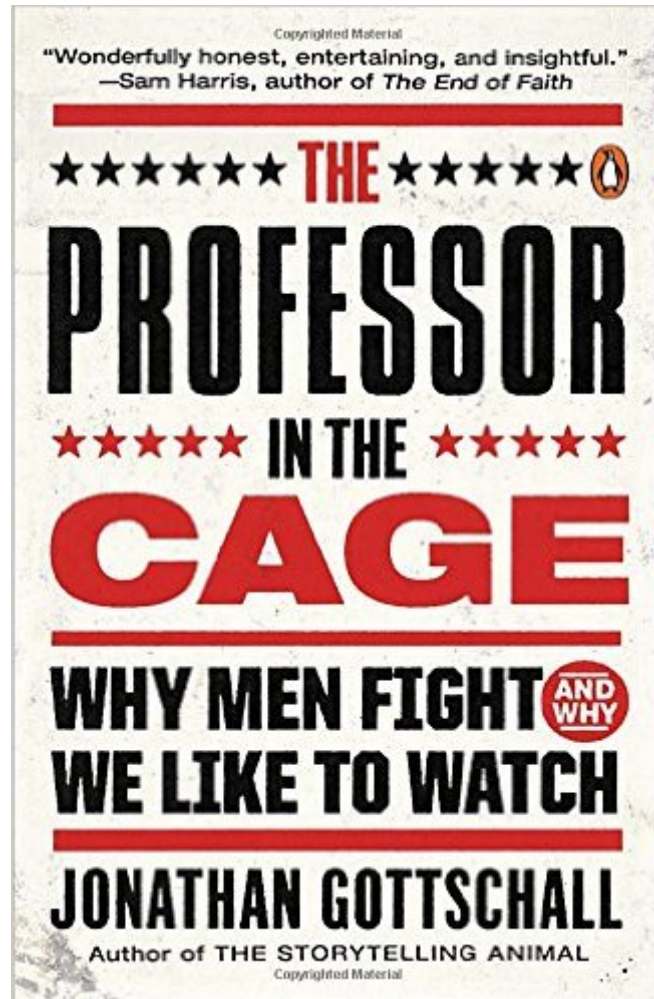


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The Professor In The Cage: Why Men Fight And Why We Like To Watch



Synopsis

An English professor starts training in mixed martial arts, exploring the science and history behind the violence of men. When a mixed martial arts (MMA) gym opens across the street from his office, Jonathan Gottschall sees a challenge. Pushing forty, out of shape, and disenchanted with his job as an adjunct English professor, he works up his nerve and finds himself training for an all-out cage fight. He sees it not just as a personal test, but also as an opportunity to answer questions that have intrigued him for years: Why do men fight? And why do so many seemingly decent people love to watch? In *The Professor in the Cage*, Gottschall's unlikely journey from the college classroom to the fighting cage drives an important new investigation into the science and history of violence. The surging popularity of MMA "a full-contact sport in which fighters punch, choke, and kick each other into submission" is just one example of our species' insatiable interest both in violence and in the rituals that keep violence in check. From duels to football to the roughhousing of children, humans are masters of what Gottschall calls the monkey dance: a dizzying variety of rule-bound contests that establish hierarchies while minimizing risk and social disorder. Gottschall's unsparing odyssey through extremes of pain, occasional humiliation, his wife's incredulity, and ultimately his own cage fight opens his, and our, eyes to the uncomfortable truth that, as brutal as these contests can be, the world would be a much more chaotic and dangerous place without them.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I came to this book with a lot of shared perspectives - both Gottschall and I work in the prim world of academics, and he went to the MMA gym and got punched in the head for a year and a half, and I went to Iraq as a freelance photojournalist. The two aren't that different. "Men" in the general "men" sense of the word often find themselves chasing something, usually with an ever-encroaching desperation. There's a reason why the mid-life crisis cliché is a man in a convertible, not a woman. Put another very sexist way, men have mid-life crises - women are the reason for the mid-life crisis. That's because women get stable and sane the older they get - while men realize their chance at being the alpha male has slipped away. This book would not have worked had it been Gottschall's memoir about MMA fighting - that part is very interesting but would have run out of steam if it had been longer than a magazine article. This book works - and it works very well - because he doubles-up his MMA memoir with an insightful and conversational study of men and violence, and really male culture overall. This is not new, I know, and other books have trod this ground - but not books that I have read. So this combination did a great job of melding a personal story with the science behind it. I do think my opinion is skewed because I see some of myself in Gottschall's story and that connected me to the book in a way another reader might not experience. But I think this is a strong piece of nonfiction for any man wondering why they are behaving the way they are - so anybody looking for a little self-awareness would at least be intrigued.

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