

THE HOW-TO GUYS OF MMA

Victory Belt

A Presence in MMA, Even if You've Never Heard of them.

BY KELLY CRIGGER

Everyone grows up eventually. After graduating college, Erich Krauss set out to live the life of a wandering writer in Spain, Morocco, Thailand, and South America while living on as little money as possible. But at thirty years old, Krauss found the vagabond lifestyle getting a bit tiring, and he decided to accomplish something with his life. So, with an empty wallet and a laptop full of stories, he moved back to California and wrote several books while working as a Muay Thai coach at Ken Shamrock's gym.

After publishing books on the Asian tsunami, the Mexican Border Patrol, and California wildfires with different publishing companies in New York, Krauss co-authored *Jiu-Jitsu Unleashed* with Eddie Bravo, and got it published by McGraw Hill. But there was a problem: They didn't know anything about MMA.

"They jacked it all up," Krauss says. "They didn't know how to edit it or market it, and then they tried to sell it as a striking book. Eddie Bravo has never thrown a kick in his life!" That experience lit a fire under a guy who normally had an asbestos ass, and, along with his training partner, Glen Cordoza, he founded Victory Belt Publishing in 2005.

But a lifetime dedicated to adventuring instead of higher education left Krauss qualified to host a show on Travel Channel, but not to run his own company. "We had to learn business real quick because we didn't know much," Krauss admits. Fortunately, his father was experienced at making money, and guided the pair through the steps of starting a

small business. Before they knew it, they hit a gold mine when BJ Penn agreed to let them publish his book, *Mixed Martial Arts: The Book of Knowledge*.

Today Victory Belt has sold over a million copies of its books, regularly outselling the major New York publishing houses. So if you've bought an instructional book on MMA in the last three years, there's a good chance it was published by Krauss and Cordoza. The Las Vegas-based company has cranked out titles by notable fighters like Randy Couture, Anderson Silva, Antonio Rodrigo Nogueira, Fedor Emelianenko, and Karo Parisyan, among others. This makes them the unofficial "How-To Guys of MMA," whose influence has reached all corners of the sport.

The average MMA tome takes between five and twelve months from photo shoot to release, depending on how many projects the pair are juggling at the same time. Their first book, *Guerilla Jiu Jitsu with Dave Camarillo*, took a mere five months to shoot, write, design, and print, while a book by Matt Lindland has been languishing in the design phase for over a year because other projects keep jumping ahead of it in the line. A year is actually a relatively short time in the publishing world, especially when you consider the amount of information that's embedded in each book and the impact it will have on its readers. Customers throw down their money because they want to learn how to fight, so a fighting system like Lindland's, which took him years to develop, cannot be trivialized or rushed.

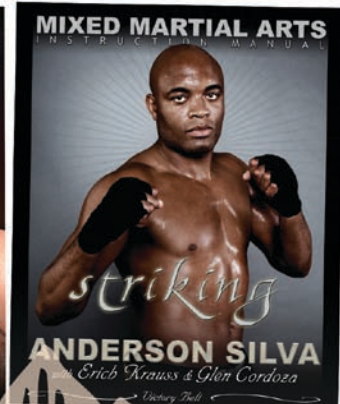
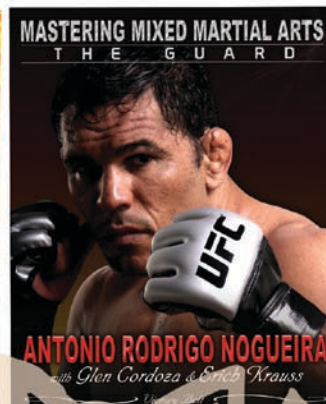
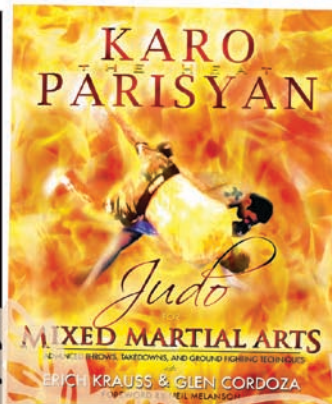
"We put everything we can into our books," Krauss says. "All of our books are a complete system instead of just a bunch of moves lumped together. Glen [Cordoza] is a master at breaking down a fighting system and presenting it in a way that's easy to understand, so it flows naturally."

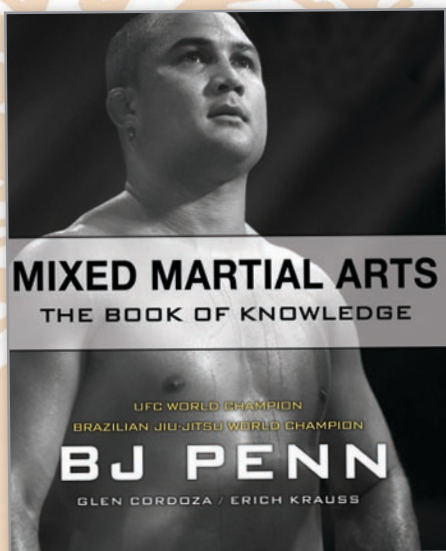
But just how much of an instructional book is written by the athlete versus the publishers? Fighters like Fedor Emelianenko and Anderson Silva are celebrities with busy schedules, and when you add in a language barrier, the challenges of writing a four-hundred page book are clear. With Victory Belt, the ratio is about 50-50. "The athlete has the system and the philosophy," says Krauss. "We get as much information as we can out of them at the photo shoot and then get more as we write the book, but we put in the little things. You don't need Fedor to say, 'I put my right foot here when I throw a cross.' We know that so we put those little details in."

That approach has made Victory Belt one of the best-selling publishers in the business today. But with so many titles, there's a risk of saturating the market so heavily with MMA books that they might go straight to the bargain bin. Fortunately, Victory Belt doesn't publish just anyone's book. *Randy Couture's Wrestling for Fighting* is a completely different system from *Karo Parisyan's Judo for MMA*, and *Marcello Garcia's X Guard* isn't the same as *Eddie Bravo's Rubber Guard*.

Krauss and Cordoza don't just take on a project because there's a popular name associated with it. There has to be a compelling reason to spend a year preparing a book about a fighting system—and a market to sell it in. "We only publish books by people who have something to offer," adds Cordoza. "Kimbo Slice might be a marketable guy and a recognizable name, but he doesn't have a fighting system that people will want to learn. He's still developing his skills, so we wouldn't publish a book by him."

What they will publish are eight more books; one by BJ Penn on gi-style grappling,





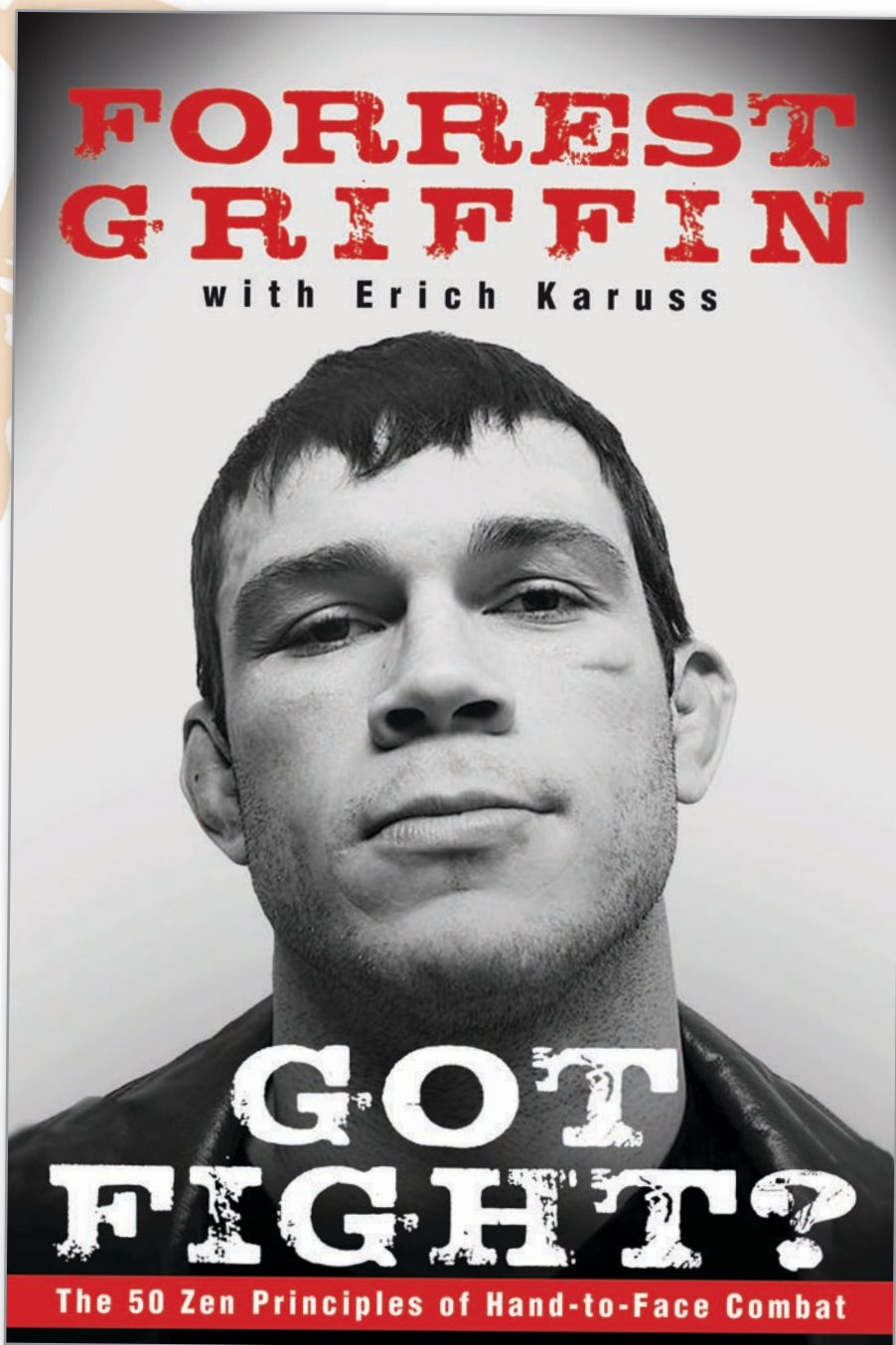
as well as titles by Lyoto Machida, Cung Le, Greg Jackson, and another book by Anderson Silva in 2009. It's not exactly what Krauss set out to do when he hit the road so many years ago, but if Victory Belt continues to be successful, his tales of hang gliding in Guatemala and running with the bulls in Spain will make their way to the bookshelves too.

When you travel far and wide to capture the fighting styles of the best in MMA, it's easy to gather some stories of tomfoolery along the way. Here are some of Krauss and Cordoza's favorite moments:

1. Punking Eddie Bravo – “We were videotaping one of Eddie Bravo's DVDs and decided to mess with him a little, so we had this big Samoan dude come into the gym and hit on a girl Eddie was interested in. Eddie kept looking at this guy and finally walked over, got in his face, and started yelling at him to leave the gym or they were going to fight. The funny thing was the girl kept instigating it. She was saying, 'Kick his ass Eddie!' and all these other things to stir the pot. When it was finally over Eddie admitted he was scared to confront the dude, but had to for this girl. The things we do for hot chicks.”

2. The Missing Day – “We had to fly to Russia to photograph Fedor for his book. Well, I don't really like flying, so Glen gave me two Zanax and I was out cold. I was so out of it that, when we were changing flights in New York, they had to carry me from one plane to the other. And when they propped me up against a wall some kids started looting my pockets. When I finally came to, we were in Russia...25 hours later!”

3. Anderson Silva's Impersonations – “There isn't much to this, but it was so funny at the time. We were photographing Anderson Silva for his striking book and during one of the breaks he suddenly goes into a dead-



on impersonation of Royce Gracie's fighting style. Then he broke out Randy Couture, Bruce Lee, and Chuck Liddell imitations that had the whole gym rolling.”

4. Sleeping on Couture – “We had to drive from Chico to Randy Couture's Legends gym in L.A., and like always, we'd stayed up all night working beforehand. So we drive the nine hours down there and go straight into the photo shoot just as tired as hell. Well, Glen got into the clinch with Couture, and suddenly I had to adjust some of the camera equipment, which took a minute or so. When we were ready to shoot, Glen was asleep on Couture's shoulder...standing up! Randy had to wake him up to do the photos,

but he was totally cool about it.”

5. Tempers Flare in Albuquerque – “We were shooting Greg Jackson's first book, and one of the co-authors was this Army guy who was pretty intense. He had a video recorder going, so whenever Greg talked he could capture it. Well, I forgot he had it on and kept saying, 'write this down,' or 'did you get that?' every time Greg spoke. I didn't know it was starting to wear on him, so I did it one more time and he blew up. He was yelling, 'Yes I got it, mother f**ker. What do you think I am, a f**king idiot? I'm a damn Army officer with a Masters degree and you're poking at me like a f**king kindergartner with crayons!' He was joking a little bit, but only a little.”