



**By Guru Scott McQuaid**

*"In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the experienced mind there are few."*

The origins of the karambit blade come from Indonesia's island of Java, tribal folklore says it was inspired by the claws of the tiger. The karambit was originally an agricultural implement designed to rake roots, gather threshing and plant rice. As it was weaponized, the blade developed more curve to maximize its cutting potential.

Through Indonesia's trade network in South East Asia, the karambit knife spread into Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Thailand with each country slightly adapting its appearance.

European accounts tell of Indonesian soldiers armed with a *kriss* (long knife) at their waist, holding a spear with a concealed karambit.

The karambit was the weapon for the last line of defense. The warrior tribes practicing *pencak silat* soon began to utilize the karambit by simply adding it onto their existing techniques. Various silat systems throughout Asia have applied this curved blade differently.

There are many regional variants of the karambit, the length of the blade differs from village or blacksmith. Some curve more than others, some feature two blades, one on each side of the handle.

The karambit blade was originally the choice of blade used by women warriors, it is primarily a close quarter weapon. The most famous karambit is the *kuku macan* which literally translates to 'tiger claw'. This knife is endemic to Sumatra, Central Java, and Madura. The tiger claw version is short in length allowing more powerful cutting strokes and ripping motion.

The *Harimau Berantai Silat* (chained tiger) style uses the tiger claw karambit to target eyes, groin, biceps, forearms, the wrist and the Achilles tendons. The movement of the blade is to pass through your opponent in motion while still using all other techniques--the sharp blade merely aids the attack.

The Minangkabau tribe of West Sumatra re-designed the karambit's short hook into a long curved blade called *lawi ayam* which means 'chicken's tail feather'. This blade is used in an upward ripping movement into the bowels of the intended victim.

