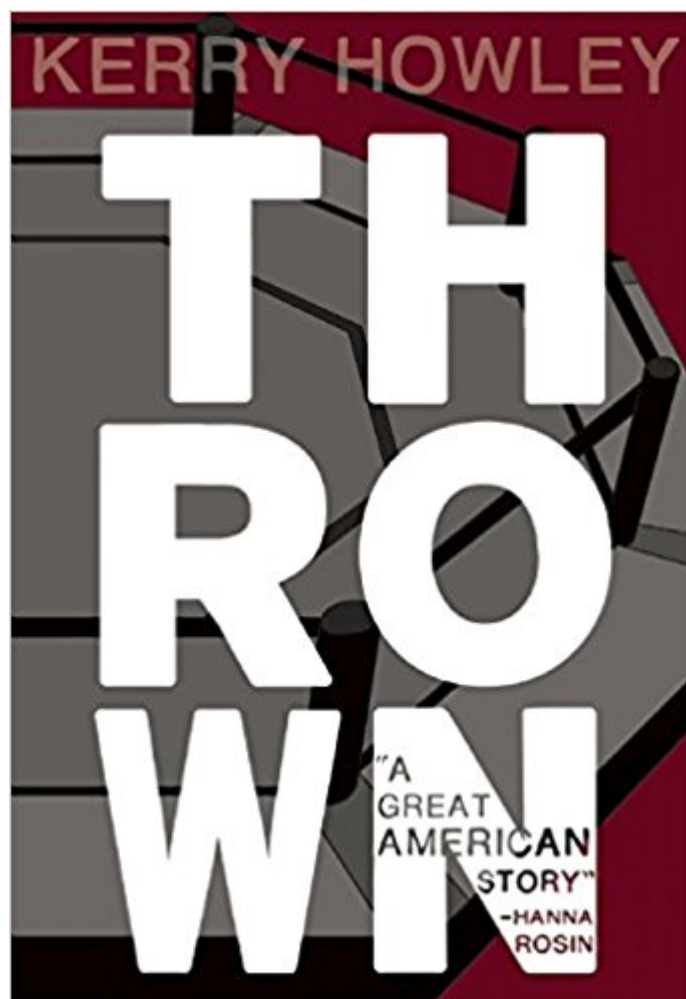


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Thrown



Synopsis

In this darkly funny work of literary nonfiction, a bookish young woman insinuates herself into the lives of two cage fighters—one a young prodigy, the other an aging journeyman. Acclaimed essayist Kerry Howley follows these men for three years through the bloody world of mixed martial arts as they starve themselves, break bones, fail their families and form new ones in the quest to rise from remote Midwestern fairgrounds to packed Vegas arenas. With penetrating intelligence and wry humor, Howley exposes the profundities and absurdities of this American subculture. Kerry Howley's work has appeared in The Paris Review, New York Times Magazine, the Atlantic, Wall Street Journal, Slate, and frequently in Bookforum. She holds an MFA from the University of Iowa's Nonfiction Writing Program.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The book started out on 5-star footing: the premise was compelling and the book had no subtitle. I've grown weary of almost every nonfiction book having a combination of clever noun or phrase and a subtitle that reveals the point to be pounded home for the next 300 pages. This book's lack of subtitle promised a deep inquiry. It indicated an examination into one of the most ancient, pervasive forms of expression. The first fourth of the book is just incredible. Howley is a great writer whose penchant for dry wit rewards the attentive reader. She name-drops a pretty wide spectrum of philosophers and peppers her writing with clever insights. After the first round though, the book punches itself out. The narrative jumps between two very different (and real) fighters: Erik Koch and Sean Huffman. Erik is an ascendant talent, and Sean is what those in the business call a "tomato

can"--albeit an incredibly tough one--who, when he loses, has to be submitted as his chin is apparently constructed of some non-biological substance. Over time the narrator gravitates more towards Erik, and in doing so undermines the stated goal of her book. Howley would like you to believe that she's going to provide some new and deep philosophical insight. She spends a lot of effort setting this up in the wonderful first fourth, but never follows through. Instead she delves more and more into the minutiae of life outside the octagon. In the case of Erik, who takes up more and more space towards the end of the book, it becomes a slog. His life is truly dull, and her adoring recitation of his banal daily routine quickly becomes stale. The account of Sean, however, is incredibly poignant and powerful in its simple repeating of facts and dialogue.

The best thing a book can sometimes do is take you to another world, whether it be Hogwarts, the Rape of Nanking or a dank English wardrobe. But other worlds can also be more close to home, whether it be the workings of your local mosque or, in Howley's expert piece of non-fiction absorption, *THROWN*, which delves into the world of MMA Fighters. I have no embarrassment in mentioning this, but I chose this book because I read an article in my local paper that Ms. Howley is now teaching at my local university and saw that the book had collected a plethora of raves and blurbs. What I did not know, however, was that the book was non-fiction. Ms. Howley's style is one of the more unique I came across, and her story of stumbling accidentally into a cage match and immediately grasping the philosophical implications in these fighters. She becomes a "spaceshadow" (as opposed to a "shadow") with two Iowa fighters on the opposite end of the spectrum, thirtysomething journeyman fighter Sean Huffman, an overweight fighter with a pitiful family life, and young Erik Koch, the brother of one of Cedar Rapids MMA founders. Different entourages, training regimens and personal lives intersect over the next two years, as our narrator Kit becomes enmeshed in the poetry and philosophy of cage matches. Ms. Howley's writing is reminiscent of Norman Mailer, giving her a maturity that one would think would initially bely the subject matter. When I finished the book and read some reviews I was amazed this was true -- Huffman and Koch are real people easily searchable on the internet. I didn't feel cheated, I felt elated, that a secret was kept from me, the reader (I will admit that was my fault, the term "non-fiction" was not hid on the book).

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