



# **The Fight That Started the Movies: The World Heavyweight Championship, the Birth of Cinema and the First Feature Film**

*Samuel Hawley*

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**"Movie buffs and boxing buffs alike will relish this!"** (*Publishers Weekly*)

**"An extremely well-researched tale."** (*Kirkus Reviews*)

On March 17, 1897, in an open-air arena in Carson City, Jim Corbett and Bob Fitzsimmons fought for the heavyweight championship of the world. The contest was recorded by film pioneer Enoch Rector from inside an immense, human-powered camera called the "Veriscope," the forgotten Neanderthal at the dawn of cinema history. Rector's movie of the contest premiered two months later. Known today as *The Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight*, it was the world's first feature-length film.

*The Fight That Started the Movies* is the untold story of Corbett's and Fitzsimmons' journey to that ring in Nevada and how the landmark film of their battle came to be made. It reveals how boxing played a key role in the birth of the movies, spurring the development of motion picture technology and pushing the concept of "film" from a twenty-second peephole show to a full-length attraction, "a complete evening's entertainment," projected on a screen.

The cast of characters in the tale is rich and varied. There are inventors Eadweard Muybridge, Thomas Edison, William Dickson and Eugene Lauste, figuring out how to photographically capture and reproduce motion. There are the playboy brothers Otway and Gray Latham, who first saw the commercial potential of fight films, and their friend and partner Enoch Rector, who pushed that potential to fruition. There are fighters Jim Corbett with his "scientific" methods of boxing; Bob Fitzsimmons with his thin legs and turnip-on-a-chain punch; hard-drinking John L. Sullivan and the original Jack Dempsey and the gifted but ultimately doomed Young Griffo. There are loud-mouthed fight managers and big-talking promoters, and Wild West legends like Bat Masterson and Judge Roy Bean when the story heads to the Rio Grande river. And finally, there is the audience, our collective ancestors, discovering that movies were more than just a curiosity to gape at, but a new and enduring form of entertainment to rival the theater.

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