

# THE MARTIALIST VOL. TWO NO. EIGHT



Photo by Phil Elmore

My Winchester light shipped to me with a Chinese-made Nylon belt sheath. The Nylon is quite light and the stitching, adhesive residue, and overall workmanship are on par with the sheaths one gets with those bargain-basement plastic-handled knives imported from the ChiComs. It works, but experience tells me it will start to fray and unravel after a couple of months (if not several weeks) of daily wear and tear. The sheath has a hook-and-loop closure.



Photo by Phil Elmore

The Winchester is a decent light for its price range -- roughly comparable to a Mini Maglite, but more powerful and more "tactical." There are many superior lights available, but this one could serve a role in your personal self-defense gear as a budget lighting alternative. ♠

## Why the Kerambit?

By Phil Elmore

Why do some knives become fads? There are plenty of possible reasons. The *Rambo* movies made hollow-handle survival knives all the rage back in the 1980s. Theorizing over a lockback stiletto supposedly purchased by OJ Simpson made that knife a best-seller during the publicity surrounding Simpson's murder trial. Any and all forms of "tactical folder" swept the industry after Spyderco introduced the pocket clip and thumbhole opener -- but this last is not a fad. It was an industry trend.



Photo by Phil Elmore

At what point does a fad become a trend? I couldn't say until after the fact. It's true, though, that as of this writing the Indonesian kerambit (characterized by a finger hole at the end of the grip and most often possessing a hawbill-shaped blade) remains wildly popular in the knife industry. Several major manufacturers offer them, from Steve Tarani (whom I would consider the most prominent advocate of the kerambit -- his [www.karambit.com](http://www.karambit.com) site is one good stop for information) to Ernest Emerson

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to Sal Glesser and Spyderco. Countless other manufacturers have gotten into the act, too. Inexpensive kerambits made in China for Mtech and Master Cutlery are everywhere, with RAM Instrument joining the fray to offer kerambits under both RAM and Vtech brand names.

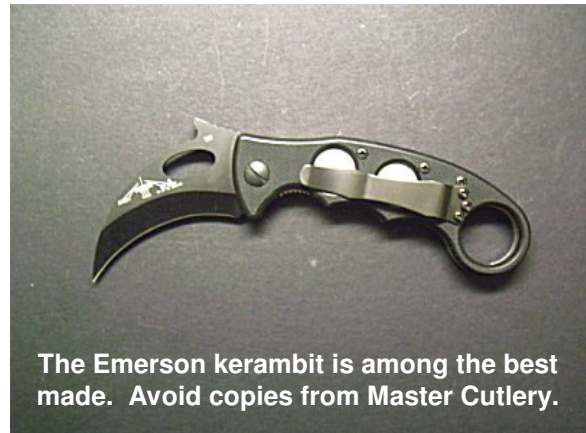


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Emerson and Tarani have both written articles favorable to the kerambit for various trade publications. On the other side, no less a knife industry icon than Lynn Thompson has weighed in on the kerambit's drawbacks.

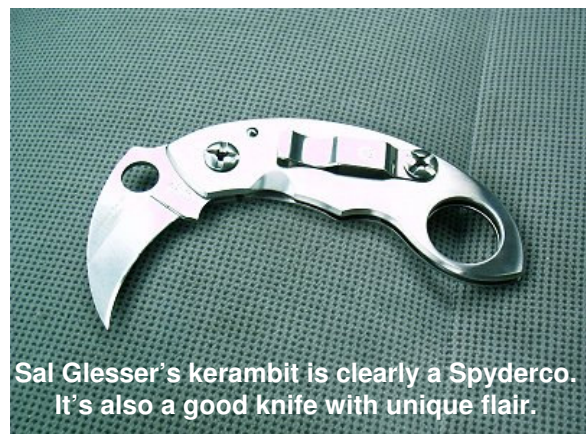
In 2003, Thompson published one of his sure-to-be-controversial editorials in the *Riposte* column in Cold Steel's catalog. He wrote that the kerambit, which he characterized as "an obscure knife from Indonesia," was being "pawn[ed] off" on an "unsuspecting public" with the help of *Blade* magazine (a publication with whom Thompson has had his differences in the past). Thompson also correctly pointed out that the kerambit is small, concealable, allows for powerful slashes and stabs at close range, and is difficult to disarm. He went on to criticize the inherently weak extended grip and the relatively short reach of the reverse grip with the kerambit.

Thompson's Warrior's Edge system (reviewed in video form at *The Martialist*) is based on "long range knife fighting" and biased towards large knives, so I can understand from where he's coming with his opinion. At the same time, there are those (myself among them) who don't consider range to be something you can effectively or reliably control when fighting with blades. I've sparred some truly gifted teachers using training knives and, to be honest, the size of my knife or the grip that I used made no difference to my opponents. The "reach advantage" offered by the size of your knife is, in my opinion, of only minor importance compared to your body mechanics.



The Emerson kerambit is among the best made. Avoid copies from Master Cutlery.

Photo by Phil Elmore



Sal Glesser's kerambit is clearly a Spyderco. It's also a good knife with unique flair.

Photo by Phil Elmore

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This fixed-blade is patterned after a popular knifemaker's kerambit design.

Photo by Phil Elmore



Forward Grip

Photo by Phil Elmore

This debate aside, why *would* you choose a kerambit over one of the countless other knife designs available? I think choosing any knife involves making a *style* choice as much as a utility choice. If you are drawn to the kerambit – which I'll grant is a very intimidating and "flashy" blade – it is because you like its style.

While the kerambit's image will work against you legally – if you choose to use it in self-defense, you can bet you'll be cast as a vicious knife-fighter wannabe in court – it does have certain real physical advantages going for it. Because it is designed primarily for a reverse grip, it lends itself well to vicious cutting attacks and hooking thrusts that closely resemble arm movements with which you are already familiar. In Jurassic Park, when the Sam Neil describes the velociraptor's talon, he holds a fossilized claw in his hand in much the same way as one holds a kerambit. The talon, extending from the hand, rips through whatever the hand passes.

The finger ring of the kerambit acts to stabilize the knife in your grip, giving you good control over the blade and making it harder for the knife to be knocked free



Extended Grip

Photo by Phil Elmore



Reverse Grip

Photo by Phil Elmore

of your hand and facilitating a secure and positive draw. If the kerambit you've purchased is properly designed, it will be possible to carry the knife with the finger ring up and the blade forward for draw directly into a reverse grip. Some of the cheap imports on the

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market have the clip placed in a more conventional manner, making them suitable for left-hand carry only.



This imported Kerambit can be drawn into a reverse grip if carried on the left side.

Photo by Phil Elmore

Is the kerambit useful as a daily utility knife? It's as useful as any hawkbill blade. It cuts well and could be used for anything from linoleum to horticulture, I suppose. There's nothing you can do with a more conventional knife that you cannot do with a kerambit held in a forward grip (unless the curved blade makes the knife impractical for the task).



Photo by Phil Elmore

The extended grip is more problematic. The applications of this method are very limited; it is useful for momentary slashing and slicing maneuvers and is, as has been observed by many, not a strong position in terms of retention. I don't see any need to bother with extended-grip techniques, but of course I won't discourage you from learning them.

What I will discourage you from doing is spinning the kerambit. This is an epidemic among knife people – inner wrist injuries from spinning the kerambit by its wring. If you must spin the knife, do so wearing a leather cuff on your wrist for protection. There are certain benefits to such dexterity training, but I see no self-defense application for spinning in most cases.

The kerambit is a flashy, lethal-looking tool that is useful for close-range fighting (and very powerful in that role). It is not the best choice for daily carry if you're worried about being politically correct, but it certainly has style. If you do choose it, be mindful of its strengths and weaknesses. ♠

