

BOO JITSU

The Travel Channel's Zak Bagans is a modern-day Ghost Buster

BY KELLY CRIGGER

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Aaron Goodwin, Nick Groff, and Zak Bagans cautiously enter the Brewery.

Not many people aspire to fight a demonic spirit. Fedor, sure. But a ghost? Zak Bagans wants to submit one, preferably by armbar. After a close encounter with a paranormal spirit in his Detroit apartment, Bagans set out to capture an apparition on film in order to provide irrefutable evidence that ghosts exist. Along with his two friends, Aaron Goodwin and Nick Groff, the trio crisscrosses the country filming their *Ghost Adventures* for their weekly show on the Travel Channel.

So what does this have to do with MMA? Besides being an avid fan of the sport, Bagans uses the base concept of mixed martial arts to develop his style of ghost hunting. Just like Greg Jackson picks and chooses techniques from Muay Thai, Jiu Jitsu, wrestling, and boxing, the *Ghost Adventures* crew picks techniques from the various fields of paranormal investigation and blends them into their own style. "Everyone in this field has a singular technique," Bagans says. "There are scientific investigators, provocation investigators, sensitivity investigators, and my base, emotional investigation, but none of them are completely effective by themselves. We try to keep an open mind and use the best parts of all of them, like a mixed martial artist would, to get the best results." Call it Paranormal Jitsu; a new approach to flushing out misty spirits and mischievous entities that's proven very successful, though not without its risks.

"It's more dangerous than it looks," Bagans says. "On TV you only see a two-dimensional picture. You can't feel the environment. Your body is the most important piece of equipment, because you can feel the spiritual energy. When we're in a haunted building, we could get scratched, hurt, or even possessed, which has happened a few times."

Possessed? I'm out. And put that on a long list of reasons why no one should do this, but Bagans is nothing if not passionate about his occupation. He's been seeking out the most dangerous haunted buildings and locking himself inside for three years now and is set to conduct a live broadcast from the Trans-Allegheny Insane Asylum in Weston, West Virginia on October 30th.

Strapping on his iPod and pumping motivational music to get into the right mindset, he approaches the most creepastic haunts like an MMA fighter about to enter the cage. He then taunts ghosts to come out and do him physical harm and though it happens, it's still statistically more likely to get beaten up in the streets of Detroit where he grew up.

Bagans was first exposed to MMA when a friend entered a Gladiator Challenge tournament that he went to watch (the same tournament Rashad Evans won long before Season 2 of *The Ultimate Fighter*). He then sought out and trained in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu while following MMA legend Dan Severn's

career. "It amazes me how true the sport is now," Bagans says. "MMA is so much more of an art than boxing is. It's so much more complex and happens on so many different levels. Boxing is one-dimensional to me."

His favorite fighter now that "The Beast" is nearly retired?

"I don't really have a favorite, but I like Chris Leben's fighting style. He brings everything to the cage and goes all out like I do when I'm trying to find ghosts. I like Dan Henderson too."

Whether you believe in the paranormal or not, exploring places that drive sane men to flee in fear is Zak Bagans' calling. The ghost that tried to drive him out of his Detroit apartment turned out to be the spirit of a woman who committed suicide in its bathroom. Bagans came face to face with the apparition and knew then and there that exposing the paranormal was his purpose in life.

"I don't do this because I have a TV show," he says. "I do this because I want to prove things exist that we don't fully understand yet. I want to show that ghosts are out there no matter what the skeptics say. There are evil spirits that want to do people harm like bullies, and I want to expose them."

If you hear something go bump in the night, forget *Ghost Busters*, call *Ghost Adventures*. It would be so much cooler to have Zak Bagans put a rear naked choke on a rowdy spirit in your kitchen. 🍷