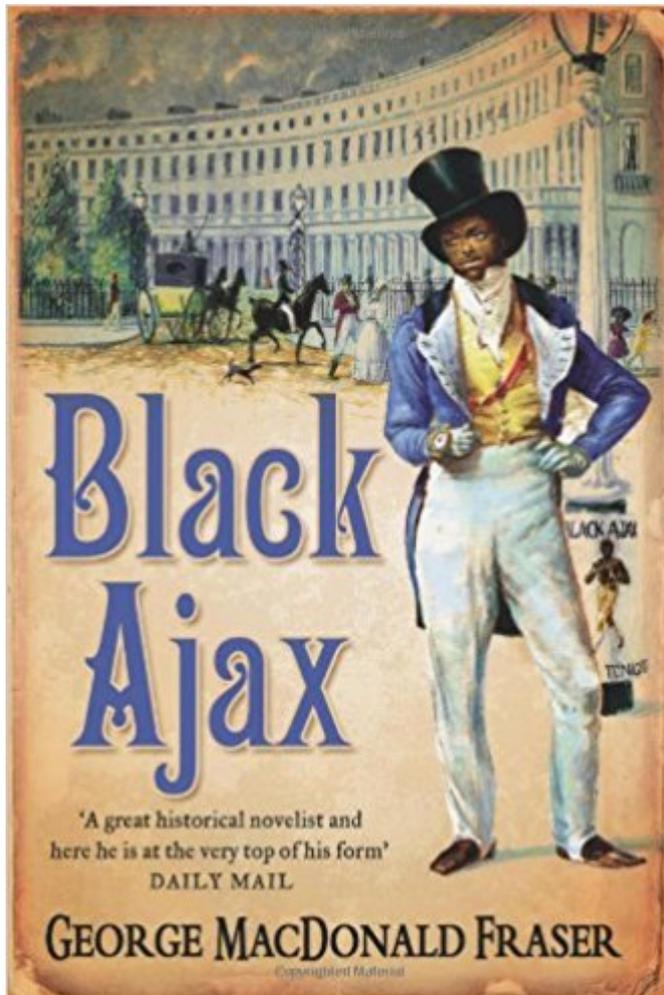


## #29 – Black Ajax, George MacDonald Fraser BOOK REVIEW

Krauser PUA | 28 February, 2018 | by krauserpua

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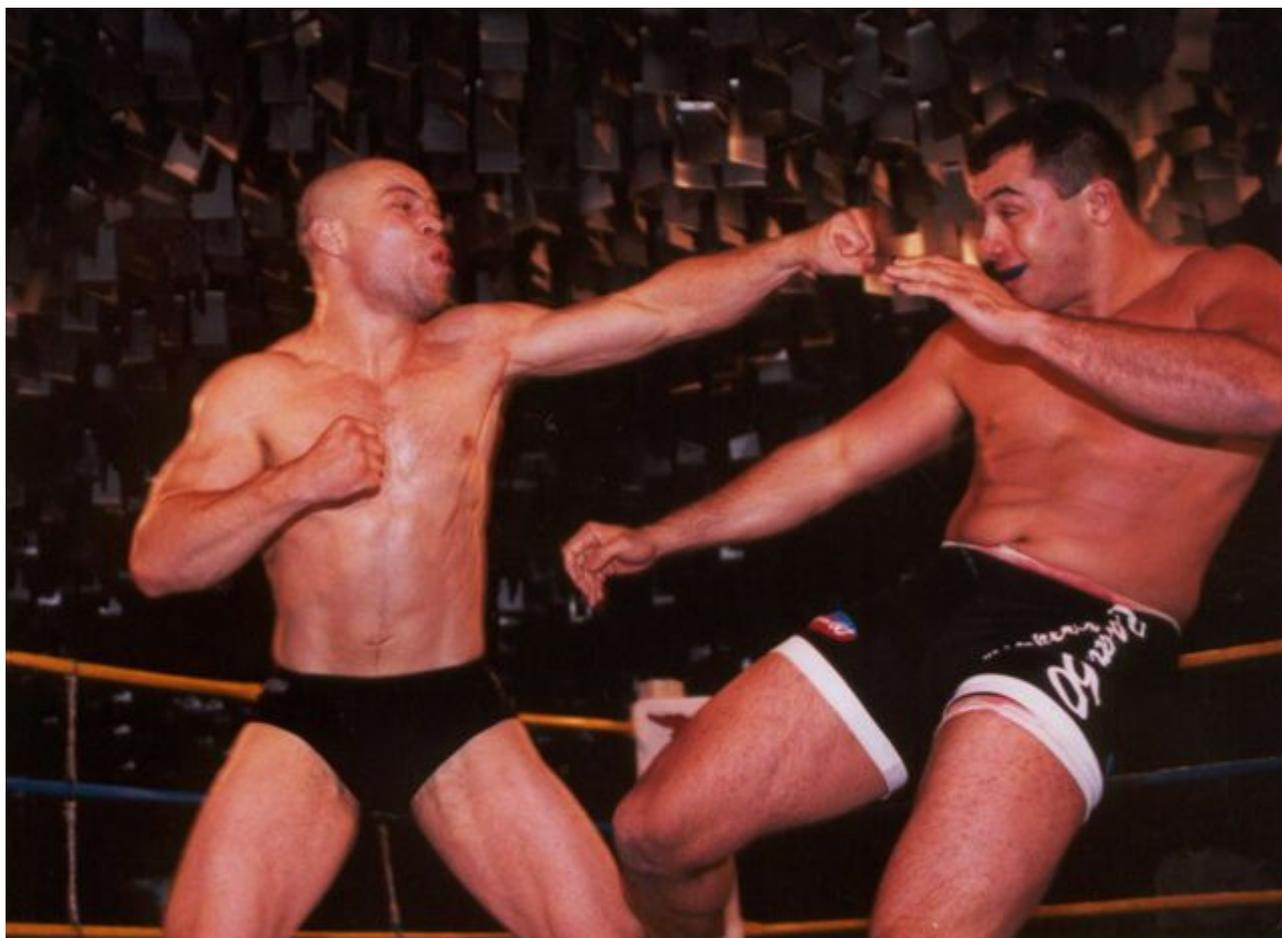


It's not Floyd nor Adrien Brody

Back in the late 90s, before the internet really existed, I was well into my Mixed Martial Arts. The UFC had only been going five years and a little over a dozen shows. It had been banned from television after Chinese agent Senator John McCain called it “human cockfighting” and used his pull with the boxing industry and state athletic commission to ban it. Some shows, such as **Extreme Fighting Championship**, [even had all the fighters and staff arrested by local police after the event](#).

It was wild west times for MMA. Just like boxing in the bare knuckle era of the 1800s.

MMA was *interesting* back then. Fighters tended to specialise in one discipline, entered MMA after achieving much in their own sport, and often had personality too. Nowadays they all look the same: crappy tattoos, facial hair, herky-jerky sprawl'n'brawl style, and giving interviews less interesting than the typical Premiership post-match piece. And don't get me started on the women.....



Before it became MM-Gay

Sigh, I long for the good old days of MMA. Back when collegiate wrestlers would blow themselves up with steroids then fly down to Brazil for a bare-knuckle bout with local BJJ guys. The days before rounds and referee stand-ups. The days when weight classes were a bit gay and time-limits were getting in the way of the fun.

Sure, it was corrupt as fuck. Sure you had the Japanese writing [“we don’t test for steroids” in contracts](#) to make sure their fighters got the hint. Sure, the Yakuza would [force managers to sign away fighter rights at the point of a gun](#).

But this was all good fun. We had Jose Pele Landi Jons, Igor Vovchanchin, Rumina Sato, and Mikhail Avetyan. We had 350lb Bob Sapp piledriving a still-functional Rodrigo Nogueira. I was well into it and collected all the VHS tapes I could. I got lucky finding one tape trader who had every single Pancrase and Shooto event from Japan, going back to 1993 and 1989 respectively. And I watched them all.

I can barely watch MMA now, it’s become so boring and chavvy. Pride has long gone and no major Japanese promotion has arisen to take it’s place. The UFC is painfully tedious to watch most of the time, being sloppy boxing. Oh there’s the occasional great fight and the occasional interesting fighter (for example Nick Diaz) but I find myself skipping through on fast forward nowadays. [1]

But those wild west days..... oh my!

**Black Ajax** is written by the creator of the *Flashman* series, **George MacDonald Fraser**, and though I haven’t read the latter I very much mean to now. It sounds like it’s Alexandre Dumas but if the *Three Musketeers* were all alcoholic womanizers. Black Ajax is set during the wild west era of British boxing, in the early 1800s. Specifically, it follows former slave and first great black fighter Tom Molineaux on his voyage to England to take on reigning champion Tom Cribb [2]. It follows his development, his life in England, his being trained up from a crude slugger into a real “millin’ cove”, and then finally the big

fight.

Structurally, the book is experimental. Each chapter is a different participant in the drama reminiscing on the times, and on Tom. His trainers, manager, mistress chip in as well as sports writers of the day. It's written as speech in an approximation of old English and uses much of the old jargon.

The lefties among you will likely find the language eye popping as it doesn't SJWise the thoughts of 1800s Englanders. For example:

“Ah’s a fighter!” roars Tom, looking monstrous, and yet in awe of this fiery browbeater half his size. “Ah won my freedom fightin’! Won fifty-fi’ thousand’ dollahs, beatin’ Black Ghost, an’ my master set me free.”

“Well, ‘imagine that!” cries Bill, in mock amazement. “You mus’ be one hell of a fightin’ terror, Tom Molineaux!” He stepped back, slipped off his coat, and squared up. “C’mon then! You show me! Sport your fives, boy! Fall to, an’ let’s see how you goin’ to beat Cribb!”

That’s some of the milder language. This book is all nigger-this, nigger-that, plus having Molineaux racing around London banging every white slag he can find. I seriously doubt a publisher would touch it nowadays. *Black Panther* it isn’t.

The book’s momentum drags somewhat in the middle because it’s taking 250 pages to cover just a few fights and the build-up between them. However one thing it does fantastically well is recreate the feel of the times [3] immersing me in the sights, smells and attitudes of 1800s London. Everyone is a rascalion and Flashman’s dad the worst of the lot. I especially enjoyed hearing boxing discussed using old jargon and concepts. It feels very well researched.

Had there been film-reel footage of the fights I’d have immediately watched them on YouTube. Instead I had to settle for warriors of a later era, watching myself a bit of Burmese boxing (Muay Thai without the gloves, mostly) and then the late great Philadelphia fighter Benny Briscoe and the ol’ mongoose Archie Moore. Oh just watch Benny move. Now that’s old time!

*If you’d like to immerse yourself in an old-time art back when it was all wild west, get yourself a copy of the original Daygame Nitro. Or for the same price you could get five times the content at five times the quality by purchasing [Daygame Infinite](#), the Floyd Mayweather Jnr of pick-up advice [4]*

[1] I’m sick to my back teeth of Conor fucking Macgregor.

[2] The Tom Cribb pub still stands near Piccadilly Circus and indeed I’ve had a few idates there back in 2010

[3] Presumably. I’m not that old as to remember them personally

[4] But arguably less cunt-ish

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