

Gloves for a Tiger

by Louis L'Amour, 1908-1988

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The radio announcer's voice sounded clearly in the silent room, and "Deke" Hayes scowled as he listened.

"Boyoboy, what a crowd! Almost fifty thousand, folks! Think of that! It's the biggest crowd on record, and it should be a great battle.

"This is the acid test for the 'Tiger Man,' the jungle killer who blasted his way up from nowhere to become the leading contender for the world's heavyweight boxing championship in only six months!

"Tonight he faces Battling Bronski, the Scranton Coal Miner. You all know Bronski. He went nine rounds with the champ in a terrific battle, and he is the only white fighter among the top contenders who has dared to meet the great Tom Noble.

"It'll be a grand battle either way it goes, and Bronski will be in there fighting until the last bell. But the Tiger has twenty-six straight knockouts, he's dynamite

in both hands, with a chin like a chunk of granite! Here he comes now, folks! The Tiger Man!"

Deke Hayes, champion of the world, leaned back in the chair in his hotel room and glanced over at his manager. "Toronto Tom" McKeown was one of the shrewdest fight managers in the country. Now he sat frowning at the radio and his eyes were hard.

"Don't take it so hard, Tom," Deke laughed. "Think of the gate he'll draw. It's all ballyhoo, and one of the best jobs ever done. I didn't think old Ryan had it in him. I believe you're actually worried yourself!"

"You ain't never seen this mug go," McKeown insisted. "Well, I have! I'm telling you, Deke, he's the damnedest fighter you ever saw. Talk about killer instinct!

"There ain't a man who ever saw him fight who would be surprised if he jumped onto some guy and started tearing with his teeth. This Tiger Man stuff may sound like ballyhoo but he's good, I tell you!"

"As good as me?" Deke Hayes put in slyly.

"No, I guess not," his manager admitted judiciously. "They rate you one of the best heavyweights the game ever saw, Deke. But we know, a damned sight better than the sportswriters, that you've really never had a battle yet, not with a fighter who was your equal.

"That Bronski thing looked good because you let it. But don't kid yourself, this guy isn't any sap. He's different. Sometimes I doubt if this guy's even human."

Toronto Tom McKeown tried to speak casually. "I talked to Joe Howard, Deke, Joe was his sparrin' partner for this brawl. That Tiger guy never says anything to anybody! He just eats and sleeps, and he walks around at night a lot, just...well, just like a cat! When he ain't workin' out, he stays by himself, and nobody ever gets near him."

"Say, what the devil's the matter with you? Got the willies? You're not buyin' this hype?" Deke Hayes demanded.

But the voice from the radio interrupted just then, and they fell silent, listening.

"They're in the center of the ring now, folks, getting their instructions," the excited announcer said. "The Tiger Man in his tiger-skin robe, and Bronski in the old red sweater he always wears. The Tiger is younger, but Bronski has the experience, and—man, this is going to be a battle!" the announcer exclaimed.

The bell clanged. "There they go, folks! Bronski jabs a left and the Tiger slips it! Bronski jabs again, and again, and again! The Tiger isn't doing anything now, just circling around. Bronski jabs again, crosses a right to the jaw.

"He's getting confident now, folks, and—there, he's stepping in with a volley of punches! Left, right, left, right—but the Tiger is standing his ground, just slipping them!

"Wow!" the radio voice hit the ceiling.

"Bronski's down! The Battler led a left, and quick as a flash the Tiger dropped into a crouch, snapped a terrific, jolting right to the heart, and hooked a bone-crushing left to the jaw! Bronski went down like he was shot, and hasn't even wiggled!

"There's the count, folks!—eight—nine—ten! He's out, and the Tiger wins again! Boyoboy, a first-round knockout!

"Wait a minute, folks, maybe I can get the Tiger to say something for you! He never talks, but we might be lucky this time. Here, say something to the radio fans, Tiger!" the announcer begged.

"He won't do it," McKeown said confidently. "He never talks to nobody!"

Suddenly, a cold, harsh voice spoke from the radio, a voice bitter and incisive, but then dropping almost to a growl at the end.

"I'm ready now. I want to fight the champion. Come on, Deke Hayes! I'll kill you!"

In a cold sweat Hayes snapped erect, face deathly pale. His mouth hung slack; his eyes were ghastly, staring.

"My God...that voice!" he mumbled, really scared for the first time in his life.

McKeown stared strangely at Hayes, his own face white. "Who's punchy now? You look like you've seen a ghost!"

Hayes sagged back in his chair, his eyes narrowed. "No. I ain't seen one. I heard one!" he declared enigmatically.

Ruby Ryan, veteran trainer and handler of fighters, looked across the hotel room. The Tiger was sitting silent, as always, staring out the window.

For six months Ryan had been with the Tiger, day in and day out, and yet he knew almost nothing about him. Sometimes he wondered, as others did, if the Tiger was quite human. Definitely he was an odd duck, and Ruby Ryan, so-called because of his flaming hair, had known them all.

Jeffries, Fitzsimmons, Ketchell, Dempsey. But he had seen nothing to compare with the animal-like ferocity of the Tiger. Through all the months that had passed since Ryan received that strange wire from Calcutta, India, he had wondered about this man....

Who sent the cablegram Ruby Ryan didn't know. Who was the Tiger? Where had he come from? Where had he learned his skill? He didn't know that, either. He only knew that one night some six months before, he had been loafing in Doc Hanley's place with some of the boys, when a messenger had hurried to him with a cablegram. It had been short, to the point—and unsigned.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO HANDLE NEXT HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION STOP
READ CALCUTTA AND BOMBAY NEWS REPORTS FOR VERIFICATION STOP
EXPENSES GUARANTEED STOP COME AT ONCE.

Ryan had hurried out and bought the papers. The notes were strange, yet they fascinated the fight manager with their possibilities. Ever alert for promising material, this had been almost too good to be true.

The news reports told of a strange heavyweight—a white man with skin burnt to a deep bronze. A slim, broad-shouldered giant, with a robe of tiger-skins and the scars of many claws upon his body, who fought with the cold fury of a jungle beast.

The CHINA CLIPPER carried Ruby Ryan to the Far East. He found his man in Bombay, India. In Calcutta, the Tiger Man had knocked out Kid Balotti in the first round, and in Bombay, Guardsman Dirk had lasted until the third by getting on his bicycle.

Balotti was a former top-notcher, now on the downgrade, but still a capable workman with his fists. He had been unconscious four hours after the knockout administered by the Tiger.

In Bombay, the Tiger, a Hercules done in bronze, had floored Guardsman Dirk in the first round, and it had required all the latter's skill to last through the second heat and one minute of the third. Then, he, too, had gone down to crushing defeat.

Ruby Ryan found the Tiger sitting in a darkened hotel room, waiting. The big man wore faded khakis and around his neck was the necklace of tiger claws Ryan had heard of.

The Tiger stood up. He was well over six feet tall and well muscled but he had a startling leanness and coiled intensity to his body. Looking at him, Ryan thought of Tarzan come to life. There *was* something catlike about the man, something jungle-bred. One felt the terrific strength that was in him, and knew instantly why he was billed as "The Tiger."

"We go to Capetown, South Africa. We fight Danny Kilgart there," the man said bluntly. "In Johannesburg, we fight somebody—anybody. If you want to come on you get forty percent of the take. I want the championship within a year. You do the talking, you sign the papers; I'll fight."

That was all. The man knew what he wanted and had a good idea of how to get it.

Danny Kilgart, a good, tough heavyweight with a wallop, went down in the second under the most blistering, two-fisted attack Ruby Ryan had ever seen. The next victim, the Boer Bomber, weighing two hundred and fifty pounds, lasted just forty-three seconds... that had been in Johannesburg.

The Tiger didn't speak three words to Ruby Ryan in three weeks. But Ryan knew what he was looking at—that potentially, the Tiger was a coming champion. Of course it was unlikely that he was good enough to beat Deke Hayes. Hayes was the greatest heavyweight of all time, a master boxer with a brain-jolting wallop. And Hayes trained scientifically and thoroughly for every fight; Ryan's Tiger Man was, to push the allusion too far, an animal. Brutally strong, unbelievably aggressive, but he hadn't been in the ring daily with the best fighters in the world.... The Tiger wasn't just a slugger, he was better than that, but it was unlikely that he had the skill of the champ.

In Port Said, Egypt, accompanied by an internationally famous newspaper correspondent, Ryan and the Tiger had been set upon by bandits. The Tiger killed two of them with his bare hands and maimed another before they fled.

The news stories that followed set the world agog with amazement, and brought an offer from Berlin, Germany, to go fifteen rounds with Karl Schaumberg, the Blond Giant of Bavaria.

Schaumberg, considered by many a fit opponent for the champion himself, lasted three and a half rounds. Fearfully battered, he was carried from the arena, while the Tiger Man, mad with killing fury, paced the ring like a wild beast.

Paris, France, had seen François Chandel go down in two minutes and fifteen seconds, and in London the Tiger had duplicated Jeffries's feat of whipping the three best heavyweights in England in one night.

Offered a fight in Madison Square Garden, the Tiger Man had refused the battle unless given three successive opponents, as in England. They agreed—and he whipped them all! One of them was unfortunate—he had lasted into the second round, and took a terrific pounding.

Then had followed a tour across the country. The best heavyweights that could be brought against the mystery fighter were carried from the ring, one after the other.

Delighted and intoxicated by the Tiger Man's color and copy value, sportswriters filled their papers with glowing stories of his prowess, of his ferocity, and of the tiger-skin robe he wore. The story was that the skins were reputed to have been taken with his bare hands.

Ruby Ryan, after the Bronski fight, was as puzzled as ever. He had his hands on the gimmick fighter of the century, a boxer who made his own press, packed stadiums, and had launched himself into the imagination of the public like a character from the movies. The Tiger Man had created a public relations machine beyond anything Ryan had ever seen but what bothered the old trainer to no end was that he wasn't in on the joke. His fighter played the part every hour of the day. He was good at it, so good that you'd swear the vague stories were real. Ryan, however, knew no more about his man than the average kid on the street—and sometimes thought he knew less.

Ryan drank the last of his coffee and turned to the man seated in the window.

"Well, Tiger, we've come a long way. If we get the breaks, the next fight will be for the title. It's a big if, though; Hayes is good, and he knows it. But McKeown won't let him fight you yet, if he can help it. I think we've got McKeown scared. I know that guy!"

"He'll fight. When he does I'll beat him so badly he'll never come back to the game... maybe I'll kill him."

The Tiger got up then, squeezed Ryan's shoulder with a powerful hand, and walked into the bedroom.

Ruby Ryan stared after him. His red face was puzzled and his eyes narrowed as he shook his head in wonderment. Finally, he got up and called Beck, his valet-handyman, to clear the table.

"I got an idea," Ryan told himself, "that that Tiger is a damned good egg underneath. I wonder what he's got it in for the champ for?"

Ruby Ryan shook himself with the thought. "Holy mackerel! I'd hate to be the champ when my Tiger comes out of his corner!"

Beck came in and handed the manager a telegram. Ryan ripped it open, glanced at it briefly, and swore. He stepped into the Tiger's room and handed him the message.

COMMISSION RULES TIGER MUST FIGHT TOM NOBLE STOP WINNER TO MEET CHAMPION.

"Now *that's* some of Tom McKeown's work!" Ruby exclaimed, eyes narrow. "They've ducked that guy for five years and now they shove him off on us!"

"Okay," the Tiger said harshly. "We'll fight him. If Hayes is afraid of him, I want him! I want him right away!"

Ruby Ryan started to speak, then shrugged. Tiger walked out, and in a few minutes the pounding of the fast bag could be heard from the hotel gym.

The canvas glared under the white light overhead. In his corner, Tom Noble rubbed his feet in the resin. Under the lights, his black body glistened like polished ebony. This was his night, he was certain.

For years the best heavyweights had dodged him. They had drawn the "color line" to keep from fighting big, courageous Tom Noble. His record was an unbroken string of victories and yet even the fearless Deke Hayes had never met him.

A fast, clever boxer, Noble was a pile-driving puncher with either hand, and most dangerous when hurt. He weighed two hundred and forty pounds; forty pounds heavier than the slim, hard-bodied Tiger.

The Tiger Man crawled through the ropes, throwing his black and orange robe over the top rope, and crouched in his corner like an animal, shifting uneasily, as if restless for the kill.

If he won tonight, he would meet the champion. Meet Deke Hayes! Even the thought made his muscles tense with eagerness. It had been a long time. A lifetime... in some ways it had almost been a lifetime.

The Tiger stirred restlessly, staring at the canvas. He remembered every detail of that last day of his old life. How Deke and himself, on an around-the-world athletic tour nine years before, had decided to visit Tiger Island.

Rumor had it there were more tigers on the island than in all Sumatra, perhaps in all the Dutch East Indies. The hunting was the best in the world but they had been warned; the big cats were fierce, and they were hungry. The greatest of care had to be taken on Tiger Island...more than one hunter had died.

Deke Hayes, however, had insisted. And Bart Malone—who was later to become the feared Tiger Man—had gone willingly enough.

For years the two had been friends. They had often trained together, and had boxed on the same card. The two were evenly, perfectly matched in both skill and stamina. Toward the end, as they had risen in the rankings, Bart Malone had seemed to get a little better. Then two things happened: both men were booked on an exhibition tour that was to take them around the world, and Margot had come into the picture. From the beginning she had seemed to favor Bart.

They had been in a tree stand, waiting fifty yards from the body of a pig they had killed to bait the tigers. Suddenly, Hayes discovered the ammunition he was to have brought had been forgotten.

Despite Bart Malone's protests, he had gone back to the boat after it. A tiger had come along, and Malone had killed it. But as the sound of the shot died away, he heard the distant roar of a motor.

At first Malone wouldn't believe it. In the morning, when he could leave the tree with safety, he had gone down to the beach. The motorboat that had brought them

over from Batavia was gone. On the beach was a little food, a hunting knife, and an axe.

Deke Hayes had never expected him to live, but he had reckoned without the strength, the adaptability, the sheer energy of Bart Malone. With but six cartridges remaining, Malone had made a spear, built a shelter, and declared war on the tigers.

It had been a war of extermination, a case of survival of the fittest. And Bart Malone had survived. He had used deadfalls and pits, spring traps, and traps that shot arrows.

He had learned to kill tigers as hunters in Brazil kill jaguars—with a lance. For nearly eight years he had lived on the remote island, then he had been rescued—and returned to the world as the “Tiger Man.”

The Tiger Man shook himself from his reverie, and rubbed his feet in the resin.

And in the champion’s apartment, Tom McKeown toyed with the dials, seeking the right spot on the radio.

“You should see him fight, champ. Might get a line on him. This will be his big test. And if Noble beats him, as he probably will, we’ll have to fight a Negro.”

Hayes snorted. “I don’t care. Noble is a sucker for a left uppercut. I can take him. I’d have fought him two years ago if you’d let me!”

“There’s plenty of time, if you have to. He ain’t getting any younger. You got seven years on him, champ,” McKeown said smoothly. Deke Hayes grinned.

“That was neat work, McKeown, steering the Tiger into Noble. No matter who wins, we got a drawing card. And no matter who wins, if we move fast, he’ll be softened by this fight. So the goose hangs high!”

The bell clanged. Tom Noble was easy, confident. He came out fast, jabbed a light left to the head, fainted, and hooked a solid right to the body. The Tiger circled warily, intent.

Noble put both hands to the head, and then tried a left. The Tiger slipped inside, but made no attempt to hit. As they broke the crowd booed, and the Negro looked puzzled.

The Tiger circled again, still wary. Noble landed a left, tried to feint the Tiger in, but it didn’t work. The Tiger circled, fainted, and suddenly sprang to close quarters, striking with lightning-like speed.

A swift left, followed by a hard right cross that caught the Negro high on the side of the head. Tom Noble was stepping back, and that took the snap out of the punch; but it shook him, nevertheless.

Noble stepped in, jabbed a left three times to the head, and crossed with a right. The Tiger slipped inside Noble’s extended left and threw two jarring hooks to the body.

The fans were silent as the round ended. The usual killing rush of the Tiger hadn’t been there. Noble looked puzzled. The Tiger glanced up at Ruby Ryan, then bared his teeth in sort of a smile.

Noble boxed carefully through the second and third rounds, winning both by an easy margin. The Tiger seemed content to circle, to feint, and to spar at long

range. The killing rush failed to come, and the Negro, who carefully studied each man he fought, was puzzled. The longer the Tiger waited, the more bothered Noble became.

The giant Negro could sense the repressed power in the steel of the Tiger's muscles. When they clinched, Noble could feel his great strength; but still the Tiger waited. He stalled, and Noble began to feel like a mouse before the cat.

In the fourth round, Tom Noble opened hostilities with a hard left to the head, and then crossed a terrific right to the jaw that snapped the Tiger's head back and split his lip.

Noble, eager, whipped over another right, but the Tiger slid under it and drove a powerful left hook to the body that jarred the Negro to his heels.

Before Noble could recover from his surprise, a hard right uppercut snapped his head back, and a steaming left hook slammed him to the floor in a cloud of resin dust!

Wild with pain and rage, the Negro scrambled to his feet and rushed. Toe-to-toe, they stood in the center of the ring and swapped punches until every man in the house was wild with excitement.

Bronze against black, Negro from the Baltimore rail yards against the mysterious Tiger Man, they fought bitterly, desperately, their faces streaked with blood and sweat, their breath coming in great gasps.

The crowd, shouting and eager, saw the great Negro boxer, the man whom all white fighters were purported to fear, slugging it out with this jungle killer—the strange white man, bronzed by sun and wind, who had come out of the tropics to batter all his competition into fistic oblivion!

When the bell rang for the fifth round, the Tiger came out like a streak. His wild left hook missed. Overanxious, he stumbled into a torrid right uppercut that slammed into his jaw with crashing force. The Bronze Behemoth slid forward on his face, to all intents and purposes out cold!

For a moment the crowd was aghast. The Tiger Man was down! For the first time in his career, the Tiger Man was down! Roaring with excitement, the crowd jumped up on their chairs, shrieking their heads off.

Then suddenly, the Tiger Man was up! All the stillness, the watching, the waiting was gone from him now. Like a beast from the jungle, he leaped to the fray and with a torrent of smashing, bone-crushing blows, he battered the giant black man across the ring!

Twice the Negro slipped to one knee, and both times came up without a count. Like a fiend out of hell he battled, cornered, fierce as a wounded lion.

But with all his ferocity, all his great strength, it was useless for Tom Noble to stand up against that whirlwind of blows that drove him back, back, and back!

The Tiger was upon him now, fighting like a madman! Suddenly, a steaming right cross snapped the Negro's head back, and he came down with a crash! Like an animal, the Tiger whirled and leaped to his corner.

Tom Noble was up at nine. A great gash streaked his black face. One eye was closed tight, and his lips had been reduced to bloody shreds of flesh. His mouthpiece, lost in the titanic struggle, had failed him when most needed.

Noble was up, and bravely he staggered forward. But the Tiger dropped into a crouch. Grimly, surely, he stalked his opponent.

Seeing him coming, Tom Noble backed off, suddenly seeming to realize that no human effort could stem that tide of blows he knew would be coming.

He backed away, and the Tiger followed him, slowly herding him toward the corner, set for the kill. Not a whisper stirred the crowd. They were breathless with suspense, realizing they were seeing the perfect replica of a jungle kill. A live tiger from Sumatra couldn't have been more fierce, or more deadly!

Then, suddenly, Noble was cornered. Vainly, desperately, he tried to sidestep. But the Tiger was before him and a short, jolting left set Noble's chin for the right cross that flickered over with the speed of a serpent's tongue. The great legs tottered, and Tom Noble, once invincible, crashed to the canvas, a vanquished gladiator.

In Hayes's apartment, there was silence. McKeown wiped the sweat from his forehead, although he suddenly felt cold. He looked at the champion, but Hayes's face was a mask that told nothing.

"Well," Tom McKeown said at last. "I guess we overrated Noble. It looks now like he was a setup!" But in his heart there was a chill as he thought of those crashing fists.

"Setup, hell! That guy could fight!"

Hayes whirled.

"Listen, McKeown: you find out who this Tiger is; where he came from—and why! He started in Calcutta. Okay! I want to know where he was before then! I think I know that guy, and if I do—"

Toronto Tom McKeown walked out into the street. He stood still, looking at nothing. The Tiger had the champ's goat. What was behind it all? One thing he knew: if there was any way to prevent it, the Tiger would never meet Deke Hayes.

Ruby Ryan walked into the hotel room and threw his hat on the table. His eyes were bright with satisfaction.

"Well, that settles that! I guess McKeown has tossed every monkey wrench into the machinery that he can think of—but nevertheless, the fight goes on, and no postponements. The commission accepted my arguments, and agreed that Hayes has got to meet the Tiger—and no more dodging."

Beck looked up from the sport sheet he was reading. He seemed worried.

"Maybe it's okay, but you and me know Tom McKeown, and he's nobody's fool. There'll be trouble yet!" Beck opined.

"It'll have to be soon, then. Tomorrow night's the night," the manager said grimly.

Suddenly the door burst open and the Tiger staggered in. He was carrying "Pug" Doman, one of his sparring partners. Over the Tiger's eye was a deep cut from which a trickle of blood was still flowing.

"What th'—" Ryan's face was white, strained. "For cryin' out loud, man, what's happened?"

"Five men jumped us. I heard them slipping up from behind. We fought. Four of them are out there"—he jerked a thumb toward the door—"in the road, Doman got in the way of a knife."

"Well, that's more of McKeown's work!" Ryan said angrily. "I'll get that dirty so-and-so if it's the last thing I ever do! Look at that cut over your eye. And I just put up the same amount McKeown did—to guarantee appearance, and no postponements!"

The Tiger Man crawled through the ropes, stood rubbing his feet in the resin. Ruby Ryan, his face hard, was staring up the aisle for Hayes to appear. Beck arranged the water bottle and stood silent, waiting. Behind them the excited crowd continued to swell. The arena was fairly alive with tension.

Now Deke Hayes was in the ring. The two men stepped to the center for instructions. Hayes's eyes were fastened on the Tiger with a queer intensity. The Tiger looked up, and there was such a light in his eyes as made even the referee wince.

"It's been a long time, Deke Hayes!" the Tiger growled. "A long time! But tonight, you can't run off and leave me.

"You gypped me out of my girl. You tried to gyp me out of the title, too. Now I'm going to thrash you until you can't move! After tonight, Hayes, you're through!"

"I don't know what you're talkin' about!" Hayes sneered. Then they were back in their corners, and the bell clanged.

Hayes was fast. The Tiger, circling to the center, realized that. He was even faster than Tom Noble. Probably as good a boxer, too. Hayes feinted a left, then hurled a vicious right that spun the Tiger halfway around and made him give way. Deke Hayes bored in promptly, punching fast, accurately.

But the Tiger danced away, boxing carefully for the first time. Hayes's left flicked at the wounded eye, but was just short, and the Tiger slipped under it, and whipped both hands to the body as the round ended.

Deke Hayes came out fast for the second heat, and a right opened the cut over Tiger's eye. Hayes sprang in and, punching like a demon, drove the Tiger across the ring, where he hung him on the ropes with a wicked right uppercut that jerked his head back and slammed him off balance into the hemp.

The Tiger staggered, and almost went down. He straightened and by a great effort of will, tried to clinch, but Deke Hayes shook him loose, floored him with a wicked left hook.

The crowd was on its feet now, in a yelling frenzy. Ryan sat in the corner, twisting the towel in his hands, chewing on the stump of a dead cigar. But even as the referee counted nine, the Tiger was up!

He tried to clinch, but Hayes shook him off. Confident now, he jabbed three fast lefts to the bad eye, then drove the Tiger to a corner with a volley of hooks, swings, and uppercuts. A short right hook put the Tiger down a second time—and then the bell rang!

The arena was a madhouse as the Tiger came out for the third round, his brain still buzzing. He couldn't seem to get started. Hayes's left flicked out again, resuming the torture. Hayes stepped in and the Tiger evaded a left, then clinched.

He caught Hayes's hands, hung on until the referee broke them, warning him for holding.

Through the fourth, fifth, and sixth rounds, Hayes boxed like the marvel he was, but the Tiger kept on. In the clinches he hung on until the referee broke them; he slipped, ducked, and rode punches. He tried every trick he knew.

Only the terrific stamina of those long jungle years carried the Tiger through now; only the running, the diving, the swimming he had done, the fighting in the jungle, the bitter struggle to live, sustained him, kept him on his feet.

Strangely, as the seventh round opened, the Tiger felt better. His natural strength was asserting itself. Hayes came out, cocky, confident. The Tiger stepped in, but his feet were lighter. Some of the confusion seemed to have gone from his mind. Between rounds the blood from his cut eye had been stopped. He was getting his second wind.

Deke Hayes rushed into the fray, throwing both hands to the head, but the Tiger was ready this time. Dropping into a crouch, he whipped out a snapping left hook and dug a right into the solar plexus.

But the champion fired a left to the head that shook the Tiger to his heels, then threw a right that cracked against his jaw with the force of a thunderbolt. The Tiger went to one knee; but came up, fighting like a demon!

He ripped into the champion with the fury of an unleashed cyclone, battering him halfway across the ring. But when the champion caught himself, he drove the Tiger back onto his heels with a straight left, crossed a right, and then threw both hands to the body.

The Tiger took it. He stepped in, swapping blow for blow, taking the champion's hardest punches with scarcely a wince. Deke Hayes backed off, jabbed a left, but was short, and then the Tiger was inside, tearing away at the other's body with the fury of a Gatling gun. He ripped a mad tattoo of punches against Deke Hayes's ribs; then, stepping back suddenly, he blocked Hayes's left and hooked his own solid left to the head.

The champion staggered, and as the crowd roared like a typhoon in the China Sea, the Tiger tore in, punching furiously. There was no stopping now. Science was cast to the winds, it was the berserk brawling of two killers gone mad!

Round after round passed, and they slugged it out, two fighting fools filled with a deadly hatred of each other, fighting not to win but to kill!

Hayes, panic-stricken, was fighting the fight of his life, backed into a corner by Fate and the enemy he thought he had left behind for good—the man he had cheated and left to die.

Now that man was here, fighting him for the world's title, and Hayes battled like a demon. Staggering, almost ready to go down, the champion whipped up a desperate right uppercut that blasted the Tiger's mind into a flame of white-hot pain! But the Tiger set his teeth, and bored in.

Shifting quickly, he brought down a short overhand punch, and then deliberately stepped back. As the champion lunged forward instinctively, the Tiger Man knocked him flat with a straight right.

Then the champion was up again at the count of seven. Suddenly, with every ounce of strength at his command, he whipped up a mighty left to the Tiger's groin—a deliberately foul blow! The crowd leaped to its feet, roaring with anger; cries of rage came from officials at the ringside.

The Tiger, tottering, collapsed to his face in the center of the ring—just as the bell rang. The referee angrily motioned the champion to his corner amid a thunder of boos, and the Tiger was helped up.

Even Tom McKeown looked in disgust at his fighter as he worked over him. The angry referee strode to the Tiger's corner, and asked whether he could continue. The official, thoroughly enraged at the foul blow, was all for declaring the Tiger the winner, then and there.

But the Tiger, through his daze of pain, shook his head. "Not that way!" he gritted. "We fight... to the finish!" and the referee, cursing the champion, let the challenger have his way.

Then the bell rang. But now it was different; and even the maddened crowd sensed that. Deke Hayes looked over at the slowly rising Tiger with real fear in his eyes. Why, the man wasn't human! No one could take a blow like that and keep coming!

Eyes red with hatred, the Tiger came out in a steel-coiled crouch. Hayes, wary now, had come to the end, and he knew it. He advanced slowly to the center of the ring, and the Tiger met him—met him with a sudden, berserk rush that drove the now frightened champion to the ropes.

There he hung, while the Tiger ripped punch after vicious punch to his body, pounded his ears until they were swollen and torn, cut his eyebrows with lightning-like twists of hard, smashing gloves.

A bloody, beaten mess, marked for life, the champion slipped frantically away along the ropes. Trembling with fright, he set himself desperately, shot a steaming right for the Tiger's chin.

But the Tiger beat him to the punch with an inside right cross that jerked Hayes back on his heels! Before the blood-covered champion could weave away, the Tiger—Bart Malone—whipped up a lethal left hook that started at his heels. Spinning completely around, the champion toppled to the canvas, out like a log, his jaw broken in three places!

The referee dismissed the formality of a count as the crowd went wild. Without a word, the referee raised the Tiger's hand in victory, as the rafters shook with the roaring of thousands of frenzied voices.

Ruby Ryan was beside himself with joy. "You made it, kid!" he yelled. "You made it! I never saw such nerve in my life! The greatest fight I ever seen! Damn, how did you do it?"

The Tiger looked down at him, grinned, though his body was a throbbing pain from the punishment he had absorbed.

"Somethin' I learned in the jungle," he growled.
