

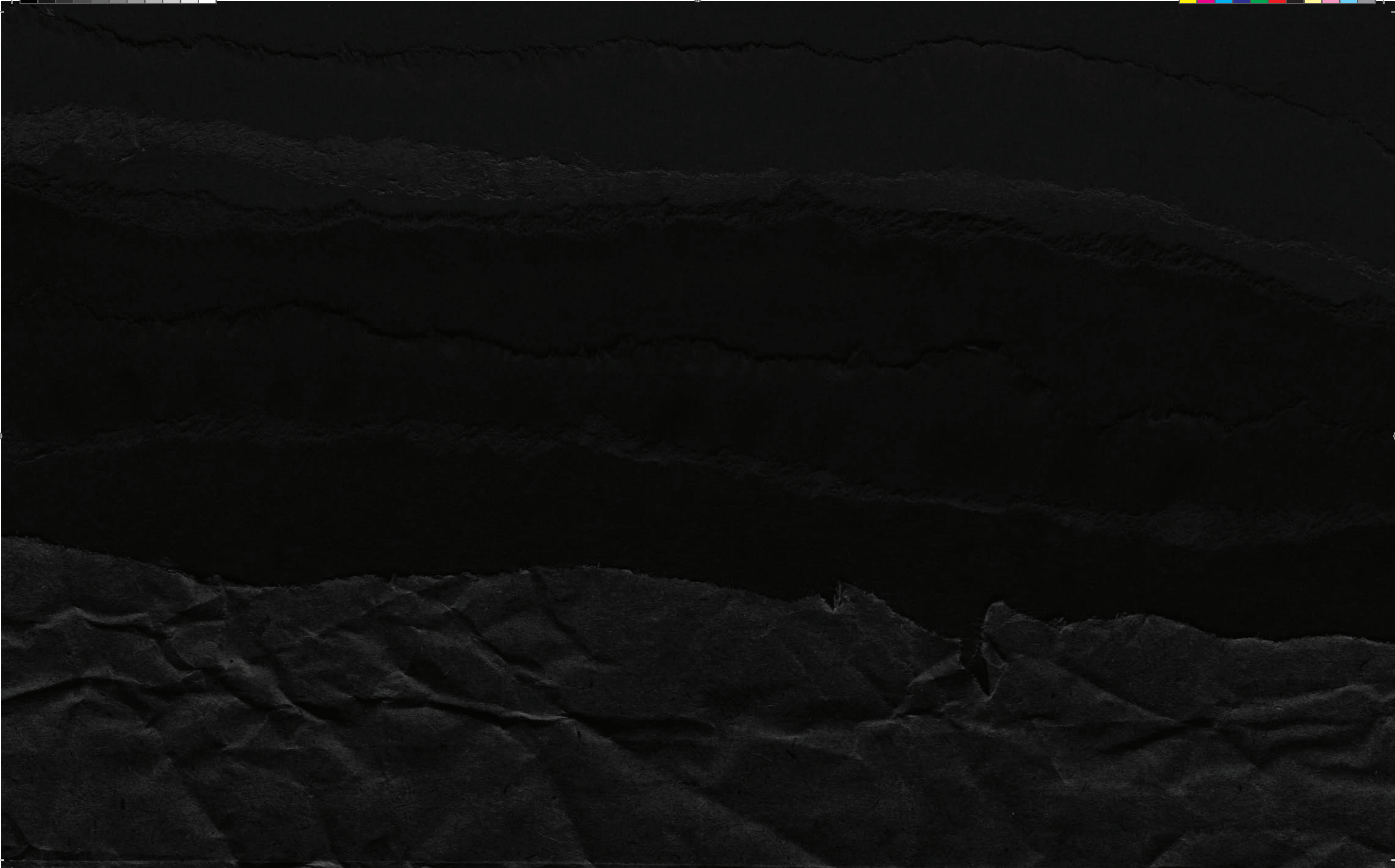


# CHOKER CLINCH CRANK COMBAT

Behind the stories of blood, sweat, tears  
and triumphs of 25 Singapore-based fighters



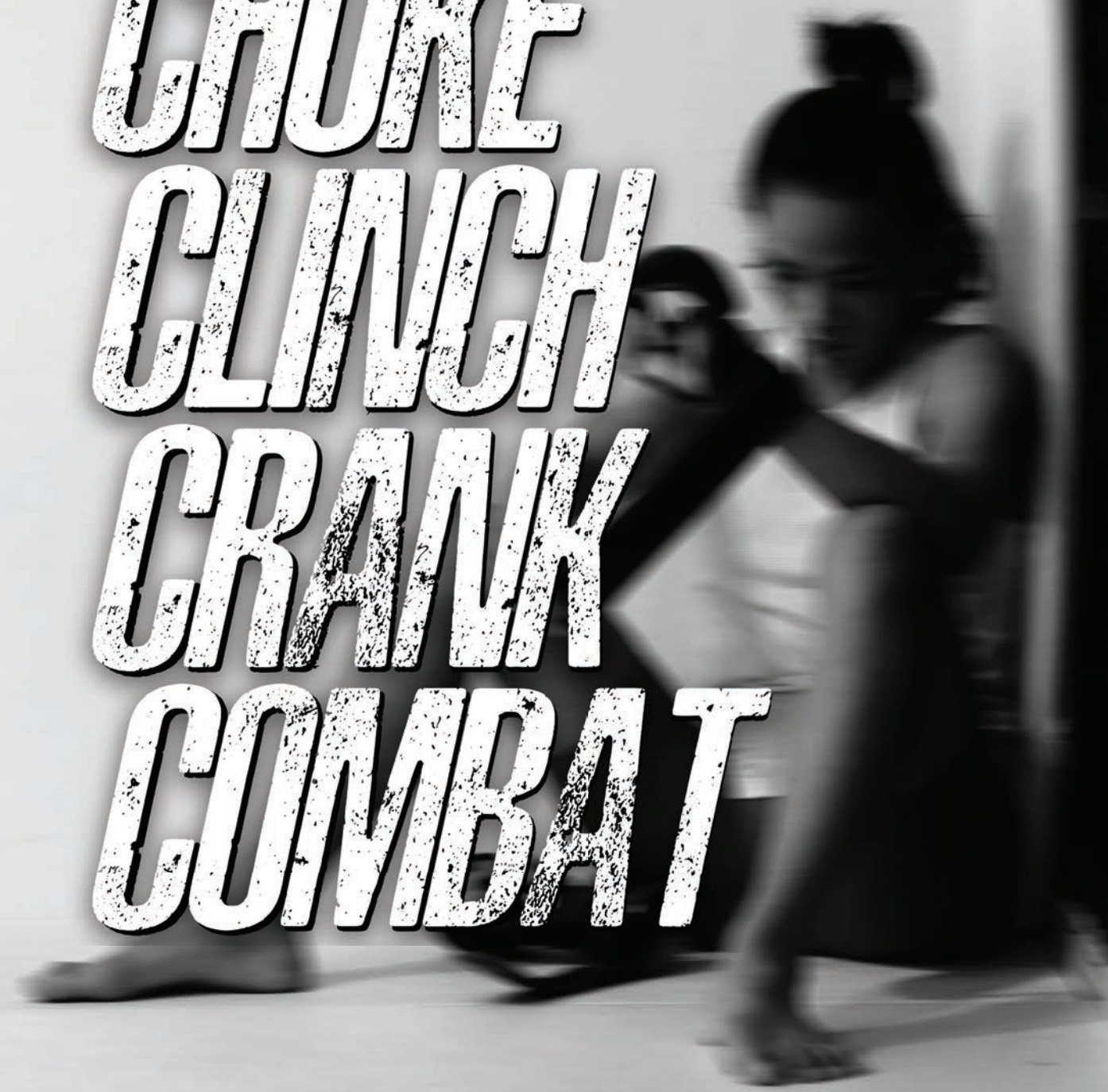








**CHOKER  
CLINCH  
CRANK  
COMBAT**







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To the instructors who see the fighters we can be,  
 to the students who show up on mats,  
 to the fighters who choose passion,  
 to the gym owners who give passion a home,

This book is for you.





# CHOKES CLINCHES CRANKS COMBAT



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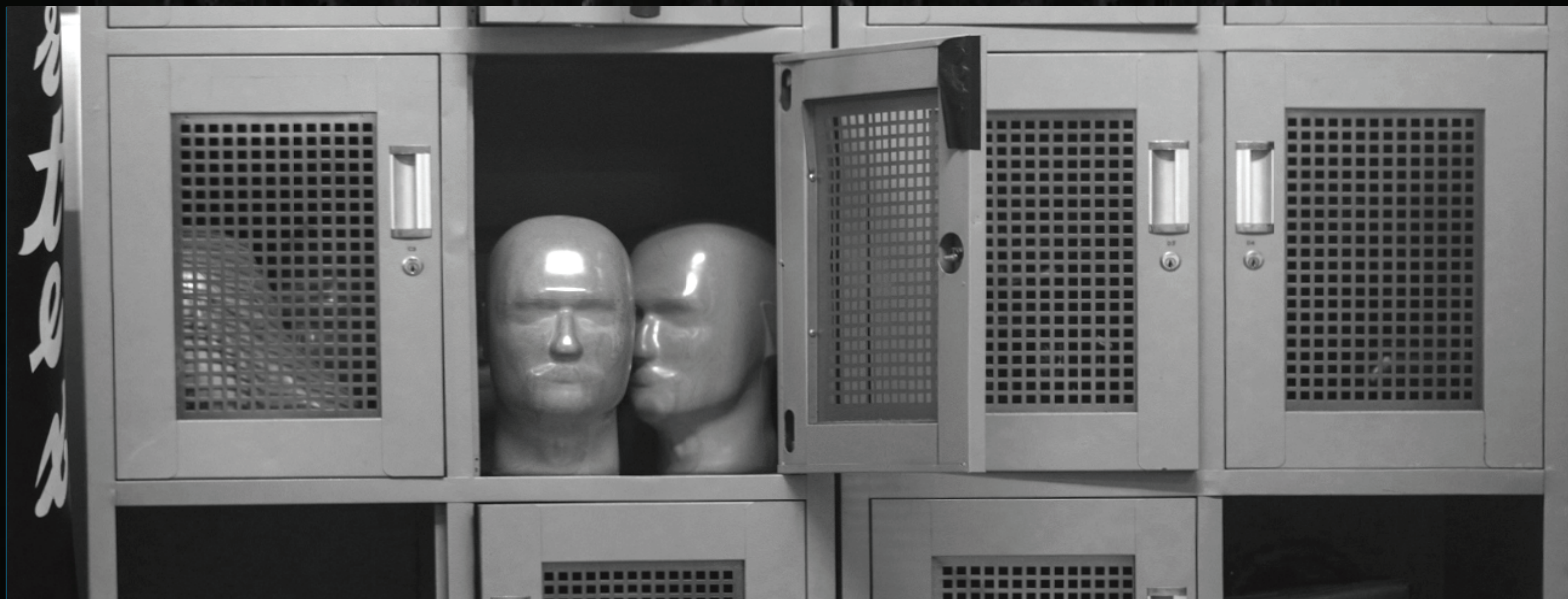
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# FOREWORD



Choke, Clinch, Crank, Combat: what would drive so many in one of the world's most prosperous cities to choose these 4 Cs rather than the more materialistic 5?

In a country with such a manicured image, so focused on business and industry, Singapore's thirst for martial arts is resoundingly apparent. There are a number of well-heeled practitioners that have come from all over the world to train and to teach, and many more who grew and honed their abilities here from the beginning. While one might not have thought of Singapore as fertile soil for such pursuits, the popularity of the local scene and the passion and dedication of its adherents cannot be denied.

It's an irony that Singapore views martial arts as an unrespectable career. The local martial arts scene is composed of a whole pantheon of local and international practitioners taking something foreign and doing it well enough that a kind of local identity and culture forms, emergent and organic. This process may as well describe Singapore itself; a tiny island nation populated by a mix of peoples, carving out a niche through determination and dedication.

There are as many reasons for pursuing martial arts as there are fighters. Some emulate or idolize more established fighters. Some view it as one of society's hidden backdoors to fame, a non-traditional career outside of the well-trodden paths to success. Some



use it to achieve some modicum of personal stability, to acquire some ability to physically defend oneself, or using it as a coping mechanism for life's troubles which often ultimately cannot be solved by force. One thing that is common to all practitioners, however, is the love of pressure.

Throughout this book, you'll be tempted to point out counterexamples, to say that this conception is backwards, as there are many stories of fighters diving into martial arts to escape the pressures of the personal or home life. It may strike one as strange to trade these troubles for the chance to be choked and punched, but martial arts are at least something of a known quantity. For many that have little recourse from the pain or stress that permeates their day-to-day life, a neat, tidy box of hell might seem like a fair trade.

Martial arts media is saturated with images of fighters sweating, punching, lifting, pushing, and pulling but nobody can sustain this output indefinitely, and for readers who really care about the art of fighting, the life of a fighter off of the mat must be considered just as carefully as on. Anyone can step into a ring once, but how many can find the dedication to do it every day?

This book presents an all-too-often neglected peek behind the curtain, showing fighters that are not great beyond the reach of normal humans, but great because of their humanity, great because of their dedication and resolve. A fighter, strong beyond the reach of mortals, faster and more precise and tougher than a mere human is not deserving of any awe or pride. If we had no weaknesses, we would have nothing to overcome.

What this book conveys, in addition to the blood and sweat, is the humanity behind the fighters, off the mat, outside of the gym. And what authors Andrea Yew and Alvin Ang manage to capture in this book is indeed intimate. Themselves no strangers to the slog of training or the pain and fatigue of fighting, they have taken their own experiences in martial arts, and sublimated their own personal motivations to craft a book allowing you to see a view of fighters not often seen, one that is at once both more humanizing and stronger.

And for those of you struggling with your own motivation, whether in martial arts or in life, perhaps you will find in here something that resonates.

## **BEN GEORGE**

**BJJ Purple Belt, Published Foreword Author  
and Sufferer of Colour Blindness**

(You can also find him on page 110 being manhandled by Glenn Ong)

# **PREFACE**



Everyone fights. From the crunch of bone on bone in a school yard scrape to the abstraction of our daily struggles, fighting is as old an instinct as they come. Anyone can throw a punch. Anyone can kick. We do it even before we are born. But what is the path that leads someone from a school yard shoving match to twenty five minutes in a cage with another man or woman whose aim is to hurt you?

In Singapore, making the decision to turn fighting into a career comes with a price. It is a gruelling career which makes demands of a person's time, and relationships are often the price fighters pay. Training subsumes family dinners, social invitations, holidays. Those who pursue martial arts alongside a day job are not exempt from this, and often a packed schedule at work is the price of making time to train. Especially in a conservative society's such as Singapore, where most choose to travel well-beaten paths of success in the name of pragmatism or societal pressure, fighters not only struggle with bread and butter issues, but must continually justify their career choice to

well-intentioned loved ones. The response is not always one that they hope for. Yet, with all the fighters we have interviewed for this book, not one person laments how difficult it is. Fighters are well aware of the cost of fighting, yet are compelled to do so. Famed author Charles's Bukowski's poem, *so you want to be a writer?*, opines a similar compulsion for his own chosen profession:

*if it doesn't come bursting out of you  
in spite of everything,  
don't do it.*

For a lot of young Singaporeans, some of our fondest childhood memories and one of our first introductions to the world of fighting was through World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) in the 1990s, or the 2008 hit reality TV series *The Contender Asia*, after school on television. Practicing on our siblings, cousins, friends — dropping smaller ones from the tops of couches, launching ourselves off tables, chairs, headboards — would, for some of us, become the genesis of passion.





***CHOKES***





# Alexsandro "Leke" Machado

*Alexsandro "Leke" Dos Santos Machado is a Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu black belt under Ricardo Vieira of Checkmat. He was a deputy coach at the famous Fight Zone Academy in Rio de Janeiro where he was in charge of training the black and brown belts at Checkmat Brazil, home to some of the best world champions. Originally from Rio de Janeiro, Professor Alexsandro is the currently head coach of BJJ at Impact MMA.*

For Alexsandro, BJJ was never just a sport. It was a way out from the favelas of his childhood, a way to support his family, and more importantly, it was a way for him to uplift his community.

Alexsandro began training BJJ when he was just twelve years old, but it was not love at first sight. He had been training Muay Thai and his

then coach was adamant against BJJ. "Every time my coach would say, 'No! BJJ is not good. If people tried to do a single leg, you could use your knees to stop the guy,' I believed my coach. One day, my coach fought on the beach against a smaller guy who trained in BJJ. This guy, kill my coach. The next day, I told my friend, let's go do BJJ. I stopped Muay Thai and boxing to do BJJ."





# Shermaine Chng

*Shermaine Chng has battled anorexia, depression and she is a survivor of abuse. She began her martial arts journey for self-protection. Martial arts has helped Shermaine redefine her relationship with herself and her body. She received her Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu purple belt under Professor Gamal Hassan El Amin.*

For Shermaine, her journey into martial arts began as a way to fight back. “When I was younger, I was abused, and as I grew up, I was threatened by ex-boyfriends whenever I broke up with them, and the last straw was when I was molested at 19. That was why I wanted to start learning martial arts so that I would be able to protect myself.”

She began with Muay Thai at Evolve MMA before slowly transitioning into Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ). Ironically, Shermaine was

introduced to BJJ through a bully. “I had this friend who asked me to go for BJJ classes just so that he could bully me. I noticed he would always pick smaller people to train with and use a lot of strength on them. He actually bullied me in Poly as well but I thought this was behind us as it happened many years ago. But unfortunately for me, he bullied me again at Evolve. That’s the story of how I started BJJ.”

“But luckily for me, there were still nice people that helped me along the way, so I started







**CLINCH**



# Samantha Quek

*Samantha Quek is a former national boxer who has trained in some of the best camps in Singapore and Thailand. At the time of writing, she is undefeated as a professional, even though she's spent most of her early career fighting through the pain barrier.*

Samantha's martial arts journey began, like so many others, as a happy accident. "I was in a regular fitness gym, and a friend of mine asked if I would be interested in trying out Muay Thai. I've always wanted to try it but never had the opportunity, so I said yes. But from the moment I put on a pair of gloves and hit pads for the first time, I was hooked. I knew, from the get-go, that this was something I needed to do. This was something I needed to pursue."

"I never found satisfaction in my studies or in the sports I played before. They left very little impact

on me. Martial arts, however, was a whole new ball game. It was impossibly difficult, and within months, I managed to fracture my spine. The adrenaline was real. It made me feel alive. It peaked my interest immediately."

Samantha's injury came as a result of a sudden change in lifestyle. Before discovering martial arts, Samantha was a two-pack a day smoker who led a sedentary lifestyle. To go from that to training Muay Thai every day was a tall order, but Samantha has always felt most comfortable in the extremes. Even when her doctor told her that she would





# Syafiq

## "The Slasher"

# Abdul Samad

*Syafiq "The Slasher" Samad is a household name within Singapore's combat scene. He has been fighting since he was fifteen after being viciously attacked as a teenager. He is the first Singaporean to win the Asian Muay Thai championship and is well versed in MMA, Muay Thai and boxing. He is currently fighting out of Juggernaut Fight Club.*

In a life marked by visceral setbacks, Syafiq combines the discipline of a fighter with an unwavering spirituality. His mantra goes, "I just do the hard work and let God do the rest." The scars that circle Syafiq's forearms are a visual reminder of the seemingly impossible obstacles he has overcome. When he was just 14, Syafiq was brutally slashed, an attack that left him unable to walk for three months.

As Syafiq recalls the horrific incident, "I got assaulted by a few gangsters. I don't know how many — maybe 14 to 17 people. And it was just me and my friend. It's like 8pm and suddenly there were a lot of people

in black. We minded our own business and walked, and then suddenly I heard someone shout at us, 'OEI!' Everyone surrounded us. And then there was a good five, six seconds of staring incident and I was like, 'What? What do you want?' Someone kicked me from behind. I fell on the ground and everyone started hitting me. I just curled up. I just took the shots."

"After that they all ran. I was on the ground and I was trying to stand up, but I couldn't feel my left hand. I couldn't feel my legs. I couldn't move. Then I look at my hand — it was dangling. And I could see







**CRANK**



# Glenn Ong

*Glenn Ong is a household name and his voice has filled our cars and houses, keeping us company on our morning commutes. As someone who is known for his suave confidence on air and sometimes provocative antics, Glenn's down-to-earth demeanour as we sit down for a cup of coffee and cake is surprising as it is refreshing.*

Glenn takes his time and every opportunity presented seriously. "Something that I feel strongly about is procrastination. Whatever you have to do, do it today. Don't wait till tomorrow, because it might be too late. Seize the day. I think life is short, life is unpredictable, so when an opportunity comes about, you've got to take it. I just think that everyone should just live each day like it's their last. There are just so many things that I think we all want to do, but we keep on saying that we will do it some other time."

"Maybe it's because of fear that they don't want to do something. I think they should try and overcome that fear. I think fear just holds everyone back."

In order to begin his BJJ journey, Glenn too had to first overcome his initial fear. After an on-again-off-again relationship with aikido since the age of seven, Glenn was introduced to grappling through the UFC. "When I found out that Evolve was coming to town, and they were offering Muay Thai and BJJ, I

was kind of hesitant at first. I thought, 'Wah this is way too hardcore man. No way.' It took me a few years before I decided, 'Okay, I'm going to check it out.' That's when I joined Evolve. That's when I felt like, 'Eh! I should have done this a lot earlier!' Because it is so intimidating, it looks almost unachievable...But I really started to fall in love with martial arts again when I started taking up BJJ."

"For the first time I felt like, 'Hey, this is real'. I could really defend myself with BJJ. Once you take someone to the ground, if the other guy is not a BJJ student, I would smash the guy. You know? It's that kind of thing. So it really does give you that confidence."

Glenn is no stranger to martial arts, but his introduction came at an interesting point in Singapore's martial arts landscape. "When I took up aikido in the 70s, we all had to have a martial arts license. The government wanted to know who was







**COMBAT**



# Tiffany "No Chill" Teo

*Tiffany "No Chill" Teo is a professional mixed martial arts fighter and former national boxer. She is most well-known for twice challenging for the ONE Women's Strawweight title against the defending champion, Xiong Jing Nan. Tiffany also holds a purple belt in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, and has competed in a wide plethora of disciplines, including amateur boxing, Muay Thai and Jiu-Jitsu.*

Tiffany looks rather unassuming for the baddest woman in Singaporean MMA. Bespectacled and seemingly perpetually clad in yoga wear, Tiffany looks like your typical university-educated yoga teacher, and part of her that is exactly that. Tiffany is also one of the Lion City's most well-known fighters. But she didn't start out trying to be a professional pugilist. When Tiffany first put on a pair of gloves at eighteen, she wanted nothing more than what most Singaporeans want when they take a martial arts class: to learn something new and to stay fit.

But her coach at the time sprang a surprise on her. "After a few months of training, my coach asked if I wanted to fight. I didn't agree to it as I felt that I was still very new and raw. But that planted the seed in

my mind." Eventually, that seed will germinate, and upon graduating from university, Tiffany took her first amateur Muay Thai fight at twenty-two years old. She promptly lost.

Tiffany now sees this loss as a blessing in disguise. "When I first started fighting, it was like checking off a goal off my bucket list. But the loss made me hungry to fight, to win." After her first defeat, Tiffany realised she needed to work on the crispness of her punches, and so started to work on her boxing, catching the eye of Singapore's national boxing team in the process. She was invited to be part of the team, and after a few boxing matches, a career change to the more popular mixed martial arts seemed like a natural progression.

