

Home » Entertainment » Books

## 'Fighter' not quite a knockout

Vince Darcangelo, Special to The Rocky  
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**Plot in a nutshell:** Davidson's debut is at once a class study, a gritty two-fisted slobber-knocker, and a lowbrow exploration of the world of illegal boxing. In its finer moments, it delivers its dark social commentary like a right hook to the jaw. At other times, particularly when describing human interactions outside the ring, Davidson telegraphs his punches.

*The Fighter's* plot unfolds through the mirrored lives of two characters: Paul Harris, the privileged son of a wealthy winery owner, and Rob Tully, a working-class teenage boxing prodigy. Paul is pampered and apathetic; in his late 20s, he still lives with his parents and works for his father. Then one night, he is savagely beaten in a bar fight, causing him to take up boxing.

Meanwhile, Rob is the product of a close-knit and loving family. Rob isn't passionate about boxing, but doesn't have any other career options. Their stories intersect in a rural farmhouse that hosts brutal, underground boxing matches.

Like Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*, *The Fighter* features a protagonist, Paul, who disdains the "softness" of the 21st century male and wants to get back in touch with his primal roots. Humanity has gained much through social evolution, but, the book seems to ask: In shedding its most basic survival skills, is humanity evolving into extinction?

**Sample of prose:** "Didn't every organism seek the easiest pathway to survival? Then what of the organism reared in an environment without predators or obstacles, its every need provided? Paul pictured a flabby boneless creature, shapeless, as soft and raw as the spot under a picked scab."

**Pros:** Like a great pugilist, Davidson's fight scenes contain no wasted motion. They are swift and smooth, graceful yet vicious. Few stomachs are stronger than mine, and even I was grimacing at the brutality.

**Cons:** Davidson excels at describing society's underbelly, but struggles to illustrate the upper-crust existence of Paul Harris. These scenes (which make up a good portion of the book) are slow, the characters and plot turns contrived.

**Final word:** Fans of Palahniuk and Irvine Welsh will relish the graphic fight sequences and gritty social commentary. Davidson has penned a disturbing treatise on the cost of human evolution.

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