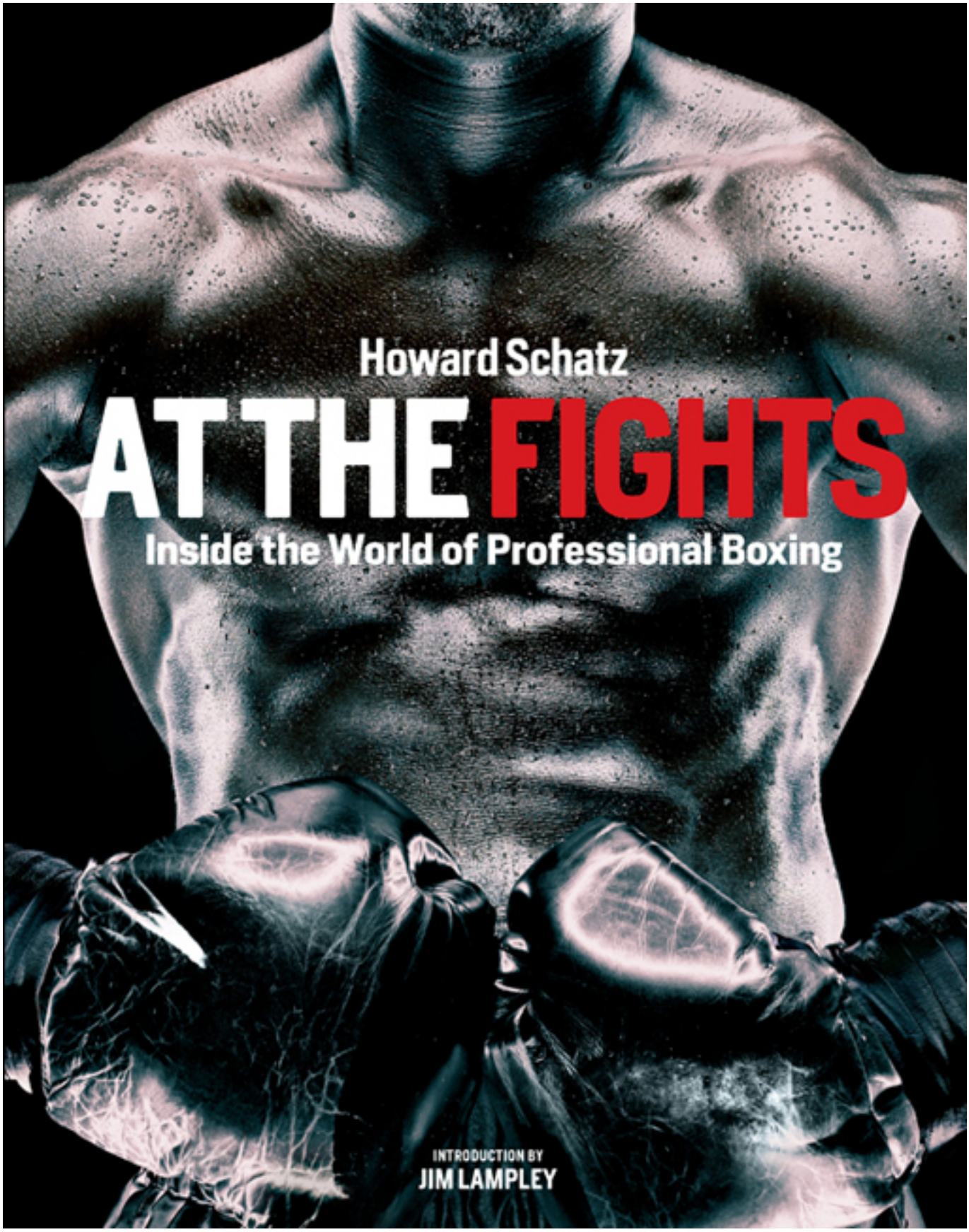
Howard Schatz
AT THE FIGHTS
Inside the World of Professional Boxing
INTRODUCTION BY
JIM LAMPLEY

Howard Schatz is an opthalmologist by training. In an earlier professional incarnation, he was one of the foremost retinal specialists in the world. In 1995, he began a second career in photography. He now makes his living as a commercial photographer, which pays well but isn't as artistically satisfying as he'd like it to be.

Six years ago, Schatz began a remarkable journey. *At The Fights: Inside the World of Professional Boxing* , (Sports Illustrated Books) is the end product of his work. It's a monumental book in more ways than one, printed on heavy glossy 14-by-11-inch stock with faithful photographic reproductions and splendid production values.

Before Schatz embarked on his project, he studied hundreds of sports photo books, looked at classic George Bellows paintings, and talked with a wide range of creative artists. As the years passed, he invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in addition to his time and emotional input.

"I wanted to make images that said 'boxing' but said it differently from the way anyone had said it before," Schatz recounts. "My studio is like a research lab. We work at other ways of seeing. The idea was to use a still photograph, not as a frozen moment but to show movement and, if possible, to show who the fighters are. These are violent vulnerable men with needs and ambitions. They're physical marvels. They're courageous, passionate, determined. The challenge was to convey all of that in a photograph."

Schatz was at ringside for numerous club shows and high-profile fights. But his most impressive work was undertaken in his studio. Dozens of fighters posed beneath as many as eleven lights while three assistants facilitated the photo shoots. A handful of boxing luminaries who were on Schatz's wish list eluded his grasp. He was never able to land a studio session with Floyd Mayweather Jr, Don King, or Oscar De La Hoya.

That's their loss.

Monet captured the essence of water lilies better than a photograph. The same can be said of Schatz's computer-styled images. Light and shadow are distorted to show movement. The images convey strength and power, motion and emotion.

Also, many photo books have a text that's serviceable at best. This one is worth reading. Schatz interviewed most of his photo subjects at length. Then he and Beverly Ornstein (his wife, business partner, and best friend) fashioned the text.

Among the most telling quotations in *At the Fights* are:

Steve Cunningham: "Before a fight, you're nervous; you're scared. Every emotion goes through your body. When you're in that locker room, that's the crazies, the jitters. Like you seriously do not want to go out there. You have to tell yourself you're good. You have to talk to yourself. Any fighters that tells you he's not nervous or scared before a fight; either he doesn't have it anymore or he's lying."

Ann Wolfe: "I love boxing because it's the only thing I've ever done in my whole life that I was good at."

James Kirkland: "In that ring, you get to do absolutely what you want to do. If you want to head-butt somebody, knee somebody; hell, you can actually do it. They may take a point away, but you can do what you want to do. And being able to break a man down, take control over him, make him bleed, bang his face up; it feels good."

Andre Ward: "Kobe Bryant can have a bad night and he can shrug it off. He's still Kobe Bryant. You lose one fight in boxing, and the whole world is scratching their heads, saying, 'This guy is not what we thought he was.'"

Tim Bradley: "I never feel for my opponent after a fight. He's in there trying to knock my head off. He's in there trying to kill me."

Michael Schwartz: "There is only really one person who gives a damn about these kids, and that's the doctor. Everybody else to different degrees has other motives. The doctor is there to make sure the kid lives."

John Duddy: “The dream is a lot different from the reality of it.”

Jim Lampley: “We watch. But we don’t really know. Only they know.”

Contemplating his journey through the sweet science, Schatz says, “I look at boxing, and the whole thing thrills me.”

The same can be said of *At the Fights*.

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thauser@rcn.com. His most recent book (*And the New: An Inside Look at Another Year in Boxing*
) was published by the University of Arkansas Press.

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Radam G says:

NICE! Wow! TH is da MAN! Holla!