



Cthulhu-Fu

Martial Arts in *Call of Cthulhu*

by Shane Ivey

The martial arts rules in *Call of Cthulhu* have always been cursory, and with good reason. *Call of Cthulhu* isn't *Feng Shui*. It's a game of mystery and horror, better suited to bespectacled intellectuals than Jackie Chan wannabes. And in 1920s-era *Call of Cthulhu*, martial arts are rare in Western civilization to begin with; of the oriental martial arts, only judo had any following among white Americans. But with modern-day *Call of Cthulhu*, martial arts become more prominent: every sort of martial arts training is commonplace, and they become more and more useful for investigators - especially given the severe consequences that can attend simply shooting every cultist in sight. In *Delta Green*, they're inevitable.

The fact is, fights happen. Sure, the really gruesome horrors are far beyond the ken and caliber of even the hardest Marine, but the nasty cultists that worship those horrors are not. The players are sometimes going to welcome that small relief against the eldritch terrors waiting to blast their sanity to gibbering bits. And in *Delta Green*, most agents are either cops or spies who ought to have some training in taking the human terrors on.

With that in mind, these rules are meant to expand unarmed combat in *Call of Cthulhu*, the martial arts skill in particular, making it a little more flexible, flavorful, and interesting, and hopefully even helping the Keeper and players to portray hand-to-hand fights with a little more verisimilitude.

(And Keeper, don't worry. We all know that big 2D6 kick still won't do jack against the shoggoth in the basement.)

Martial Arts Effects

There are numerous martial arts subskills, each representing a distinct style of unarmed combat training (see below). You should treat martial arts like any skill group, such as languages or crafts or art: there are many distinct skills which fall under the same category (Martial Arts (karate), Martial Arts (judo), Martial Arts (aikido), and so on), and each must be developed separately.

Each subskill, or style, offers advantages in a few of the following skills. The effect of martial arts varies with the attack or skill being performed.

Fist/Punch, Kick, or Head Butt: If the attack roll is also a successful martial arts skill roll, the base damage of the unarmed attack is doubled (i.e., a punch attack does 2D3 rather than 1D3). If an unarmed parry roll is also a successful martial arts skill roll, the parry will affect a melee weapon attack.

Grapple: The martial arts skill can be used in place of the character's STR vs. STR resistance roll when attempting to maintain or escape from a hold. When used to harm the target, if the grapple roll is also a successful martial arts skill roll, the base damage is doubled to 2D6. Alternately, the martial arts skill rating can be used in place of the character's grapple skill rating, with the same limitations as for Fist/Punch, Kick, or Head Butt.

Dodge: If the dodge roll is also a successful martial arts skill roll, the character can take a melee attack action in the same round as the dodge. (The character still cannot launch a ranged attack and dodge in the same round.)

Weapon Skill (varies with style): The martial arts skill can be used in place of the character's attack and parry skill with a designated weapon. The chance of an impale is not affected, and the character cannot obtain an experience check in the weapon skill if the martial arts skill rating is used instead. Note that this effect only applies to melee weapons, not to unarmed attack skills.

Non-Weapon Skill (varies with style): The martial arts skill can be used in place of the character's normal rating with the designated skill. The character cannot obtain an experience check in the skill if the martial arts skill rating is used instead.

Martial Arts Styles and Skills

Aikido Dodge Grapple Weapon: Knife	Boxing Fist/Punch Dodge Head Butt	Capoeira Kick Dodge Skill: Jump
Filipino Kali Fist/Punch Kick Weapon: Knife	Jiu-Jitsu Grapple Dodge Weapon: Knife	Judo Grapple Dodge Fist/Punch
Karate Fist/Punch Kick Head Butt	Kendo Fist/Punch Kick Weapon: Sword	Kickboxing Fist/Punch Dodge Fist
Kung Fu Fist/Punch Kick Weapon: Club	Savate Fist/Punch Dodge Kick	Special Forces Training Fist/Punch Grapple Weapon: Knife

Example: Agent Marlow has Martial Arts (aikido) at 62%, Grapple at 69%, Dodge at 50%, and Knife skill at base. Using his Martial Arts (aikido) skill, he can make knife attacks or parries at 62% (but his chance of an impale remains 5%, from his 25% skill). If his grapple attack roll is also a successful martial arts roll, he can inflict double damage with a successful grapple attack. And he can use his martial arts skill to always have a 62% chance of escaping a grapple hold, even against an opponent of much higher Strength. Because his martial arts skill is higher than his dodge skill, any time he makes a successful dodge he can still launch a melee attack in the same round. However, his high aikido skill gives him no advantage in launching punches, kicks, or head butts.

But What About [insert your favorite style here]?

Obviously, the chart above is not meant to be comprehensive. If you want to have a character be an expert in some other form of martial arts, feel free to make it up on the spot based on the most prominent characteristics of the style. To keep things more or less balanced, restrict the effects to three distinct skills, as in the styles above. Give it a name, pick three skills, and you're set.

A Word About Damage

Because hands and feet simply lack the deadly penetrating power of knives and crowbars, This article recommends using the "subdual attack" rules in *Call of Cthulhu* as the default for unarmed attacks, but with a twist: any "special success" unarmed attack (i.e., an attack which would be an impale with an impaling weapon) inflicts full damage, not subdual damage. This allows for the crippling and killing trauma that *can* be done hand to hand, without ensuring that every fistfight leaves a character in traction, or every foot is as good as a .45.

Of course, it won't bother that shoggoth much either way. But won't you breathe a little easier when that security guard takes you on?

Article publication date: August 24, 2001

192 *Pyramid* subscribers rated this article **3.20** on a scale of 1 to 5. Visit the [ratings page](#) for more info.

Copyright © 2001 by [Steve Jackson Games](#). All rights reserved. Pyramid subscribers are permitted to read this article online, or download it and print out a single hardcopy for personal use. Copying this text to any other online system or BBS, or making more than one hardcopy, is *strictly prohibited*. So please don't. And if you encounter copies of this article elsewhere on the web, please report it to webmaster@sjgames.com.



[Home](#) - [Subscribe!](#) - [Current Issue](#) - [Playtesting](#) - [Chat](#) - - - [Feedback](#)