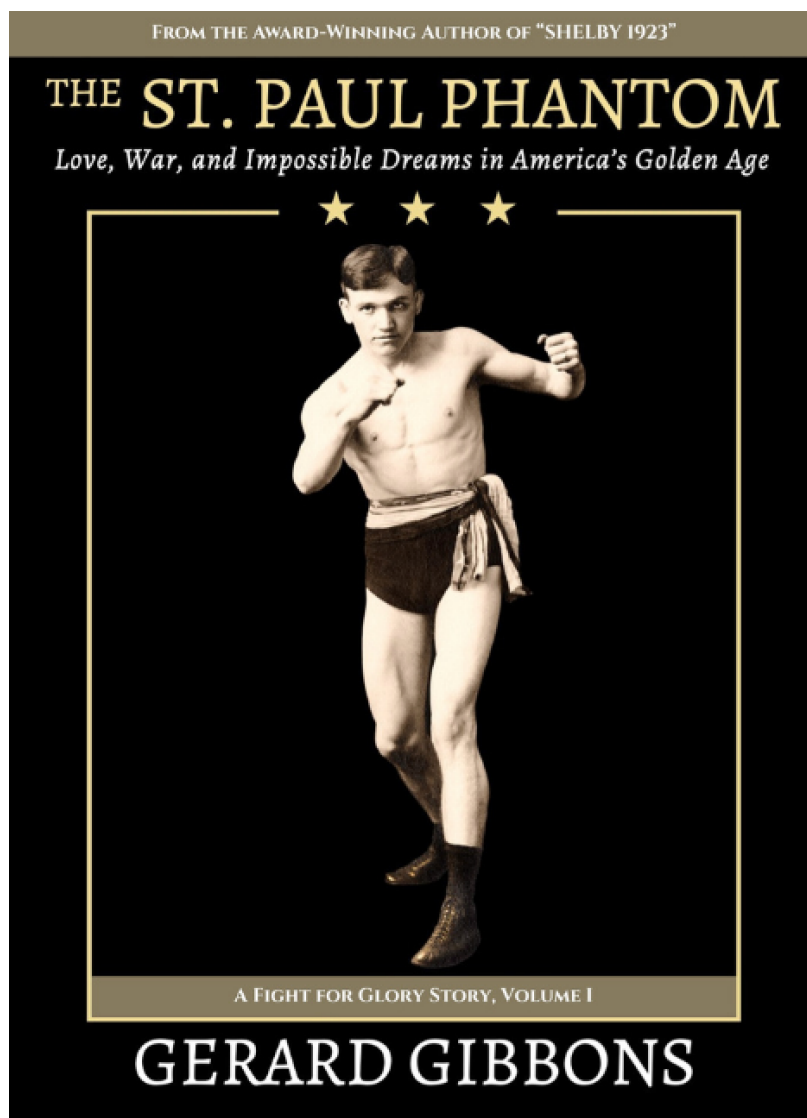


THE ST. PAUL PHANTOM:

Fight for Glory, Volume I

Chapter by Chapter Synopsis



Overview

The St. Paul Phantom is the epic story of boxing brothers Mike and Tommy Gibbons, charting their rise from the impoverished Irish immigrant neighborhood of Frogtown, St. Paul, to the pinnacle of the boxing world. Their personal saga unfolds against the backdrop of early twentieth-century America, intersecting with major historical events including the First World War and the 1918 influenza pandemic. It is a story of ambition, brotherhood, and the elusive nature of the American Dream.

Part I: Bring Back the Good Old Days (1850–1911)



Chapter 1: The Comet Vow

In May 1910, as Halley's Comet streaks across a sky filled with apocalyptic fear and new-century wonder, brothers Mike, twenty-three, and Tommy, nineteen, are discovered sparring in the Minnesota wilderness. Mike is the gifted, quicksilver boxer; Tommy is all heart and muscle. Captivated by the celestial event, Mike declares it a sign of their destiny. Under the comet's light, they vow to become the first brothers crowned world boxing champions.



Chapter 2: Frogtown Hustle

A flashback to 1904 finds a younger Mike, sixteen, and Tommy, twelve, navigating the harsh realities of St. Paul's Frogtown neighborhood. They struggle against poverty and the anti-Irish prejudice personified by local bully Herb Catherwood. The stark contrast between their immigrant world and the opulence of Summit Avenue—home to figures such as F. Scott Fitzgerald and James J. Hill—fuels Mike's fierce ambition. After a desperate escape from Catherwood, they stumble into the Amateur Athletic Club and witness a secret, illegal "sneak fight."



Chapter 3: Fall from Grace

At the rooftop fight, the Gibbons brothers meet charismatic George Barton, a young sportswriter and respected referee. The world of sneak fights is corrupt, with Police Chief John O'Connor taking bribes. The night ends in tragedy when one boxer, Kid Braun, suffers a life-altering brain injury. Barton is arrested in the raid that follows. In the chaos, Mike and Tommy are cornered again by Catherwood but are saved by Father Dunphy, a charismatic priest.



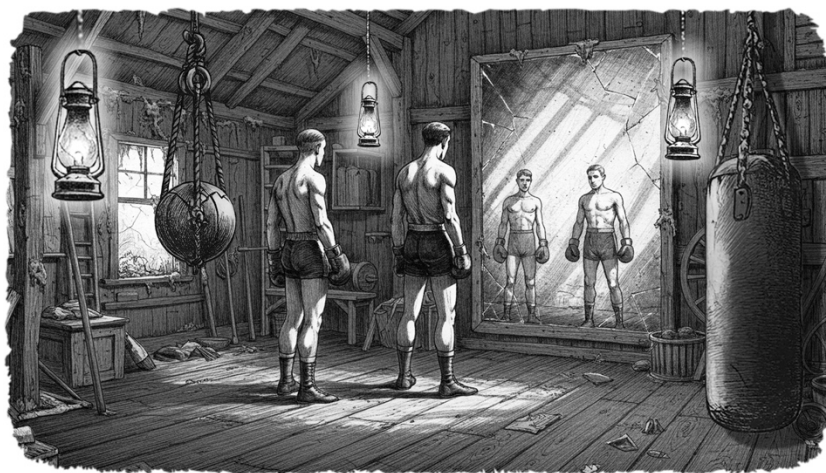
Chapter 4: Exodus

The Gibbons family's harrowing backstory begins in famine-stricken County Mayo, Ireland, in the 1850s. Born during the Great Hunger, family patriarch Thomas John Gibbons, as a young man, is caught between the harsh realities of British rule and Irish rebellion. He becomes involved with the Invincibles, a group of Irish rebels fighting for freedom. Pursued by the British and betrayed by his brother-in-law, Mocky Dolan, Thomas John is forced to flee Ireland in 1884 with his family, seeking a new life in America. Upon his arrival, he vows to God to abandon violence forever—a decision that sets him at odds with his American-born, prizefighting sons.



Chapter 5: Trouble

Back in 1904, Father Dunphy brings the bruised Gibbons brothers home, sparking a powerful debate between Thomas John's pacifism and Dunphy's doctrine of muscular Christianity. Haunted by his rebel past, Thomas John struggles to reconcile his fighting spirit with his desire for a peaceful life. To keep his sons from falling into the darkness of physical violence, he separates them, sending Tommy to a boarding academy and putting Mike to work in the Great Northern Railway tin shop. The harsh labor and meager wages only strengthen Mike's resolve to find another way forward: the boxing ring.



Chapter 6: Glorious Little Fella

George Barton, haunted by the rooftop tragedy, decides to quit boxing. A persistent Mike convinces him to become his first trainer. They form a bond, and Barton becomes a mentor, teaching Mike discipline, strategy, and emotional control in the ring. Under Barton's tutelage, Mike develops a scientific, defensive style rooted in speed and evasion: "If they can't hit you, they can't hurt you." His prowess becomes legendary in YMCA sparring sessions. Mike then works Barton's corner in a sanctioned exhibition against the unstable ex-champion "Terrible" Terry McGovern, whom Barton surprisingly knocks out.



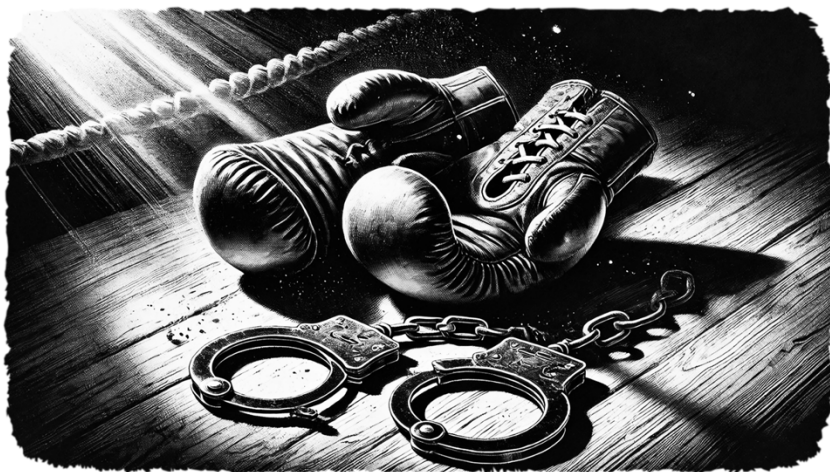
Chapter 7: Silver Dollar Baby

Mike's rising ambition is contrasted with his father's early struggles in America. Years earlier, Thomas John resisted the temptation to join a crew of boxing firefighters, honoring his vow of nonviolence. In 1907, Mike makes the opposite choice, accepting his first professional sneak fight against "Newsboy" Brown. His reward is a single silver dollar, which he places beneath absent Tommy's pillow as a symbol of their shared dream.



Chapter 8: Fire with Fire

Mike's victory attracts the attention of Fire Captain Hugh J. McFayden, the same man who once tempted his father. A flashback reveals Thomas John's final, bloody night in Ireland, when he escaped betrayal with the help of his rebel compatriot, Uncle Michael "Q" Cusick. Back in St. Paul, Mike longs to earn enough to court childhood sweetheart Mae Walsh, a fireman's daughter and budding suffragist who despises boxing. Testing his resolve and challenging his commitment to his father's wishes, Mike accepts an illegal forty-dollar bout arranged by McFayden against Roy Moore.



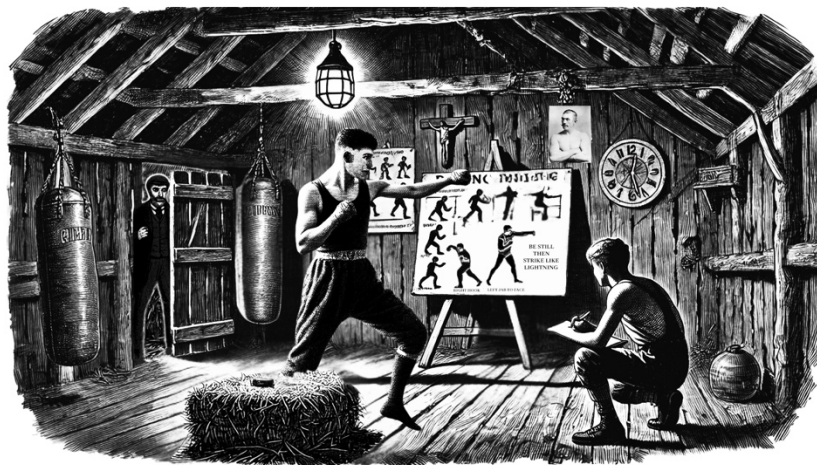
Chapter 9: The Handcuff King

Mike's ambition mirrors the career of escape artist Harry Houdini, another immigrant who remade himself in America. Mike takes Mae to see Houdini's Milk Can Escape. The chapter explores themes of illusion, escape, and the pursuit of dreams, drawing parallels between Houdini's feats and Mike's own aspirations in the boxing world. When Mike finally lands his grudge match against Catherwood, the battle is brutal. Mike is victorious but badly beaten, breaking his promise to Mae to "come home handsome." Arrested for illegal prizefighting, he is jailed but receives a mysterious visit from long-lost Uncle Q before Tommy and Father Dunphy bail him out.



Chapter 10: The Old Master

The legendary Joe Gans—the first American-born Black world champion and a master of scientific boxing—is introduced. His rise from Baltimore's brutal battles royale to his epic forty-two-round victory over Battling Nelson is recounted. After Mike's messy fight with Catherwood, Barton arranges a private lesson with the aging, terminally ill Gans. Blindfolded with a bloodstained handkerchief from Gans' early fights, Mike learns to "feel" an opponent, transforming his understanding of the sport. As the two men part, Gans gives Mike the blindfold, which Mike holds sacred as a talisman.



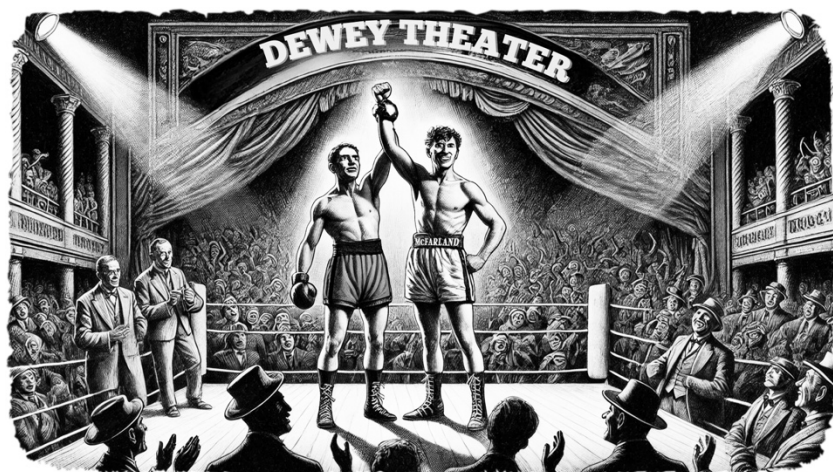
Chapter 11: The Art of War

With his career stalled, Mike finds purpose when Tommy returns from the academy. They resume training as equals, recording strategies in a “dope book.” Their studies are revolutionized by *The Art of War*, gifted by Father Dunphy. Incorporating its strategies of timing, misdirection, and psychological dominance, they elevate their sweet science to a new level. Mike’s reputation grows, and he becomes known for his elusive movements and devastating punches.



Chapter 12: The Ghost Who Crossed an Ocean

The family’s past reemerges when Q returns, attempting to extort Thomas John into rejoining the Irish rebellion. Even when Q’s methods become violent, including an attempt to burn down the Gibbons barn, Thomas John holds to his vow. Q’s threats, however, solidify Mike’s resolve to build a safe home for Mae and their future children. He and childhood friend Eddie Reddy begin hustling bars with a clever “can’t-hit-me” challenge, leading to a string of clandestine victories.



Chapter 13: Everywhere but the Ring

Mike seizes a major opportunity: a five-night exhibition series against Packey McFarland, Chicago's elusive lightweight. After being outclassed on the first night, Mike and Tommy use the dope book to adapt and improve with each subsequent bout. The series earns Mike national recognition and McFarland's friendship. Urging him to take his talents to New York, McFarland's endorsement secures Mike's legitimacy. Mae reluctantly accepts his boxing career—on the condition that she is free to fight her own battle for women's suffrage.



Chapter 14: Oh-Sa-Kis

As Halley's Comet reappears in 1910, Mike prepares to leave for New York, knowing success there is his only path to a home on Lake Como. While fishing, Mike confronts his father about Q, and Thomas John learns Mae is pregnant. The chapter flashes to larger events: Jack Johnson's "Fight of the Century" and the death of Stanley Ketchel. Mike departs for New York with Eddie Reddy, determined to make his fortune.

Part II: Twice Removed from Yesterday (1911–1917)



Chapter 15: Through the Looking Glass

In November 1911, Mike and Eddie Reddy arrive in a chaotic, garbage-strewn New York City, hoping to make a name for themselves in the boxing world. They confront numerous challenges, struggling to find opportunities in the competitive and often discriminatory environment of the big city. Mike's determination is tested as he navigates the complexities of the boxing scene and the harsh realities of pursuing his dreams. After three days of failure, money is nearly gone. Reddy is beaten in an alley, and Mike, forced to mend his friend's torn shirt, experiences a humbling moment of near defeat.



Chapter 16: Knighted

On their last day in New York, Mike and Reddy shift tactics, approaching sportswriters—known as the Golden Pens—on Newspaper Row. After repeated rejections, they secure an audience with Robert Edgren of Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*, the most influential sportswriter in America. Recognizing Joe Gans' handkerchief and recalling a letter of introduction from George Barton, Edgren sends Mike to the Polo Athletic Club. Mike dazzles: he outboxes Leach Cross,

knocks out Billy Sherman, and dominates Willie Lewis. Overnight, he is christened the St. Paul Phantom, a name bestowed by Edgren.



Chapter 17: A Sort of Homecoming

The Phantom's triumph is clouded by controversy over his weigh-in for the Lewis fight, stirred by skeptical sportswriter Bat Masterson. The debate casts doubt on his claim to the welterweight crown. This narrative is juxtaposed with heavyweight champion Jack Johnson's struggles against racist persecution after defeating "Great White Hope" Jim Jeffries. Returning home to St. Paul, Mike is celebrated as a hero with a parade and purchases the lot on Lake Como, ready to build his family's future.



Chapter 18: Pool of Red, Sea of Green

Now too big for welterweights, Mike moves to the middleweight division. At Madison Square Garden, he faces English brawler Sid Burns. The fight is seen as a symbolic battle between Ireland and England, with strong nationalistic sentiments fueling the crowd's excitement. Mike wins decisively, solidifying his reputation as a top middleweight contender. However, the victory comes at a cost: he suffers a broken hand during the bout. On the train home, Uncle Q confronts him, revealing that he has been funding Irish rebels with wagers on Mike's fights.



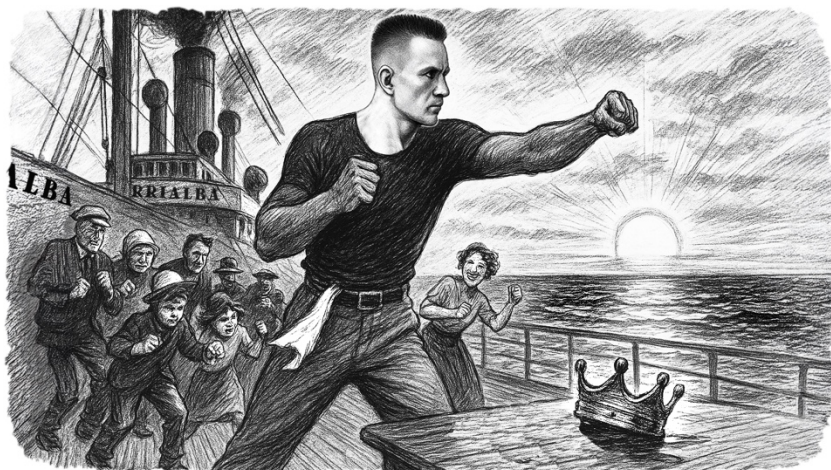
Chapter 19: Coulda

The chapter explores the aftermath of Mike's victory over Burns. He faces challenges in securing a title fight and encounters obstacles in his personal life. The narrative also introduces the concept of *coulda*, highlighting the missed opportunities and regrets that often accompany a boxer's career. While his hand heals, Mike focuses on building his Lake Como home and training Tommy. Together, the brothers become local celebrities. Eddie Reddy, feeling increasingly marginalized, drifts into gambling debts. Mike returns to Madison Square Garden for a highly anticipated bout with Eddie McGoorty, which ends in a tactical draw that disappoints fans and tarnishes his reputation. The setback, coupled with Reddy's financial failures, severs their friendship.



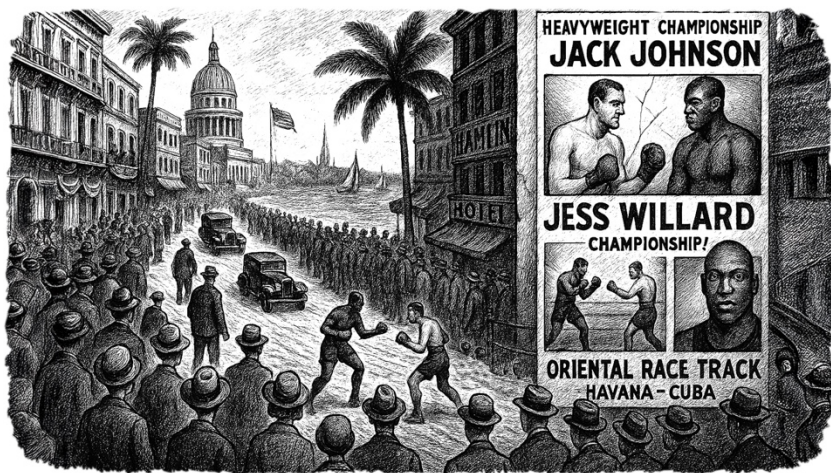
Chapter 20: The Middleweight Muddle

The chapter delves into the complexities and controversies surrounding the middleweight championship after the 1910 murder of Stanley Ketchel. The title remains vacant for years, with multiple contenders vying for recognition. Mike's path to the crown is blocked when Al McCoy, whom Mike once spared in the ring, lucks into the crown and refuses him a title shot. Labeled the "uncrowned king," Mike relocates his career to Hudson, Wisconsin, where boxing is legal. There he is managed by promoter Mike Collins and his irrepressible assistant, Eddie Kane.



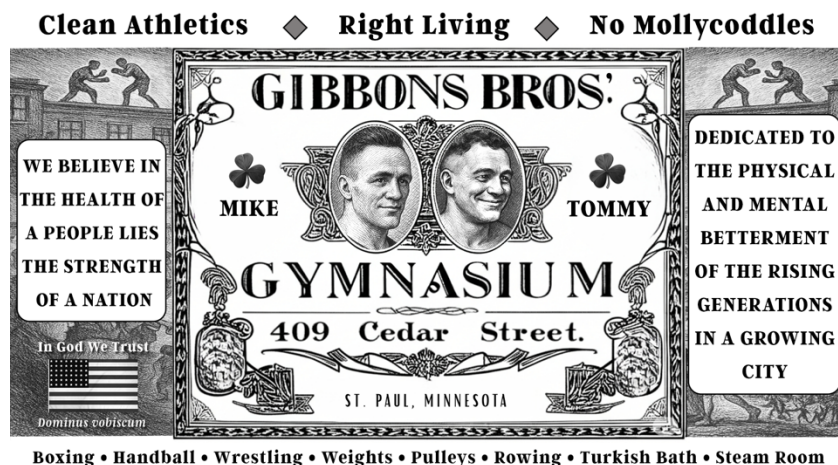
Chapter 21: The Long Road

The chapter focuses on the challenges and setbacks Mike endures on his quest for the middleweight championship. Determined to force a title bout, he and Barton create a three-man “hit list.” He first faces old rival Jimmy Clabby, finally defeating the Indiana Wasp in their fourth and last encounter. Next, he rematches Eddie McGoorty, beating him decisively in Hudson Arena. Only one man remains between Mike and the crown: Packey McFarland. Meanwhile, the relationship between Mike and kid brother Tommy, who is also pursuing a boxing career, becomes more complex. Tommy’s growing skills and ambitions create both pride and rivalry between the brothers.



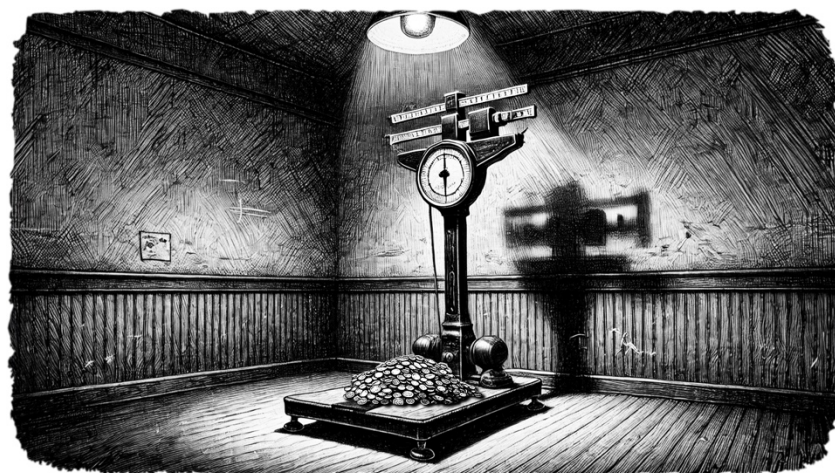
Chapter 22: The Big Smoke

The chapter shifts its focus to Jack Johnson, the heavyweight champion of the world. Johnson, a controversial figure due to his race and flamboyant lifestyle, faces persecution and discrimination. In March 1915, Mike travels to Havana as a special newspaper correspondent for the heavyweight championship between his friend Johnson and challenger Jess Willard. Years of exile have aged Johnson, and under the punishing sun he falls in the twenty-sixth round. On the docks, Mike bids farewell to his friend as Johnson flees to escape extradition.



Chapter 23: Local Gods

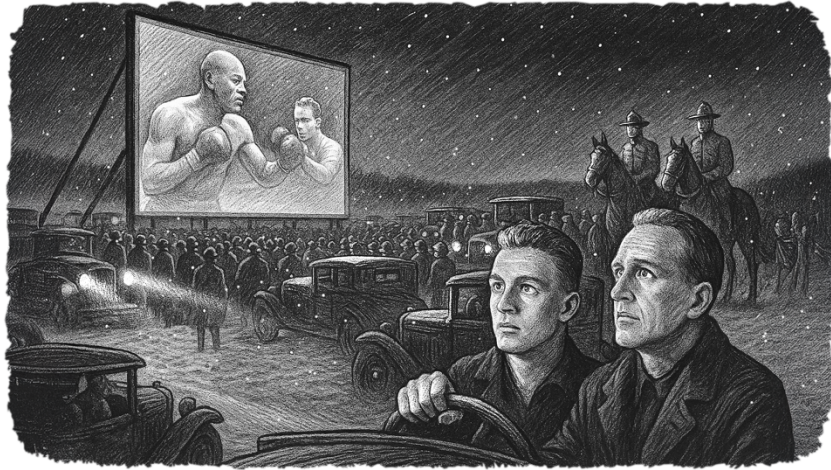
The chapter returns to St. Paul, where Mike and Tommy have become local celebrities. They open their own gym, the Gibbons Brothers' Athletic Club, and train a new generation of fighters (including future champion Mike O'Dowd) and self-defense enthusiasts (including fellow Minnesotan F. Scott Fitzgerald). The brothers' success brings them fame and small fortune, but it also attracts the attention of St. Paul's darker forces, including corrupt police officials and organized crime figures. In a major boon, George Barton, aided by the brothers, lobbies successfully to legalize boxing in Minnesota after twenty-four years. Finally, Packey McFarland, the third man on Mike's hit list, agrees to fight him at Brighton Beach—but with a punishing catch: the Phantom must weigh 147 pounds, a weight he has not made in years.



Chapter 24: The Devil's Opera

The chapter focuses on the buildup to the highly anticipated fight between Mike Gibbons and Packey McFarland at Brighton Beach in 1915, billed as the greatest sporting event of its time. The fight is seen as a clash between two masters of the sweet science, with the middleweight championship symbolically at stake. The narrative explores the intense preparations, the media frenzy, and the high stakes surrounding the bout. Under Tommy's protection, Mike endures a grueling, near-suicidal weight cut to make 147 pounds, entering the ring a hollow shell. The fight is a technical masterpiece but ends without a knockout—and so without a clear victor. The

verdict falls to sportswriters, who, after studying a secretly obtained fight film, side with Mike. Robert Edgren declares the Phantom the true middleweight champion—though unofficially.



Chapter 25: The Villains We Need

Mike's reign is short-lived. Promoter Jack Kearns, managing Australian prodigy Les Darcy, challenges Mike's legitimacy, reigniting the middleweight muddle. Before a match can be made, Tex Rickard, a shrewd, enigmatic promoter who aims to control the sport, seizes Darcy's career. When the young Australian star tragically dies of illness, the crown slips once again from Mike's grasp—just as the world tilts toward war.

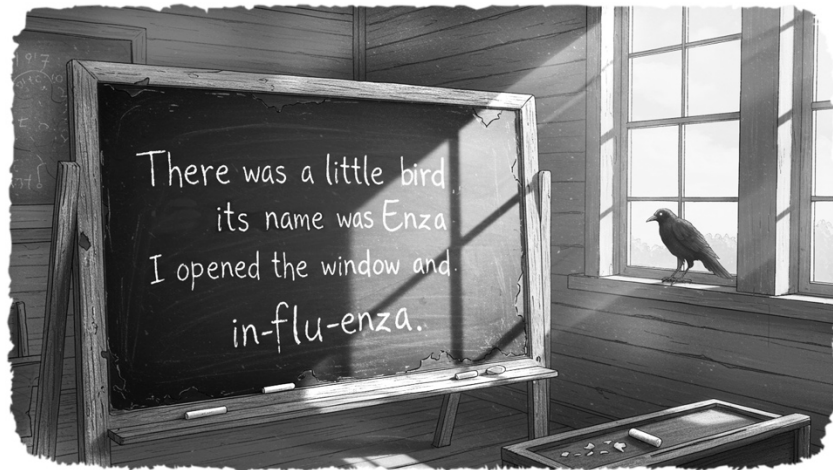
Part III: Toward Abundance or Oblivion (1917–1920)



Chapter 26: Ten Rounds at Camp Dodge

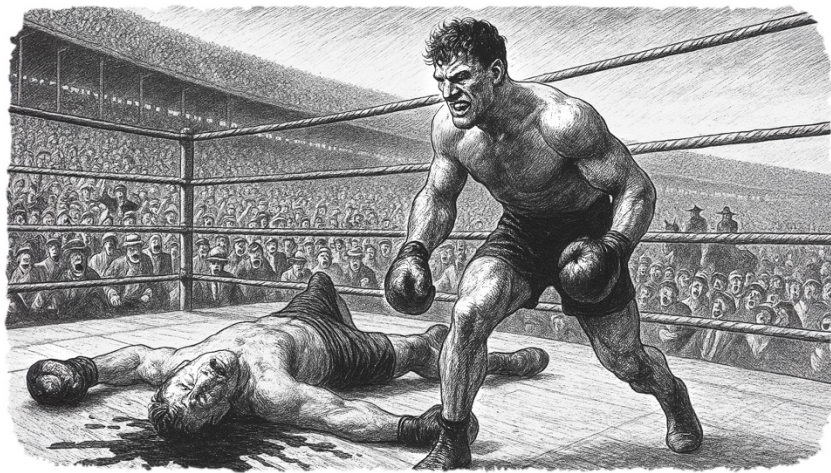
The chapter focuses on Mike's service in the First World War at Camp Dodge, Iowa. He becomes the Army's chief boxing instructor, developing a unique combat system that blends boxing and bayonet techniques, taught to three million new recruits. The program is a success,

but personal tragedy strikes when Mike and Tommy's mother dies of pneumonia. At her funeral, Thomas John gives Mike the family's ancient shillelagh. When Mike returns to the Army cantonment, Tommy joins him. In meditation, Mike vows to surrender the glory of a boxing championship for a more patriotic mission: becoming a ranked and commissioned soldier in service to his country.



Chapter 27: The Little Bird

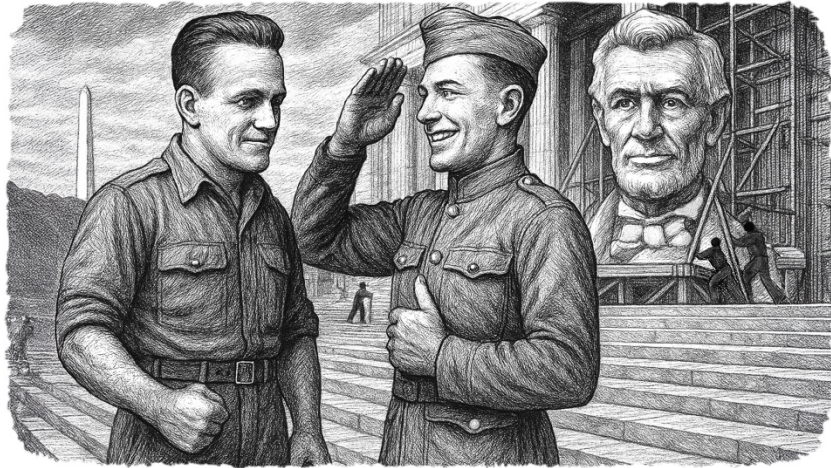
In 1918, Mike and Tommy seem poised for military honors when the Spanish flu suddenly emerges, engulfing Camp Dodge and the rest of the world. As the brothers endure the grim devastation of the virus, Mike comes face-to-face with one of his former students, Mike O'Dowd, now the reigning middleweight champion. A crackling rivalry brews between them as the influenza rips through the camp, filling mass graves and silencing entire regiments. Back in St. Paul, officials delay action until thousands are sick and dying. Across the globe, the pandemic kills over one hundred million, collapsing trust in governments and reshaping history. By war's end, the Gibbons family survives, with Mike and Tommy returning to a St. Paul forever marked by grief, resilience, and fragile hope.



Chapter 28: Rhapsody in Red

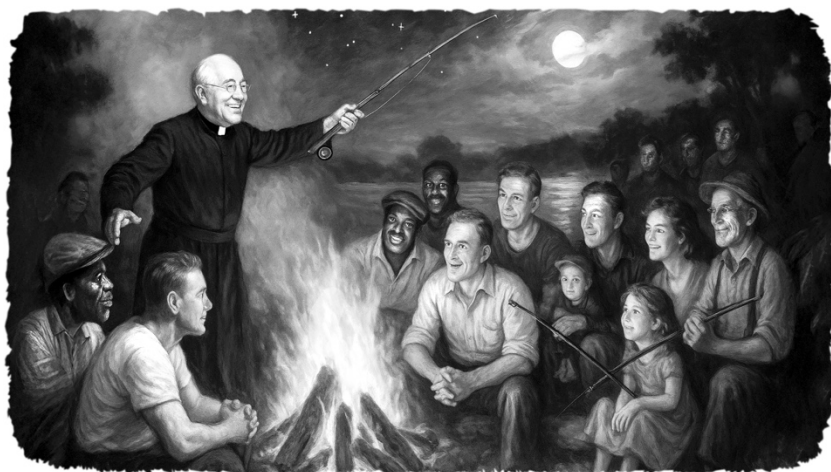
In the violent, jazz-fueled postwar era, public taste shifts from finesse to savagery. Jack

Dempsey epitomizes this change, capturing the heavyweight crown in a blood-soaked massacre of Jess Willard. Dempsey becomes both villain and opportunity: Tommy Gibbons sees him as his only path to save his wife Helen, whose health is deteriorating. Meanwhile, Mike must contend with a new middleweight champion: his own former pupil, Mike O'Dowd.



Chapter 29: The Aftermath

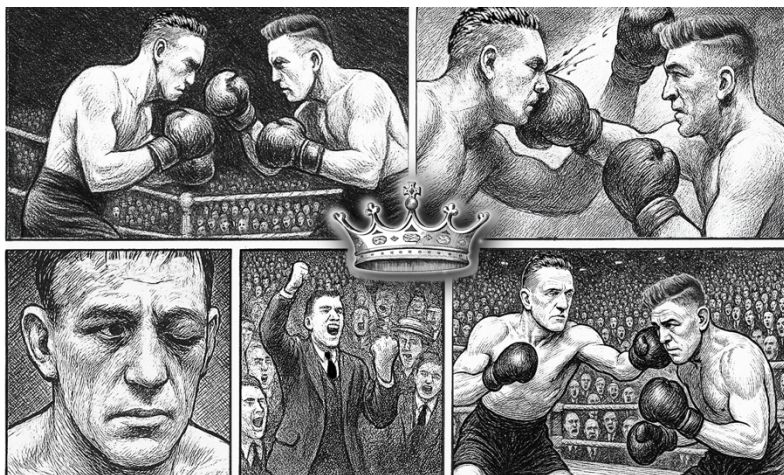
Grappling with the trauma of war, the social changes of the Jazz Age, and the loss of their mother, Mike and Tommy are denied their promised army commissions. This deeply embitters the Phantom, who struggles to find his place in a grieving St. Paul, now suffering business closures and cultural upheaval. Haunted by Camp Dodge and his own fading prime, Mike feels the hunger for a crown still burning. As Tommy plots a desperate run at Jack Dempsey and the heavyweight crown to save his ailing wife, Helen, Mike decides to take one last shot at the middleweight crown, encouraged by Mae, who has finally enjoyed a major victory with the suffragists. Now thirty-two years old—ancient in the world of boxing—Mike confronts O'Dowd, eight years younger, and issues his declaration of war.



Chapter 30: The Gilded Cage

Facing the twilight of his career, Mike prepares for his championship battle against O'Dowd. To win the crown by Minnesota boxing law, the Phantom must deliver a knockout—which he

struggles to find. Surrounded by family and faith at Lake Osakis, Mike studies with Black heavyweight legend Sam “Boston Bone Crusher” Langford, while receiving strategic and spiritual guidance from Father Dunphy and George Barton. On his own critical mission, Tommy steps forward, defeating Billy Miske and clearing his path toward Dempsey. Yet when Mike meets Harry Greb in a warm-up bout, the Pittsburgh Windmill’s relentless fury exploits Mike’s fading speed and injured eye. Deeply concerned about what comes next, Mike still clings to hunger, refusing to surrender the dream of the crown.



Chapter 31: The Last Hurrah

On November 21, 1919, the thirty-two-year-old Phantom takes his last shot: ten rounds with his protégé, champion Mike O’Dowd, before a roaring St. Paul crowd. Steeled by Tommy’s quiet devotion and Joe Gans’ talisman handkerchief, Mike opens sharp—then the tide turns. A gash blinds him; later, his right hand shatters as his perfect uppercut lands a shade high. Still, he conjures one incandescent surge that launches O’Dowd across the ring—but the champion will not fall, and without a knockout, the title stays put. At the final bell, Mike embraces his pupil and, the next day, retires with grace, gratitude, and courage, declaring that victory lies not in a crown but in the journey itself.

Chapter 32: This Side of Paradise

The 1920s roar to life, but for Mike Gibbons the quest is over. The Walker Law makes plain what he always knew—that in another time he might have been champion. Thomas John shares with Mike the redemption story of the Apostle Paul, their hometown’s namesake, paving the way toward a



meaningful father-son reconciliation. Seeking to embrace whatever faith, stillness, and renewal he can find, Mike turns to love, family, and teaching. With Mae, he launches a women's self-defense class; with Tommy, he revives their gym; with pen and paper, he spreads his methods to thousands through a mail-order boxing course. He visits Jack Johnson, tired of running and now incarcerated, both men laughing at how comebacks always fail. Nearing the Dempsey showdown he needs, Tommy sails toward his own destiny, crossing the Atlantic in search of greater power and family secrets. At book's close, Mike makes peace with his legacy as an uncrowned king, gazing out over St. Paul with George Barton, finally accepting the truth of his journey: greatness lies not in a crown, but in the life lived, the love given, and the stories remembered.
