

Let's face it—most action movies don't waste time on plot and characterization. Hong Kong flicks take this, like most other conventions, to the extreme. The emphasis in martial arts movies is action, action, action. This chapter gives you the tools to recreate that mayhem in the privacy of your own home, kicking off with the martial arts rules and following it up with a more general section on combat, stunts, and feats. By the time you're done reading this chapter, you'll be able to run a fight the HK movie way.

Martial Arts

Martial arts are an important part of *Dragon Fist*. Nearly everyone in a Hong Kong action movie can use martial arts, and your characters reflect this. Even wizards, who traditionally avoid physical combat, can use martial arts in this setting. The previous chapter provided progression tables for martial arts special maneuvers; this section describes those maneuvers and tells you how to make the most of them.

The Basics

Although there are a wide array of martial arts styles, they all share some basic fundamentals. Every school teaches footwork, punches, and kicks, as well as the use of some associated weapons. Weapons are an integral part of many styles. They can be used in conjunction with most special maneuvers, except for those that determine martial arts damage (such as Iron Palm and Invincible Eagle Claw).

Martial arts are as deadly as any weapon, and damage from such attacks is no different from that inflicted by swords and arrows. This damage represents the effects of all kinds of moves, from punches to kicks to the use of improvised weapons. Describing attacks adds excitement and color to the game; encourage players to go for it!

All characters start with a basic martial arts damage of 1d4 and a basic Armor Class of 10. As a character increases in level and learns more special maneuvers, he or she learns additional stances and strikes that can improve these numbers. Some higher-rank maneuvers have prerequisites; these are noted in the maneuver description.



Chi

In its broadest sense chi means “energy,” in particular life energy. It is a fundamental component of the universe and a complement to the Five Elements. Chi pulses through living beings much as does blood, and regulating this flow is the goal of much martial arts training. Ideally, when yin and yang are balanced, so too is chi. Those who have mastered their chi flow can store, conserve, and focus it.

While the primary goal of regulating chi flow is better health, chi can also be released forcefully and with devastating effect. Martial arts masters also learn a series of vital points, allowing them to cause paralyzation and even death by blocking off the chi flow of their opponents.

Martial Arts Maneuvers

Tianguo is home to hundreds of different martial arts. Students routinely leave their masters to found their own schools, and then their students do the same. Quantifying such a vast array of styles and moves would be tedious at best. What’s important for playing is the effects of these styles within the game. Dragon Fist martial arts are defined by a series of special maneuvers. How these are achieved is unimportant, though it’s more fun if players describe their moves in outlandish detail.

The mechanics of these maneuvers are described below, along with sample names. Players are encouraged to make up evocative names of their own to describe these powers.

Rank 1 Maneuvers

Cobra Strike: The character can make a called shot (see the “Combat Considerations” section below) at –2 to hit instead of the usual –4.

Crane Stance: The character’s AC is increased to 12.

Grace of the Crane: The character suffers no damage from falls of up to 20 feet and only half damage for falls of over 20 feet.

Iron Palm: The character’s base martial arts damage is increased to 1d6.

Mantis Strike: The character can make a special stunning attack with a –2 penalty to hit. If the attack succeeds, his or her opponent must make a saving throw vs. paralyzation or be stunned for one round. Stunned characters can’t perform stunts, and attacks against them are +4 to hit.

Speed of the Leopard: By performing an Acrobatics stunt at the beginning of the round, the character can increase his or her Move for that round (normally 60 feet; see below) by a number of feet equal to 10 times the result of the stunt die roll.

Spring of the Tiger: By performing an Acrobatics stunt at the beginning of the round, the character can withdraw from combat at full speed without giving opponents a chance to take a free swing.

Way of the Snake: The character can fight effectively even when lying on the ground.

Wind in the Reeds: The character can stand up from a prone position without spending a round to do so. (Attacks against prone characters are normally +4 to hit, and they must spend the next round getting up.)

Wuxia: The character can jump 20 feet vertically, plus an additional 1 foot per level.

Rank 2 Maneuvers

Blood of the Dragon: Once a day, the character can use chi energy to heal himself or herself for 2 hit points per level.

Claw of the Crab: The character makes an attack at –2 to hit. Success means the foe has been disarmed. The weapon flies 2d6 feet in a random direction. By making a successful second to hit roll at the same penalty, the character can send the flying weapon anywhere within range (for example, into the hands of a nearby companion).

Martial Arts Maneuvers by Rank

Rank 1

Cobra Strike
Crane Stance
Grace of the Crane
Iron Palm
Mantis Strike
Speed of the Leopard
Spring of the Tiger
Way of the Snake
Wind in the Reeds
Wuxia

Rank 2

Blood of the Dragon
Claw of the Crab
Dance of the Golden Lotus
Flying Dragon Fist
Mantis Stance
Might of the Tiger
One Hundred Eyes
Pounce of the Tiger
Rain of Heaven

Rank 3

Cobra Stance
Fists of Fury
Nerve Strike
Plum Blossom Fist
Purity of Chi
Ride the Wind
Way of the Crab

Rank 4

Invincible Eagle Claw
Poisoning the Spirit
Step of the Crane
Torrent of Chi
Whirlwind Strike

Rank 5

Breath Stealer
Five Elements Fist
Miracle Palm
Scorpion’s Sting
Ultimate Stance
Way of the Dragon

What You Can Do in a Round

Sometimes it's hard to judge exactly what a character can do in a minute of game time. The following guidelines should give you a good idea of what's possible.

No matter what else you do in the round, you can always:

Move up to half your Move rate (usually 60 feet), or
Use the Wuxia martial arts maneuver to jump around.

In addition to moving around the battlefield, you can perform one major action each round. These include the following:

Make an attack (or attacks if you can strike more than once a round). This includes both missile and melee attacks.

Cast a single spell (if the casting time is 1 round or less).

Perform a feat (see the "Feats" section below).

Bind a character's wounds.

Move the rest of your Move rate (usually 60 feet).

Use a magic item or drink a potion.

Use a thieving skill (note that some of these take more than 1 round to complete, however).

Dance of the Golden Lotus: The character's casting speed for spells is increased by 1. This is usable only by shamans and wizards.

Flying Dragon Fist: The character's base martial arts damage is increased to 1d8.

Prerequisite: Iron Palm.

Mantis Stance: The character's AC increases to 14, +1 for each additional Stance maneuver known. For example, a character who had previously learned the Crane Stance would have an AC of 15.

Might of the Tiger: By performing a Fortitude stunt at the beginning of the round, the character can smash through wooden walls and similar inanimate obstacles without taking any damage.

One Hundred Eyes: The character can detect opponents on all sides, providing they are not invisible.

Pounce of the Tiger: The character makes an attack at -2 to hit. Success indicates the opponent is knocked down and becomes prone. Attacks against prone characters are normally +4 to hit, and they must spend the next round getting up.

Rain of Heaven: The character can fight equally well with either hand. This allows an extra attack each round (using either a weapon or martial arts). Characters wielding two-handed weapons cannot use this maneuver.

Rank 3 Maneuvers

Cobra Stance: The character's AC is increased to 16, +1 for each additional Stance maneuver known. For instance, a character who had previously learned the Crane and Mantis Stances would have an AC of 18.

Fists of Fury: By performing an Acrobatics stunt at the beginning of the round, the character can strike two adjacent opponents with a single attack. Roll to hit once against the higher AC of the two opponents; on a hit, both take damage.

Nerve Strike: The character attacks with a -4 penalty to hit. If the attack is successful, his or her opponent must make a saving throw vs. paralyzation or become immobile for 1 round. Immobilized characters are hit automatically.

Plum Blossom Fist: The character attacks with a -4 penalty to hit; if successful, he or she doubles the damage rolled (before modifiers). For example, a fighter specialized in martial arts strikes her opponent with Plum Blossom Fist. Because the character also knows Flying Dragon Fist, her normal damage is 1d8. The player rolls a 6, which is doubled to 12, then adds the specialization bonus of +2 for a total damage of 14.

Purity of Chi: The character gains Magic Resistance of 2% per level. By making a successful Magic Resistance check, he or she is untouched by a magical effect.

Ride the Wind: The character can "fly" by running through the air. The movement rate is 60 feet plus 10 feet per level.

Way of the Crab: The character suffers only half damage from one class of weapon. Choose from slashing, piercing, blunt, or missile. However, magical weapons of the selected type do normal damage.

Rank 4 Maneuvers

Invincible Eagle Claw: The character's base martial arts damage is increased to 1d10.

Prerequisite: Flying Dragon Fist.

Poison the Spirit: The character gives up all attacks in this round in order to make one debilitating attack. If the attack is successful, the target must make a saving throw vs. poison at -2 or lose 1 point of Constitution. Each day thereafter, a new save (also at -2) must be made or another point of Constitution is lost. This continues until the character makes the save is made, receives a cure disease spell, or loses all Constitution, in which case he or she dies. Once the progression of the poisoning has stopped, the character recovers 1 point of Constitution per full day of rest.

Step of the Crane: The character's step is so light that he or she can walk, even run, on

water. This maneuver also allows grass glide: running on top of grass while never touching the earth underneath.

Torrent of Chi: The character can make a missile attack with a 60-foot range that does 1d12 damage if successful. This is an Average speed action (modifier +4).

Whirlwind Strike: The character can attack a number of opponents equal to his or her level once each in a single melee round. No opponent can have more than 2 Hit Dice.

Rank 5 Maneuvers

Breath Stealing: Once per day the character can add the hit points just inflicted on an opponent to his or her own. This cannot take the character above his or her starting score.

Five Elements Fist: The character makes an attack at –6 to hit; if successful, the damage is tripled (before modifiers). For example, a fighter specialized in martial arts strikes his opponent with Five Elements Fist. Because the character also knows Invincible Eagle Claw, his normal damage is 1d10. The player rolls a 8, which is tripled to 24, then adds the specialization bonus of +2 for a total damage of 26. Ouch!

Miracle Palm: Once per week, the character can cure disease as per the shaman spell of the same name.

Scorpion's Sting: This is the same as the rank 3 maneuver Nerve Strike, but its effects last for 1d4+1 rounds instead of a single round.

Ultimate Stance: The character's AC is increased to 18, +1 for each additional Stance maneuver known. Thus, a character who has already learned Crane Stance, Mantis Stance, and Cobra Stance would have an AC of 21.

Way of the Dragon: The character takes no damage from one class of weapon. Choose from slashing, piercing, blunt, or missile. However, magical weapons of the selected type do normal damage.

Combat

Exciting fight scenes are the heart of Hong Kong action movies. The jaw-dropping physical prowess of Jet Li and Jackie Chan are what make their movies great, and a good game of Dragon Fist should recreate that kind of kinetic mayhem. Before leaping into cinematic combat, however, you'll need to know a few game terms and the way combat is simulated in play.

Anatomy of a Fight Scene

A covert group of secret society members are trying to slip through a cordon of imperial troops. They crest a rise—and walk right into an enemy patrol. What happens?

When a fight breaks out, narrative time ends and combat time begins. The fight scene is broken down into combat rounds, each of which represents 1 minute in the game. In each round, a character can perform one major action, such as making an attack or casting a spell. The fight continues, one combat round resolving at a time, until one side is victorious or the fight ends in some other manner.

Surprise

The first thing to do is to determine if either side is surprised. This can happen in any situation in which one side is taken unawares. In some instances (such as the example above) both sides have a chance to be surprised.

To determine surprise, each side rolls 1d10. If the result is 1–3, that side is surprised. Their opponents get a free round of actions before the surprised side can react in any way (including stunts). If both sides are surprised, no one acts that round; everyone is too confused!

Attacking a surprised opponent gives a +1 bonus to hit. Surprised characters suffer a –1 penalty to their saving throws.

Combat Terminology

Armor Class: A measure of how difficult a target is to hit, either because of armor worn or a martial arts stance. Armor Class (AC) starts at 10 and goes up; the higher the AC the better.

Combat Round: A unit of time equal to 1 minute, in which a character can do one major action.

Damage: Every character and creature has a hit point total, which represents vitality and life force. Successful attacks cause damage that reduces the hit point total. When a character's hit point total is reduced to 0, he or she is out of the fight and possibly dead. Damage can also be inflicted by spells, poison, fire, falling, and myriad other causes.

Initiative: This determines the order things happen during a combat round. Initiative is part luck, part skill, and part circumstance, as determined by the stunt die roll (if any) and the speed rating of the weapon, spell, or maneuver. The highest initiative score goes first, followed by other scores in descending order.

Movement: All characters and monsters in Dragon Fist have a Move score, which is the number of feet they can move in 1 round if no other actions are taken. For most characters, this is 120 feet, but monsters often move faster.

Saving Throw: A measure of a character's resistance to special attacks such as magic, poison, and monsters' breath weapons. These scores improve as characters rise in level.

Speed: Swinging a sword, shooting a bow, casting a spell, or just posing dramatically in a martial arts stance—all take a certain amount of time, measured by speed. The speed rating of an action is added to the stunt die roll (if any) to determine initiative. Slow (Sl) actions have a speed of 2; Average (Av), 4; and Fast (Fa), 6. The higher the speed number the better.

Turn: Ten combat rounds (10 minutes).

Types of Stunts

There are six stunt types, each based on a different ability and listed below. Each has a summary of what bonuses it provides; no matter what else you do that round, you always get the relevant stunt bonus. Additionally, you can use your stunts to perform feats (see the “Feats” section below). Attempting a feat is your action for the round, so you cannot also attack that round. Each entry lists some sample feats to give you an idea of the sort of things you can do.

Might (Strength)

Bonus: to hit in melee and to damage.

Sample feats: breaking down doors; snapping restraints.

Acrobatic (Dexterity)

Bonus: to AC and to hit with missiles.

Sample feats: running across the heads of a crowd; juggling knives.

Fortitude (Constitution)

Bonus: to save vs. poison and to hit points that round.

Sample feats: walking through fire; resisting pain.

Savvy (Intelligence)

Bonus: to any one roll that round.

Sample feats: solving puzzles; deciphering codes.

Insight (Wisdom)

Bonus: to initiative and saves vs. magic and fear.

Sample feats: resisting temptation; reading motivations.

Charm (Charisma)

Bonus: to reaction rolls and save vs. charm.

Sample feats: fast talking; verbal trickery.

Combat Resolution

After surprise is determined, the action starts. Each round resolves in the sequence described below.

1. Each player declares what type of stunt he or she wants to perform and rolls the appropriate stunt die. The DM secretly does the same for each opponent.
2. Each player adds the speed rating of the character's action (2, 4, or 6) to the stunt die result. The DM does the same for each opponent. (If a character has no stunt die, treat this as a result of 0.) The total is the character's initiative.
3. The character or monster with the highest initiative takes the first action, followed by the other combatants in descending initiative order.

When all the combatants have had a chance to act, the round is over. Start over from step 1 and repeat until the combat is over.

Making an Attack

The most common action during a combat is the attack. Both missile and melee attacks are handled the same way.

1. When it's your turn to act in the round, announce who your character is attacking and with what (for instance, a bowshot or a martial arts maneuver).
2. Roll 1d20 and add all your bonuses to the result. You usually will get bonuses to hit from Might stunts (for melee attacks) or Acrobatics stunts (for missile attacks), plus any class bonus. Magic items and spells can modify this further, as can the fighter's weapon specialization.
3. Compare the total of the roll and bonuses to your opponent's Armor Class. If you've equaled or exceeded that number, you've scored a hit.
4. Once you've hit, roll for damage. The type of die rolled depends on the type of attack, either base martial arts damage or a weapon's damage. Add any bonuses (such as from Might stunts, specialization, or magic weapons) to the result. The total is deducted from the opponent's hit points.

Example: Liu Lam, a 3rd level Righteous Fist fighter, attacks a hopping vampire with a flying kick to its ugly face. Liu performs a Might stunt that round and gets a 3 on his die roll (1d4). His bonuses are +3 for the stunt, +1 for the Righteous Fists' specialization in martial arts, and +2 for being a fighter, for a total bonus to hit of +6. Liu's player rolls 1d20 and gets a 13. Adding the bonus of +6 gives a very respectable total of 19. The hopping vampire has an Armor Class of 16. Since Liu's total to hit was greater than the vampire's AC, he has succeeded in hitting the foul creature! Now for the damage. Liu has learned the Flying Dragon Fist martial arts maneuver, so his base martial arts damage is 1d8. He rolls an eight-sided die, getting a 7. Adding in +3 for his Might stunt and +2 for his specialization, he comes up with a total damage score of 12. His kick connects with deadly effect and sends the vampire sprawling backward.

Stunts

Combat in **Dragon Fist** revolves around stunts. These represent the kind of wild moves you see in Hong Kong action movies. When Michelle Yeoh balances a tray of tofu while beating up a thug in Wing Chun, she's performing a stunt. Same goes for Jackie Chan when he fights on burning-hot coals in Drunken Master II.

Dragon Fist stunts are based on ability scores and increase as characters go up in level. Each round you choose a type of stunt to perform and describe exactly what your character is doing. This provides certain bonuses for that round only. The next round you pick a new stunt, and so on. Nothing prevents using the same type of stunt every round, but it's a lot more fun to vary your style.

Characters can make a stunt roll and perform a major action each round. What stunt you choose depends on the kind of bonus you'd like to have that round. If your top priority is killing a rampaging monster, you'd probably want to make a Might stunt, which adds to your rolls to hit and do damage. However, if your character is wounded, you might be more interested in defense. In that case, you'd perform an Acrobatics stunt to get a bonus to your Armor Class. Note that you can still make a melee attack if you perform an Acrobatics stunt—you simply gain no stunt bonuses to the hit and damage rolls that round. (This applies to other major actions as well.) You'll find a breakdown of the stunt types and the bonuses each gives you in the box above.

Example: *Returning to Liu Lam and his fight with the hopping vampire, we find that Liu is in bad shape. He's taken some hits and is in danger of losing the fight. On the next round, he considers a Might stunt, which will help him hit and do damage, but feels it's too risky. He decides instead on a Fortitude stunt. The result of his stunt die will add to his hit points for this round only, and any damage he takes will come off these bonus points first. His Fortitude die is 1d6; Liu rolls a 5. The vampire beats Liu's initiative this round and scores a hit, inflicting 7 points of damage. Because of his stunt, Liu only suffers 2 real points of damage (5 having been absorbed by his bonus hit points). This isn't enough to kill Liu, so on his turn he makes another martial arts attack. He doesn't get any stunt bonuses for the attack, but he still gets all his normal bonuses (specialization and his fighter class bonus).*

Two stunt bonuses require a bit of explaining. Fortitude stunts, as the example above illustrates, give you bonus hit points to offset any damage you take that round. However, these hit points are temporary! If you don't get hit that round, you don't get to keep the extra points. Savvy stunts, unlike the others, add to only one thing that round—but that can be any die roll the character chooses. The clever character has figured out a clever way to achieve a desired effect, such as adding to damage by spotting a monster's weak spot or getting a bonus on a saving throw by taking cover behind a tree. This stunt is very flexible, but you must choose which die roll to modify before making that roll.

Feats

A feat is a special form of stunt for resolving actions not covered by the rest of the rules; this serves as a default skill system for the game. Performing a feat counts as your major action for that round, so you cannot also attack or cast a spell. You can try all kinds of wacky stuff with the feat system and really play up the improbable action of HK's best.

So, what you can do with feats? Just about anything. You can use Might to break down doors, Charm to fast-talk a guard, or Savvy to crack a puzzle. Get creative! The DM decides how likely a feat is to succeed and ought to give the players a fighting chance to pull off most. The game is meant to reflect a cinematic sensibility, rather than realistic simulation, so characters should succeed more than they fail.

Resolving a feat is easy. The player describes what the character is trying to do, and the DM assigns a Target Number (TN) depending on his or her estimate of the difficulty (see the "Target Numbers" sidebar). The player rolls 1d20 and adds the applicable stunt bonus, so he or she must perform an appropriate stunt that round. (In other words, if you want to use Dexterity to run across the heads of a crowd, don't make an Insight stunt that round!) If the total is equal to or greater than the TN, the feat succeeds.

Feats are usually Average speed actions. The DM can change the speed of the feat if it seems appropriate.

Wounds and Dying

Every character and creature in the game has a certain number of hit points, representing vitality and general toughness. As characters rise in level, they gain additional hit points: The more experienced you are, the tougher you become. For example, a conscripted peasant sol-

Target Numbers

An important part of the DM's job is determining Target Numbers for feats the PCs perform. These can vary widely depending on what is being attempted: Let the player describe the desired action, then decide on how difficult it is.

Easy feats have a TN of 10.

Example: knocking down a door (Might).

Average feats have a TN of 15.

Example: staring down an imperial officer (Charm).

Difficult feats have TN of 20.

Example: running up a wall (Acrobatics).

Absurd feats have a TN of 25.

Example: swimming underwater for half an hour (Fortitude).

You can also use ability scores to figure Target Numbers. This works especially well when NPCs attempt feats that affect the PCs (or vice versa). For example, a charlatan tries to fast-talk some money out of one of the PCs. The DM decides this is a Charm feat and that the Target Number for success is the PC's Intelligence score. If the charlatan fails to roll that number, the PC has seen through the shallow play.

The danger of using ability scores as Target Numbers is that they do not improve as characters rise in level. A character's Strength at 9th level is probably the same as it was at 3rd. To reflect the fact that higher-level characters are better than those of less experience, add the character's level to the ability score. In the example above, if the PC had a 14 Intelligence and was 6th level, the charlatan would have to roll a Target Number of 20.

dier might have 4 hit points; a seasoned veteran, 10.

Whenever characters and monsters suffer damage, this is reflected in a loss of hit points. Damage can come from many sources: weapons, spells, poison, and so on. There is no real difference between types of damage (since hit points are an abstract concept to begin with), and being wounded has no real effect on what a character can do. Remember, this is like the movies! It's only when you drop below 1 hit point that you get into trouble.

A character whose hit point total falls below 1 is knocked unconscious. Unconscious characters are helpless and can be automatically slain by anyone willing to spend a round doing so. For each round the unconscious character's wounds remain unattended, he or she loses an additional hit point. A character who falls to -10 hit points is dead. This loss of hit points can be stopped by any character who spends a round binding the wounds.

Those with an exceptionally strong will can sometimes fight on even after suffering terrible wounds. Any character who is about to drop below 1 hit point can make an Insight feat with a TN of 20 to remain conscious. While heroic, this is also dangerous: The character still loses 1 hit point a round until bandaged and will be killed by any strike that reduces his or her hit points to -10 .

Healing

Wounded characters can be healed by natural or magical means. Natural healing is slower, but is always available. Magical healing is very quick but requires the spells of shamans and certain magical devices. Healing can never restore more hit points to a character than his or her starting total.

Characters healing naturally always regain at least 1 point a day; by making a Fortitude stunt at the end of each day of rest they can get back hit points equal to the result of the stunt die. "Rest" is defined as low activity, but can include riding and light travel. Characters enjoying full bed rest double the result of their stunt die and always heal at least 3 points of damage even without Fortitude.

Magical healing usually is bestowed by shaman spells such as cure light wounds. (See Chapter 4: Magic.) These cures are instantaneous and require no special rest. They are especially handy in the midst of combat. Characters who have fallen below 1 hit point need to be stabilized before they can receive magical healing. If 1 round is spent binding the character's wounds, healing proceeds as if the character had 0 hit points.

Example: A Great Immortal is hit by a sword, and his hit point total drops to -4 . The next round a White Lotus binds his wounds, preventing him from losing an additional point of damage. The following round the White Lotus casts cure light wounds and rolls a 5. This raises the Great Immortal's hit points to 5, so he can act the next round.

Saving Throws

A saving throw is a die roll that gives a character a chance to avoid such hazards as poison, spells, and monsters' breath weapons. Saving throws represent instinct, training, and plain old luck. The exact action is not important; DMs and players are encouraged to think up lively and colorful explanations for why a saving throw succeeded or failed. Explanations tailored to the events of the moment enhance the excitement of the game.

Rolling Saving Throws

To make a saving throw, a player rolls 1d20 and adds any appropriate stunt bonuses (Fortitude stunts, for instance, add to saves against poison). The result must be equal to or greater than a saving throw number based on the character's class and level; the range of numbers appears in Table 3-1 below. Monsters make their saving throws using the numbers for fighters, substituting hit dice for levels.

Saving throws are made in a variety of situations, which for simplicity's sake are divided into five categories: paralyzation, poison, or death magic; petrification or polymorph; rod, staff,

or wand; breath weapon; and spell. The type of saving throw is determined by the specific spell, monster, magical item, or situation. Circumstances that don't fall exactly into one of these categories are adjudicated by the DM, who decides what saving throw is most appropriate.

TABLE 3-1: CHARACTER SAVING THROWS

Character Class/ Experience Level	Attack to be Saved Against				
	Death Magic	Poison, or or Wand	Paralyzation, Rod, Staff, or Polymorph	Petrification Weapon*	Breath Spell**
FIGHTER					
0	16	18	17	20	19
1–2	14	16	15	17	17
3–4	13	15	14	16	16
5–6	11	13	12	13	14
7–8	10	12	11	12	13
9–10	8	10	9	9	11
WIZARD					
1–5	14	11	13	15	12
6–10	13	9	11	13	10
SHAMAN					
1–3	10	14	13	16	15
4–6	9	13	12	15	14
7–9	7	11	10	13	12
10	6	10	9	12	11
THIEF					
1–4	13	14	12	16	15
5–8	12	12	11	15	13
9–10	11	10	10	14	11

* Excluding those that cause petrification or polymorph.

** Excluding those for which another saving throw type is specified, such as death, petrification, or polymorph.

Saving Throw Priority

Sometimes the type of saving throw required by a situation or item isn't clear, or more than one category may apply. For this reason, the saving throw categories in Table 3-1 are listed in descending order of importance, reading from left to right. If a character is forced to make a save and two types seem equally appropriate (for instance, a spell that causes paralyzation), use the save that is higher in priority.

Paralyzation, Poison, and Death Magic: This category is used whenever a character is affected by a paralyzing attack (regardless of source), poison of any strength, or certain spells and magical items that would otherwise kill the character outright. This saving throw can also apply to situations requiring exceptional force of will or physical fortitude.

Rod, Staff, or Wand: As its name implies, this category applies whenever a character is affected by the powers of a magical rod, staff, or wand, provided another save of higher priority isn't called for. This saving throw is sometimes appropriate for situations in which a character faces a magical attack from an unusual source.

Petrification or Polymorph: This category is used any time a character would be turned to stone (petrified) or changed into a different form (polymorphed) by a monster, spell, or magical item other than a rod, staff, or wand. It can also apply when the character must withstand massive physical alteration of his or her body.

Breath Weapon: A character makes this saving throw when facing monsters with magical breath, particularly the powerful blast of a dragon. It can also be used when physical stamina and Dexterity are critical to survival.

Spell: This is appropriate whenever a character attempts to resist the effects of a magical

attack, either by a spellcaster or from a magical item, provided no other type of saving throw is specified. It can also be used when resisting an attack that defies any other classification.

Voluntarily Failing Saving Throws

No save is made if the target voluntarily chooses not to resist the effect of a spell or special attack—even if he or she was duped as to its exact nature. When a character announces that he or she is not resisting, that spell or effect has its full efficacy.

The intention not to resist must be clearly stated, however. A character who is attacked by surprise or caught unawares is normally allowed a saving throw. The DM can modify this, perhaps making the chance of success worse, if the situation warrants it. Only in extreme cases of trickery and deception should an unwitting character be denied a saving throw.

The Battle at the Bridge: An Example of Combat

Using my charm and impressive contacts in the film industry, I've gotten together Jet Li, Michelle Yeoh, and Jackie Chan for a game of Dragon Fist. Unfortunately for these Hong Kong glitterati, they were forced to have dinner with Tony Danza the previous evening. Tony's influence is all too clear when they name their characters Li, Yeoh, and Chan. Li is a 5th-level Righteous Fist, Yeoh is a 6th-level Iron Monkey, and Chan is a 5th-level Dragon's Breath.

This heroic trio is seeking the Five Legendary Weapons (see Chapter 5: Experience and Magic Items), which are rumored to be hidden in the Forest of Clouds. Making their way through the Ling Mu Mountains, they come to a long rope bridge over a yawning chasm. Defending the bridge are an imperial guard captain (a 5th-level fighter), a eunuch sorcerer (a 3rd-level wizard), and six soldiers. Neither side is surprised, so combat begins as normal.

First, everyone declares and rolls their stunts and then determines initiative. Li performs a Might stunt, rolling 1d6. He rolls a 4, adds 6 for the Fast action he plans, and ends up with an initiative of 10. Yeoh makes an Acrobatics stunt, rolling 1d8, gets a 6, and adds 6 more for a Fast action for an initiative of 12. Chan executes a Savvy stunt on 1d6, gets a 3, adds 4 for an Average action, and ends up with an initiative of 7.

Meanwhile, I roll for the villains. The captain does a Might stunt, rolls a 4, adds in 4 for an Average action, and ends up with an initiative of 8. The eunuch sorcerer performs a Fortitude stunt, rolls a 3, adds 6 for a Fast action, and gets an initiative of 9. The soldiers have no stunts, so their initiative is equal to the speed of their action. They are using spears, which have an Average speed, so their initiative is 4.

Based on these results, the characters will act in this order: Yeoh, Li, eunuch sorcerer, captain, Chan, soldiers. We now join the action.

DM: OK, Michelle, you act first. What do you want to do?

Yeoh: I use my Wuxia to leap onto the support ropes of the bridge. As I'm flying through the air, I pull out three throwing spikes and hurl them at the imperial guard captain.

DM: Great! His AC is 16. Roll to hit.

Michelle rolls to hit. Since she performed an Acrobatics stunt this round, which improves missile weapon use, she gets +6 to hit with her throwing spikes. She also gets +1 for being a thief, so her total bonus to hit is +7. She can throw three spikes, so she rolls three times: 3, 10, and 16. Adding in her bonuses, she ends up with 10, 16, and 22. Since she had to get 16 (the captain's AC) or better, she has hit twice.

Yeoh: All right! I say, "Take that, lackey!" as my spikes slam home.

Michelle now rolls damage. Throwing spikes do 1d4 damage each, so she rolls 2d4, which come

up 2 and 4. Her total damage is 6.

DM: The captain says, "You'll have to do better than that, rebel dog!"
Jet, you're up. What are you doing?

Li: I run across the bridge, deliver a flying kick to the captain's head, and then backflip off him so I land in my stance.

DM: Man, you guys have it in for that poor captain. OK, roll to hit.

Jet rolls 1d20. He gets +2 to hit because he's a fighter, +1 because he's specialized in martial arts, and +4 because of his Might stunt, for a total bonus to hit of +7. He rolls a 10, adds 7, and hits with a final score of 17. His martial arts damage is 1d8. He rolls an 8, adds his damage bonus of +6 (+4 for the Might stunt and +2 for specialization), and does a whopping 14 points of damage to the captain.

Li: "Ha ha, you'll never defeat my Twirling Crane style!"

DM: As you stand gloating over the captain, the eunuch sorcerer shouts words of power and lashes out at you with a long silk scarf. You hear his high-pitched voice scream, "Iron scarf!" as the blow takes you full in the face.

Iron scarf is a 1st-level wizard spell. It hits automatically and does 1d8 damage, plus 1 hit point per level of the caster. I roll for the eunuch. He gets a 5, adds 3 for his level, and does 8 points of damage to Li, reducing him from 35 hit points to 27.

Li: "Curse you, eunuch. You'll face my wrath soon enough."

DM: Li, as you turn to curse the sorcerer, the captain leaps towards you with sword drawn. He grasps the hilt with both hands and drives the point towards you as finishes his leap.

I roll for the captain. The total of his class, specialization, and stunt bonuses is +7. Li's AC is 14, but the captain rolls a 5. Even with his bonuses, this is adds up to only 12, so he misses.

Li: I backflip out of the way, easily avoiding his clumsy blow.

DM: The captain growls in anger, but there is nothing he can do. Jackie, it's your turn. What are you doing?

Chan: Well, no one else is taking care of these soldiers, so I cast heart ripper at them. I want to use my Savvy stunt to increase the number of targets I can affect.

DM: You want to justify that stunt for me, Jackie?

Chan: Sure! I've noticed that a couple of the soldiers are standing behind some of the others. If I line up the spell just right, I can send my bolts of power through the soldiers in the front and into those behind them.

DM: [chuckles] You're a slick one, Jackie. I'll buy that. Roll for the number of targets.

Heart ripper is a 2nd-level wizard spell (see Chapter 4: Magic). Jackie rolls 1d4 (as per the spell description) to see how many targets he can affect. He rolls a 3, adds 3 for his earlier Savvy stunt, and ends up with a 6. Since there are only six soldiers, he can nail them all!

DM: OK, these guys get a saving throw vs. spell to resist this. Let me roll.

I roll, and each and every soldier fails to save.

DM: Oh man, it's a bad day for these guys. They all failed their saves, so your bolts of power tear out their hearts. The soldiers fall to the ground in unison, leaving the captain without a unit to command. Both he and the sorcerer pale visibly.

Michelle: Way to go, Jackie. You're the man!

DM: OK, since all the soldiers are dead, they don't get to go. That's the end of the round. So everyone declare your stunts and figure your initiative . . .

Combat now continues in a new round, following the same sequence. Things don't look too good for the lackeys of the emperor, though.

Combat Considerations

For the most part, combat is easy to resolve. However, a number of wrinkles tend to crop up in games, which need to be addressed.

Called Shots

The hit point system of **Dragon Fist** does not take into account where blows land, but generalizes damage and vaguely defines the effect of wounds. However, sometimes characters may want to hit a specific point for an unusual effect. These attempts are known as called shots and can be made with both missile and melee attacks.

When a player describes his or her major action for the round, the attempt at a called shot must be specified and the intended result described in detail. If the DM agrees that this is a reasonable, the player can make an attack roll at -4 to hit. If the attack succeeds, the called shot has the intended effect. Characters with the martial arts maneuver Cobra Strike suffer only a -2 penalty to called shots.

Players may think they can cause extra damage by hitting enemies in the head or maiming them, but this is not the case. Called shots inflict only the normal damage of the weapon or martial arts attack. So what good are they?

The most potent effect of a called shot is to reduce the target's stunt bonuses. If the player can explain convincingly how the attack would inhibit a particular stunt type, that stunt's die type is reduced by one step for the rest of the combat.

Example: *A Heavenly Gates archer opts to shoot a villainous eunuch in the feet with two arrows (two separate called shots), hobbling the opponent's ability to move about. If both attacks hit, the eunuch's Acrobatics stunt roll would be reduced by two die types (from 1d6 to 1d3, for instance). Blows to the head could daze the eunuch, reducing Savvy stunts and magic use, and so on.*

Called shots can also trigger traps, shatter vials or flasks, or make opponents drop held items. As always, the DM should be flexible. If a called shot just seems too outrageous, though, try resolving it as a feat instead.

Charging

Characters next to an opponent can always make a melee attack, but just swinging at the foe lacks panache. Players love to catapult their characters into combat with a bloodcurdling battle cry. In game terms, this is called charging. Any character can charge into hand-to-hand combat, as long as he or she is less than 60 feet away from the target and not already engaged

with another foe. The psychological rush of charging a hated enemy gives the PC +1 to hit that round. However, rushing straight towards an opponent is not exactly subtle, so the character also suffers a -1 reduction to Armor Class.

Falling

Occasionally characters suffer a really bad fall, most likely because a gloating villain pushed them off a 50-foot wall. With all the leaping and flying about of wuxia films, falling damage is not usually a major concern, but sometimes it does matter. Falling characters take 1d6 damage for each 10 feet they fall; this is offset by the martial arts maneuver Grace of the Crane. To enhance the cinematic action, you may want to let characters drop for multiple rounds, so other characters can perform impressive feats to save them.

Mounted Combat

Some roleplaying games have elaborate rules for mounted combat, but Dragon Fist isn't one of them. Any character can ride a horse, and fighting on horseback is handled exactly the same way as normal combat. Think of horses as "mobile stunt platforms" and you get the idea.

Multiple Attacks and Initiative

Sooner or later, most characters are going to end up with multiple attacks per round, which can create headaches as far as initiative goes. The "realistic" answer is to stagger the attacks so that some occur early in the round and others at the end, but Dragon Fist simplifies things: Characters roll all their attacks at once when it is their turn to act. This speeds up combat immeasurably, and it's easy to imagine a martial arts master raining blows down on an opponent in quick succession.

Nonlethal Combat

Martial artists aren't always looking to kill each other. Sometimes opponents want to test their skill without doing permanent damage. Such nonlethal combat is handled as follows. Run the combat as you normally would, but keep track of the number of hit points inflicted. Only 25% of the damage is "real"; the rest is temporary and returns after the combat is over. A character knocked below 1 hit point in nonlethal combat is knocked out, but not killed.

Two-handed Attacks

Players just love the idea of attacking with weapons in both hands and are sure to ask about it. This is indeed possible. A character can use a second weapon or make an additional martial arts attack with the off hand (for example, the left hand if he or she is right-handed), but this attack has a -4 penalty to hit, while the primary attack has -2 to hit. Regardless of level or specialization, only one extra attack per round is allowed. A 9th-level Red Tiger, for instance, could make two attacks with the war sword at -2 to hit as normal, as well as one extra martial arts attack at -4. These penalties are offset by the martial arts maneuver Rain of Heaven, which is sure to be popular with your players.

Poison

Unscrupulous characters and minions of the emperor may resort to poison. Most poisons simply do damage, and the DM sets the appropriate amount. For example, a mild poison might cause 1d6 damage, while a virulent one would cause 5d10. The target usually gets to make a saving throw vs. poison to take half damage. Other poisons may cause unconsciousness or paralyzation. These allow a saving throw, and those who fail suffer the full effects. These poisons normally have a duration (1 turn, 3 hours, and so on), again set by the DM.

Dragon Masters should limit the accessibility of poison to the player characters, or risk having the game dominated by poison-crazy Ghost Eaters. When it comes down to it, poison isn't very heroic, so discourage your players from using it. Leave it in the hands of the villains, where it belongs.

Contests

Often in Hong Kong movies, two characters vie to gain the upper hand, performing outrageous stunt after outrageous stunt back and forth. These types of scenes feature a great deal of action and reaction, and are difficult to simulate in a roleplaying game. Rolling to hit, even performing feats, doesn't quite capture the right flavor. Therefore contests are used to handle these types of engagements.

Contests can be based on any of the stunt types, although Might and Acrobatics are most common. Initiating a contest is a major action, but accepting one is not. A contest works as follows.

1. One character initiates a contest based on the type of stunt he performed that round. He or she declares the kind of contest and then describes the opening move.
2. The challenged character can accept or decline, regardless of which type of stunt he or she had previously performed that round. By accepting the challenge, the character in effect changes the stunt type to what the challenger has declared.
3. If the challenged character accepts, he or she declares the reaction and rolls the appropriate stunt die. (If the character has already performed the applicable stunt, he or she keeps the result rolled at the beginning of the round.)
4. Either character can decide to resolve the contest. If neither chooses to, the contest continues. Otherwise, skip to step 6.
5. If the contest continues, the challenger declares his or her reaction and rolls another stunt die. The challenged character does the same. Then either has another chance to resolve the contest. This continues until one of the characters decides on resolution.
6. To resolve a contest, both characters roll 1d20 and add all their respective accrued stunt bonuses. Whoever has the highest result has won.

Contest Results

The winner of a contest determines how the contest ends. He or she can choose from any of the standard results described below or try for an original effect. If the winner wants to do something out of the ordinary, it's up to the DM to decide whether the desired outcome is reasonable. Use the winner's accrued stunt bonuses as a general guideline: In general, the higher the final bonus, the more likely the desired result.

Damage

Nearly any contest can result in the loser taking damage. If the contest has lasted for multiple exchanges, this can be deadly. To determine the amount of damage, the winner rolls his or her martial arts damage and adds the accrued stunt bonus for the contest. Physical stunts use this result most frequently, but it is possible to come up with contests of Savvy and Insight that result in damage.

Examples: Two characters have been fighting in a rickety structure, destroying it as they do so. Each has been holding up a section of the building while fending off blows (a Might contest). When the contest resolves, the winner decides to have the collapsing building fall on top of the loser. The winner's base martial arts damage is 1d8 and his final stunt bonus was +9. The die roll is a 4, so the loser takes 13 points of damage.



Two characters face off in a battle of willpower (an Insight contest). Each had used her chi to batter down the opponent's will, and the winner decides to inflict damage. The contest was such a struggle that the loser was drained of chi, translating into physical injury.

Unconsciousness

This is a variant of the damage result, with the goal of knocking someone out. Damage is calculated just as described above, but if the loser's hit points total drops below 0, he or she is only rendered unconscious. The loser stays unconscious for a number of rounds equal to the winner's accrued stunt bonus and regains all lost hit points on waking up. If the winner failed to inflict enough damage to knock his or her opponent unconscious, it is still a victory, but the loser only gets kicked around some. A quarter of the damage is inflicted as "real" damage instead, reducing the loser's hit point total.

Fortitude contests are the most common way to achieve this result, especially through drinking challenges.

Examples: *Two characters were fighting in a burning building, a contest of Fortitude to see who could last longer in the thick smoke. The winner decides that the smoke overcame her opponent and caused him to fall unconscious.*

Two characters whack at each other with tables and chairs in an inn (a Strength contest). The winner tries to knock the loser out. His martial arts damage plus accrued stunt bonus is 16, but the loser has 20 hit points and so avoids unconsciousness. The winner still connects with a chair, sending the loser sprawling and inflicting 4 hit points of damage.

Humiliation

This result is most useful when two characters are competing in front of a crowd. As the contest concludes, the winner succeeds in completely humiliating the loser. The precise results are best roleplayed out, but the winner's accrued stunt bonus should serve as a rough guide to how badly the loser is humbled.

Examples: *Two characters are trying to gain the favor of one of the Dragon Kings (a Charm contest). Each tried to flatter the Dragon King by comparing him to precious objects. The winner decides to humiliate his foe by verbally tricking her into likening the Dragon King to a mollusk.*

Two characters have been fighting their way across the rooftops of a town, drawing a large crowd. Their leaping and flipping was dangerous and impressive, making this an Acrobatics contest. The winner decides to humiliate her opponent, so she trips the loser and sends him face first into a cesspool.

Approval

Rather than trying to humiliate your enemy, you can pump yourself up. In this situation, both sides try to win over a crowd or even one important individual. The winner succeeds in looking good—really good. Charm contests are most appropriate for this result, but Acrobatics and Savvy can impress equally well.

Examples: *Two characters are trying to win over a crowd by making outrageous promises (a Charm contest). The winner decides on approval, so after his last promise the crowd showers him with adoration and boos the loser off the stage.*

Two characters engage in a battle of wits (a Savvy contest) to impress a wizard. Both had tried to demonstrate with their knowledge of magical techniques. The winner secures the approval of the wizard, who agrees to teach her a new spell.

Timing and Declining

Contests count as the challenger's major action, and the entire thing resolves in a single round. (This may seem unrealistic, but remember how much action goes on in a Hong Kong movie in a minute.) Nothing else happens until the contest is over; thus no one can interfere. Once the contest has resolved, the character or creature with the next highest initiative takes his or her action as usual.

As mentioned above, contests can be declined. While this may cause a loss of face, sometimes it's the safest course. In this case, the challenger's action resolves as a feat or as an attack (if he or she just wants to do damage).

Example: *A character tries to initiate an Acrobatics contest and starts by kicking two flagstones at her opponent. The challenged character decides that he's bound to lose, so he declines. Since there is no contest, the challenger decides to make the flagstone trick into an attack and rolls to hit instead, adding her Acrobatics stunt bonus (the kicked flagstones count as missile weapons).*

Challenging Multiple Opponents

Extremely skilled—or at least, extremely overconfident—characters can challenge more than one opponent. In this case, all of the challenged characters get to react to each of the challenger's actions. When the contest is resolved, each side rolls a single d20, but the challenged characters add together all of their stunt bonuses. Likewise, results affect all the losers.

Example: *A brash Red Tiger has challenged two opponents to a contest of Might. The two challenged characters each have an accrued stunt bonus of +4, rolling 1d20 and adding +8. The challenger had better make this good!*

Running an Exciting Combat

This chapter gives the basic rules DMs need to run combats in Dragon Fist. Hong Kong action movies are all about style, however, so no discussion would be complete without some advice on running cinematic fight scenes. In general, aim for an atmosphere in which anything can happen. Who's going to come up with the coolest stunt, and how improbably can the characters succeed? You can always assign an extremely high TN to a stunt, but let the players think they have a chance. This is not about realism, after all—try not to limit their imaginations.

Feel free to use or ignore the more specific advice that follows. These are just suggestions; it's your game, after all, and the most important thing is that you and your group have fun.

Fast-paced Action

Dragon Fist is meant to simulate the frenetic world of martial arts action. Your combat scenes should reflect this, so keep up a breakneck pace. Try to avoid looking up rules if at all possible, as this really slows things down. With the stunt and feat system, you can jury-rig almost anything—don't be afraid to use it.

Don't let players dilly-dally, especially when coming up with feats. Their characters don't have 10 minutes to think over their move, so neither should the players. Encourage players to have ready details of the spells they want to cast before their characters act. This goes for the DM too! Photocopies of spells you know you'll need are really handy, since you'll have the info at hand in the heat of battle. The same goes for the vital statistics of your PCs' opponents. The more quick-reference material you have ready, the faster you'll be able to run the combat.

No Double Declarations

What often happens in combat is the DM works around the table asking each player what stunt he or she wants to perform that round. Players also get into the habit of telling you their stunt type and exactly what they want to do with it. Then they tell you all over again when it's

their turn to act. This is wasted time that only hampers the pace of the game. Instead, have players state only their stunt type at the start of the round. Then, when his or her character is about to act, the player can explain the action in detail. For this to work properly, players need to know the speed of the action they plan to use that round, so they can determine initiative correctly. Most players know what they want to do already, so this shouldn't be a problem. A little practice should help everything run smoothly.

Justify Those Stunts!

You may find players are draining all the color from combat because they treat the stunt system too mechanically. When players tell you they're going to do a Might stunt and "swing at the guy," you know you're in a rut. Everyone needs to remember that stunt bonuses represent the wild moves of action-movie heroes. When you watch Jackie Chan fight onscreen, nothing is routine; the same should go for your game. Players should never take stunt bonuses for granted. Make them earn those plusses by coming up with colorful and entertaining explanations. You can encourage this behavior by doing the same with your villains. A player who "attacks with his sword" is going to look pretty foolish when the villain counters by backflipping out of the way, kicking up a table, and sending it whirling at the player's character.

Make Misses Matter

Frequently in roleplaying games, misses in combat have no effect at all. Characters are bound to be disappointed when they don't connect with their super-cool stunts, but you can make up for this by looking once again to HK flicks. In martial arts movies, misses are almost never clean. Furniture is destroyed, buildings set on fire, windows shattered, and so on. Such random property destruction adds a great deal of color to combat scenes. Play this stuff up—sets in movies are made to be destroyed. A player won't feel as bad for missing the big baddie if he or she manages to put a hole in the wall as the villain leaps out of the way.

Destroying items or places important to the story is off-limits, of course, but you still have plenty of options. Use these events to increase the excitement of the fight or end it if it's dramatically appropriate; you can also guide the PCs to where the story needs to go. Let's say you want a combat to end because the PCs have got what they came for. Just have a missed blow knock over a lantern and set alight the building. As the place goes up in flames, anyone who wants to live will have to stop fighting and flee. You are now free to move on to the next scene.

Don't Forget the Posing!

As you run through the mechanics of having a big ol' fight, you and your players may find yourselves losing touch with the setting. Sometimes entire rounds go by without anyone saying anything in character. The players are describing their actions but aren't interacting with each other or the villains. This is no good. A big part of the fun of martial arts movies is the posing. Characters in wuxia films in particular love to shout out what they are doing as they do it: "Your Ultimate Stance is most impressive, but it cannot compare to my Five Elements Fist!"

The 1-minute combat rounds of Dragon Fist allow plenty of time for posing and character interaction during fight scenes. As the DM, don't forget to have your villains gloat and cackle. This kind of wackiness makes it all the more enjoyable for the players when they finally bring the bad guy down.

Monster Go Boom

In most wuxia films, a monster isn't dead until it blows up. Hey, they've got to use those special effects budgets somewhere, right? Feel free to add this detail to your games. You can have a lot of fun fooling your players with monsters that go down and play dead. Just as the heroes are catching their breath, up comes the critter to attack them again. Do this a few times and your players will really appreciate it when the monsters go boom!

Use Exotic Locations

A 10 × 10 room made of stone is not an exciting fight location. To spice up your game, take a cue from the movies when designing your adventures. Big onscreen fights usually happen in unusual places, which add atmosphere and inspire great stunts. The ideal location should have plenty of ways for the characters to interact with it. For example, rather than just saying the fight is in a warehouse, go that extra step and specify that it's full of wine casks. And look—there are ropes hanging from the ceiling so the workers can move around, and ramps and ladders for hauling casks. Suddenly that old warehouse is full of possibilities. Characters can swing from ropes, roll casks onto their enemies, and fight spectacularly on ladders. The more you detail your fight locations ahead of time, the more your players will have to work with.

Learn to Say Yes

A DM's first instinct is to refuse a player who suggests an absurd course of action. But *Dragon Fist* is all about cinematic possibilities, so try to curb that instinct. You have nothing to lose from letting your players try, and they'll be more creative when they know such imagination is rewarded.

