

Others Might Cry Insanity

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In the late '60s, I went to the old Madison Square Garden to see a main-go between two Latin fighters, one Cuban, the other, Puerto Rican.

The Garden's a tinderbox; any spark will set it off.

The main event's hotly contested -- could go either way. When the decision's announced, the losing side -- already spoiling for a fight -- attacks the winner's fans. Everybody's raining beer bottles into the ring. Fighters, seconds, and TV people dive under the ring.

Broken furniture and everything that can be ripped loose is heaved. The main floor is shelled -- shrapnel whizzing in every direction. It's a war zone.

Lunatics up in the cheap seats yank the red fire spears off the walls and fling them down. I shudder at someone being impaled -- hug the ground, barely able see from under my seat.

Then, from the far end of the arena comes a stocky, curly-haired figure -- vaguely familiar -- in a double-breasted suit, walking purposefully -- not rushing -- through the deadly barrage. No other life form dares move.

As he gets closer, I recognize the pugnacious set of his shoulders -- the John Wayne walk: world-famous novelist, Norman Mailer. He doesn't duck, flinch, blink or avoid anything walking to the other side of the arena. Metal and shards and jagged hunks crisscross every inch of him until he exits.

Russian Roulette with no empty chambers.

What would possess him to do it, a man of his intellect? Drink? Drugs? Both? A macho head-trip? A search for enlightenment? Or, was he like the guy that jumped off a bridge? And when asked why, said, "It seemed like a good idea at the time."

It was never mentioned in the following day's press, and Mailer's never spoken of it or addressed it in any of his work. But, finally, after more than 40 years, he may have revealed why he did such a suicidal thing in a sentence about his philosophy of life in his book THE SPOOKY ART: "...he has had the courage to be bold where others might cry insanity."