



## **Beast: Blood, Struggle, and Dreams at the Heart of Mixed Martial Arts**

*Doug Merlino*

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## **Beast: Blood, Struggle, and Dreams at the Heart of Mixed Martial Arts Doug Merlino**

The first book to bring readers deep inside a top mixed martial arts gym, *Beast* shows exactly what it takes to reach the top of this exacting sport. Doug Merlino spent two years at Florida's American Top Team, living, eating, and training alongside some of the world's best fighters, and traveled with them to fights around the world. The result is the most unvarnished look at the sport yet, with its electrifying highs and devastating lows. For both the uninitiated and for hardcore fans, *Beast* offers an intense journey into an often misunderstood world.

## **Beast: Blood, Struggle, and Dreams at the Heart of Mixed Martial Arts Details**

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Author : Doug Merlino

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## **From Reader Review Beast: Blood, Struggle, and Dreams at the Heart of Mixed Martial Arts for online ebook**

### **Jess C. says**

Merlino did a detailed honest job of following the ATT athletes. The strength of the book is his portrayal of those he chooses to follow - both at the beginning and the end of their careers. In doing so, he outlines a sport in which the exploitation of the athlete (not the Marxist interpretation of exploitation but the common language interpretation) is pervasive. Merlino's best insights regard his own and others following of these athletes. I think the book falls short in deriving more complete conclusions from his ethnography.

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### **Cody Lasko says**

There are some moments of mind melting insight, boldly visceral imagery, and bits of fascinating MMA history rife throughout this book but it ultimately falls short of being “great” and lands itself in the territory of the “good”.

This book is not meant for anyone other than fans of MMA and fighting. And the way in which the author so sharply jumps from individuals and their stories only intensified this potential alienation of other readers.

But if this is of interest to you it's a damn fine, easily digested read with some phenomenal insights into the “fighter condition” (a little take on the human condition). Merlino understands what makes fighters tick and it really shows the depth to which his relationships with members of the camp developed.

It wasn't phenomenal. It wasn't even great. But for what it is this is a damn good read.

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### **Ben says**

Not quite as good as Ronda Rousey's memoir, but Beast is a visceral, unblinking look at the struggle of the non-superstar MMA fighters to stay relevant and dominant in a league of cutthroat competition, bus rides and discount hotel rooms, and their own mortal bodies. These guys bleed true grit.

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### **Eric says**

Beast is an MMA book about the fighters. It switches among four mixed martial artists at various stages of a sports combat career, and it gives a good look into what each has gone through to arrive at where they are in the book.

Each story is fascinating. I enjoyed the in-depth biographies, even if they were at times difficult to read. Jeff Monson's portion is particularly rough.

The writing is excellent. It is a tale well told, and that's why I gave it four stars. But it offered nothing new

about MMA that other books coming before haven't. No new conclusion about the sport or the athletes is drawn in the book. I was expecting a more cohesive theme than they're all American Top Team fighters.

If you like learning about what it takes to be an MMA professional, this book is well written and gets you to care about the fighters. It is simply a tale of their lives. Recommended to anyone who enjoys the person behind the fighter's persona.

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### **Scott Cumming says**

Beast tells the stories of four MMA fighters at differing points in their respective careers. Jeff Monson, a battle worn veteran looking to go out on a high that becomes ever more elusive the longer he continues; Mirsad Bektic, a hyped featherweight prospect who fled war torn Bosnia as a child; Daniel Straus, an ex-con, now Bellator title contender, trying to move away his past and support himself and his family; and Steve Mocco, a celebrated wrestler looking to move into professional MMA and test his mettle against the best. All four train out of the illustrious American Top Team based in Florida and we also follow coaches from the team as they assist and cajole the above fighters in their quests.

Using four stories instead of one really captures the various stages of a successful MMA path from starting out to prospect to contender to aging veteran struggling to let go and not knowing what career there is after fighting. Merlino also includes potted roots of MMA and UFC histories to give a broader spectrum and visits the issues of fighter pay and the chasm between the reality of being a fighter and the portrayal in promotional packages.

The great thing about this book is that it's accessible to the hardcore fan or the newcomer. There's no overwhelming glut of technical data and it's full of interesting tidbits including the fact the Gracies are descended from Scottish immigrants. This really reignited my passion for MMA, which is something that's been more than a sport to me as it triggered my ambition to get healthier and shed a lot of extra weight I'd put on. Living in the UK and having a son who's approaching the terrible twos it's hard to give up sleep/vast amounts of time to watching fights like I used to be able to, so I'm maybe just catching main events here and there when I can. This book reminded me of everything that goes on behind that and the work and struggles that not just these four, but every fighter must go through.

It's a sport that will continue to grow with new superstars cropping up and creeping further in the mainstream media (see Ronda Rousey hosting SNL). This book is the perfect place to learn/expand knowledge on this sport, which as the book highlights is as much psychological as it is about skill.

I look forward to whatever project Merlino gets into next as his writing here is excellent with some chapters/sections being structured in unique ways and he shows a clear attachment to those he's covering that make this more than just straight reporting.

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### **Brad Summers says**

Really easy read. It's a good intro in the dedication of these athletes, but also in some sense when you should

choose when enough is enough.

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### **Cyan Night says**

By default, if a writer can describe the sport of MMA in an objective manner and is capable of bringing into light all aspects of MMA, the good, the bad, the misunderstood without the interjection of personal judgements, the book will be a 5 star for me.

This book for me rates a 3.5 star.

Doug Merlino, an established sports journalist presents this book and its several stories in a simple and effective style. He begins by introducing the sport from a layman's perspective - how cage fighting normally appears like a barbaric activity to an outsider. He then brings in the opposing view of how each fighter are presented as warriors that embodies civilised virtues such as courage, hard work and honour. The book goes on to explore many facets of the sport including the physical and emotional backstories of various athletes, a brief history of the sport, wages and challenges of being a professional fighter onward to how the career can terminate for some of them. Overall I felt that he presented an all rounded view of MMA.

I deducted one star for one very large aspect of MMA he had failed to include in his book - Women's MMA (WMMA). Aside from a brief mention of Ronda Rousey and Miesha Tate, all other women in his book played the clichéd role of girlfriend, wives and mums. HELL NO! WMMA has been around several years prior to the publishing of his book (2015). Why would he not think that WMMA is a vital part of MMA? Does he believe a woman cannot be a BEAST? This is a huge sore point for me.

The other half a point was deducted because the book zig-zags between the lives of 3 athletes and made it rather confusing for me at the start.

Towards the end, Merlino mentions how through the months of his research, he acquired a number of wisdom from the veterans of the sport. I was particularly impressed when he describes how martial arts training helps align the mind, body and spirit, teaches a fighter to manage their emotions and defend themselves from threats. This is a level of wisdom not normally available to many athletes even after years of training. And this is why I round the book up to 4 stars.

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### **NinjaK says**

An intimate portrait of some of the men who compete in MMA. Didn't rate higher because there were a lot of names, and with the way the chapters were set up, it was very hard to keep track of who was who, so it was difficult to really care about any one fighter profiled. There were also no captions under any of the pictures, and it wasn't always obvious through context what it was a picture of or why it was there.

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### **Jack Combs says**

As a fan of MMA it was a well put together book. Doug Merlino choosing to live among the fighters at a top gym such as ATT was a brilliant idea.

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**Jaclyn Day says**

I've tried to read more books this year about things I know absolutely nothing about and MMA certainly qualifies. This book was great—inclusive and technical enough for the superfan, but appropriately descriptive for someone like me too. Really compelling read.

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