wa Za Banga, sort of "all conquering warrior who goes from triumph to triumph". This is all detailed by Mailer at the beginning of the book, although Wikipedia is also useful for those trying to remember and writing a book review on !Essentially as a showcase for and to consolidate his rule Mobuto set up this historic boxing match. Thus a lot of the early book is Mailer's perceptions of the bizarre dictatorship and its brief history and, like all dictatorships, cult of personality. We can then compare Mobuto the warrior to the other warriors in the story, Foreman and Ali. A major theme of the book is masculinity. There are almost no female characters in the book, apart from Ali's wife who briefly appears at the end and an American stewardess - er flight attendant - who is something of a heroine in the final act. Thus there is George, portrayed as the one dimensional knock out machine he probably was back then. There are the men in George's camp, who worry he might kill Ali. Then there are the men around Ali, his camp. Many doubt him. A fascinating figure is Bundini, whose role in the camp appears to be court jester, motivator and mystic provider. As another reviewer has mentioned one of the most satisfying chapters is when Mailer ("Norman" in the text) goes for a morning jog with Ali and is ultimately disappointed and worried by the seemingly lackadaisical aspect of Ali's training. The chapters chronicling the fight itself are just amazing writing that should be set as a text for any budding sports journalist. Mailer here is good, very very good. However for me the best New Journalism tome on masculinity is actually *The Right Stuff* by Tom Wolfe, a book of genius.

Norman Mailer was one of the best writers to come out of the Twentieth Century. He was also one of those writers in the Hemingway mold, who sought to immerse himself in the subject matter about which he wrote. No stranger to the sweet science (he once did a three-round boxing match on the Dick Cavett Show with ex-light-heavyweight champ, Jose Torres), Mailer was sent to cover the Rumble in the Jungle in Africa in 1974 when Muhammad Ali became the second man to regain the heavyweight title when he took it away from George Foreman. Mailer had a way with imagery and metaphor, and his writing is engaging. His colossal ego is also in evidence in this piece. He refers to himself in the third person throughout. Interestingly enough, there is more written about the events leading up to the big fight than of the actual contest itself. Despite Mailer's friendship and obvious idolization of Ali, the author does give us a few glances of Ali's cruel nature. Foreman, who later became the oldest man ever to regain the heavyweight title, is not described in much detail, and is cast as a bit player in this piece. Ironically, Foreman's genial personality wouldn't become evident until his comeback about ten years after his original reign as heavyweight champion. The Fight

focuses primarily on Ali, who was a larger-than-life icon during the 1970's. It's too bad Mailer didn't try to gain more insight into Foreman's nature, but perhaps that wasn't an option at the time, since Norman was clearly a member of Ali's camp. Originally written as a two-part article for Playboy magazine, Mailer later expanded the article into this book. It's an interesting memoir and gives the reader a sense of being caught up in the big event.

"The Fight" is not just a week-long journey into the events, places, and people surrounding "The Rumble in the Jungle," the classic championship bout between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman that will be forever remembered as one of the greatest displays of athletic prowess. It's also a free-ranging tour of a mind into a genius wordsmith; yes, there's the obnoxious narcissism of a man at the height of his literary powers and at the apex of his celebrity profiling a man about to reach the peak of his athletic glory and at the cusp of his stardom. But there's also the endless and compelling curiosity of Norman Mailer, as he zooms in and out of people's minds as fast as he zooms in and around Zaire. Above all, there are all these psychologist insights into the athletic genius of Muhammad Ali that only a literary genius like Norman Mailer can appreciate. The actual fight itself will go down as the most fluidly and accurately description of a championship fight in literary history, and could be compared to the final battle scene in The Aeneid. From Mailer's description, we can see that the epic battle between Foreman and Ali was violent and brutal, but ultimately who wins fights is not whoever is strongest and fittest but who is braver, smarter, and more determined. Boxing then is psychological warfare at its rawest and at its most subtle, and in the fight it becomes painfully and exhilarating clear to the audience that midway into the fight both men are on the brink of death, that their bodies and their minds have taken punishment and torture that would have killed any other human being, and that if they were to take a shot in the wrong place at the wrong time then they will come crashing down to their death. But Foreman and Ali buried their fear deep, albeit in their own individual way that defines the character of each. With Foreman he compensates with his fear of death and the much worse possibility of defeat by summoning a blind brutality and violence -- it's not only to think of winning; he needs to kill. With Ali he's looking deep into himself, summoning the mental discipline and courage he needs to do what he knows he can and must do -- land that awesome combination of strikes when Foreman is most vulnerable, that awesome combination that had not flinched his fearsome opponent in previous rounds but which most bring him down in the waning minutes of the fight when both men are on the brink of death and annihilation. Ali proved himself the cooler and the calmer of the two fighters, and thus the infinitely superior one. And Mailer has written a book that will make eternal Ali's great athletic performance.

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