

# CHUCK ZITO

# CAN KICK YOUR ASS!

**Chuck Zito can kick your ass. Let's make that clear right up front.**

Hell's Angel. Ex-con. "Bodyguard to the Stars." Actor on HBO's *Oz*. Golden Gloves boxer. Black belt in karate and jiu-jitsu. Movie stuntman. Pro wrestling personality. But these grand feats only detract from his primary vocation: ASS KICKER.

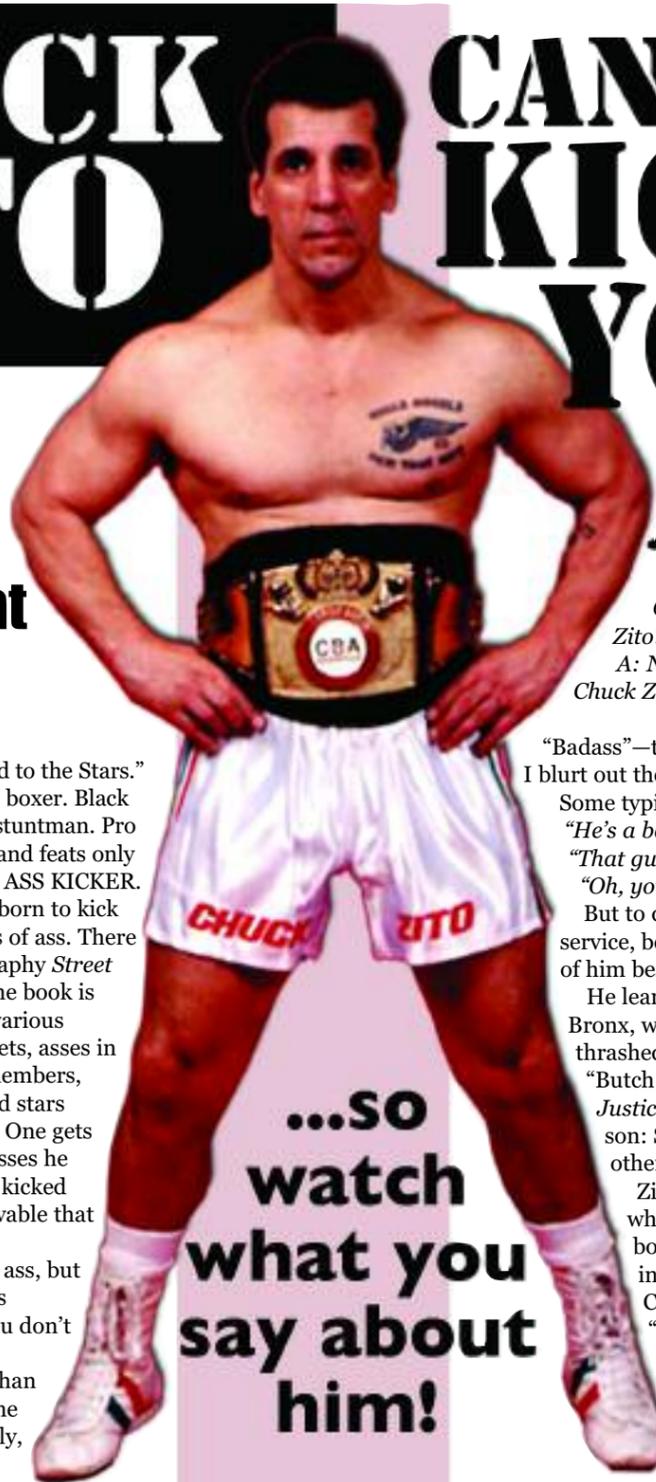
Fifty years ago, Chuck Zito was born to kick ass. In his life, he has kicked miles of ass. There he is on the cover of his autobiography *Street Justice*, poised to kick your ass. The book is filled with tales of Chuck kicking various asses—asses on the New York streets, asses in prison, asses of rival biker-gang members, and the famous asses of Hollywood stars such as Jean-Claude Van Damme. One gets the impression that there are no asses he couldn't kick, only asses he hasn't kicked yet. Sometimes, it's almost conceivable that Chuck Zito could kick God's ass.

You can try to kick Chuck Zito's ass, but you'll just wind up getting your ass kicked. He'll kick your ass until you don't even have an ass anymore.

"I'd rather kick someone's ass than have my ass kicked," Chuck tells me via telephone as I listen respectfully, mindful that he might hunt me down and kick my ass if I misquote him. (In 1997, Zito flattened *New York Daily News* columnist AJ Benza with one punch after Benza misquoted him in print. Days later, Benza would write that he still had to drink with a straw.)

"I basically knock out anyone I hit with either hand," Chuck tells me. "One guy was in intensive care for three weeks—broken nose, broken jaw, punctured lung, the whole nine yards."

Chuck Zito is the Anti-Sissy. That's all you need to know about him. There are other facets to the man, but none so compelling as his rep for kicking *mucho* ass. For kicking ass *en masse*.



**...SO  
WATCH  
WHAT YOU  
SAY ABOUT  
HIM!**

by  
**JIM GOAD**

*Q: What is tougher than Chuck Zito?*

*A: Nothing. Nothing is tougher than Chuck Zito.*

"Badass"—that word surfaces most often when I blurt out the name "Chuck Zito" to people.

Some typical responses:

*"He's a badass."*

*"That guy's a badass."*

*"Oh, you mean that badass guy?"*

But to dub him a "badass" does him a disservice, because it ignores all the other parts of him besides his ass that are tough.

He learned to be tough at age five in the Bronx, where he was getting routinely thrashed by Butch, the neighborhood bully. "Butch was a jerk," Zito writes in *Street Justice*, "but he taught me a valuable lesson: Sometimes, when you turn the other cheek, you get smacked twice."

Zito's father, a professional boxer who lost only twelve fights in 228 bouts, began schooling young Chucky in the art of fisticuffs. Since then, Chuck estimates he's scrapped in "over a hundred" street fights. "And I've never lost. Someone once split my head wide open with a champagne bottle. But I still won the fight....I don't think I have an anger problem," Chuck says, "but

I will not be abused by anyone. Every man's responsible for his own actions....I try to talk my way out of a fight, but sometimes you can't. Sometimes you have to take it to the next level. [pause] A lot of times."

Chuck's father taught him to be more than a simple palooka—he welded the idea of self-defense to a broader theme of personally administered justice. "I still believe what my father taught me: that you stand up for yourself, you do what you think is right, and you take shit from no one," Zito writes.

It is this combo of ass-kicking in the service of a personally defined moral code that makes Chuck Zito such an ironically heroic figure.

"We love our outlaws," says film director John Milius of Zito, "yet he's also such a fine example of the old values that we used to live by: honesty, courage, and personal integrity."

"He has witnessed firsthand the best and worst of people and is an incredible judge of character of who's telling the truth and who's not," says Chris Sloan, a USA Network programming director. (The channel once planned a reality show with Zito presiding as a streetwise judge in small-claims cases.) "He believes people should respect one another and should be fair to one another. He has a real sense of what's right and wrong. He doesn't kowtow to anybody."

"He's got this rare combination of gumption and morality that I haven't seen before," says Jim Miller, another USA Network executive. "I don't think I've met anybody who's so strong, yet so gentle—so angry, yet so calm...."

"He has this kind of amazing innocence in that he actually trusts people at their word," says *Oz* creator Tom Fontana of Zito, whom he cast as Italian prison enforcer Chucky Pancamo. "He gets truly angered when someone doesn't keep his word. It's refreshing to meet a man so true to his own code of ethics."

When I ask Chuck to use three words to describe himself, he generously gives me seven:

*Real deal  
Old values  
Lots of integrity*

"There's a lot of people who've lost respect for each other," Chuck theorizes when asked what's wrong with the world these days. "If we had more respect for one another, we'd have a better society." He disagrees with his *paisan* Machiavelli and says it's better to be loved than feared: "When people fear you, it means they have no respect for you—it's just the fear that they feel. So if it comes down to it, I'd rather be loved. Love and respect go a lot farther than fear."

Still, in a pinch, fear will work. And I can't think of anyone who inspires fear like Chuck Zito. The ability to instill primordial dread in others is a gift accorded to few humans. I'm fascinated with mythic destruction machines such as Mike Tyson in his prime. It comforts me to know that these monster sharks are swimming out there, predatory and uncivilized, uncouth and appealing.

Chuck Zito has made fear, charm, and honesty work to his advantage. His career has progressed from being a bodyguard for Hollywood's upper crust....to becoming a Hollywood stunt man and actor in his own right...and finally to beating up some of Hollywood's top stars.

The deed he's most famous for was when he decked Belgian action hero Jean-Claude Van Damme at a Manhattan strip club in February, 1998.

"The man who calls himself The Muscles from Brussels went down like a sack of potatoes and curled up in the fetal position after taking a blow from his former bodyguard," read an article in *The Globe*. "This ain't the movies!" Zito reportedly shouted as Van Damme lay in a heap, "This is the street, and I own the street!"

"[Van Damme] is just a very arrogant and disrespectful person," Zito told the *New York Post*, whose front-page headline was JEAN-CLAUDE VAN SLAMMED! "He was saying, 'Chuck Zito doesn't have any heart.' There are people who will take that kind of abuse. I am not one of them," claimed the man who came to be known as "The Van-Damminator."

Although one news account says Zito knocked out actor Gary "I'm Ugly" Busey, Chuck tells me he only "bitch-slapped" him. "He's just another guy who's disrespectful. He just got stupid and jumped in my face, so I bitch-slapped him because he had a plate in his head. I said, 'I bitch-slapped you like a girl.'...Maybe that's why I don't get so much work—I'm known for cracking a few celebrities," he laughs.

I ask Chuck whether he could kick California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's ass. "Without a doubt," he says. "But I did four movies with Arnold, and I got a lot of respect for Arnold. He couldn't even speak English, and he went from becoming the world's greatest bodybuilder to the number-one action hero, to the governor of California. I respect that."

So if Arnold's the governor of our biggest state, and Chuck can kick his ass, it only follows that Chuck Zito should be president.

Actually, the mythic figure he most reminds me of is the Muslim divinity Allah, who is beneficent and merciful until you cross him.

Then he'll kick your ass.

With so much ass-kicking goin' on, I ask Chuck how he's able to avoid assault charges. This was his original answer:

"I've been pretty lucky that nobody's pressed charges. I guess they're afraid to get their asses kicked again."

After I faxed him a transcript of his quotes for this article,

Chuck left a voicemail message asking me to tweak the second sentence:

"Make it read, 'I guess they're afraid to get beat up again' instead of 'their asses kicked.' There's too many ass-kickin's in there."

I disagree, Chuck, even at the risk of getting my ass kicked. When it comes to Chuck Zito, there are never too many ass-kickin's.



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