

MANDATE ARCHIVE

MARTIAL ARTS

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UNARMED COMBAT AND PRIMITIVE WEAPON STYLES

The default presumption of *Stars Without Number* is that while a skilled unarmed combatant can be a dangerous foe, there's no substitute for a gun. Unarmed combatants never need to worry about being disarmed and are perilous enemies even when stripped of their equipment, but most PCs will sensibly prefer to pick up a combat shotgun or shear rifle when they have the opportunity. Such rules model most flavors of science fiction and correspond to most players' intuitive expectations about how combat ought to play out. Guns are the weapons of choice, with primitive weaponry as backup and unarmed combat as a choice of last resort.

Not every group prefers to go with this hierarchy. Some GMs and players prefer game worlds in which choosing to fight unarmed is a mechanically viable choice, and the expert unarmed combatant is no worse off than the expert rifleman. The following optional rules give a boost to unarmed combat so that the level 6 warrior with Combat/Unarmed-3 is every bit as lethal as his comrade who has specialized in projectile weaponry.

Learning Martial Arts

Martial art styles are purchased as new specializations of the Combat skill, each style as its own skill. Warriors can buy them as class skills, while other classes can purchase them at non-class skill point rates. Characters with levels in Combat/Primitive may optionally convert them into a style that uses weaponry and levels of Combat/Unarmed may be converted into styles that involve unarmed strikes.

Most martial arts require a teacher. Some of them may not have any known practitioners on a world, especially those reliant on psychic abilities. Characters who seek to learn a particular style might have to conduct extensive research and exploration simply to find a master capable of instructing them. Many styles can be learned in their basic form through instructional materials alone, including psychic styles, but attaining true mastery often requires a living teacher.

Each style of martial art confers special benefits at skill levels 0, 1, and 2. Practitioners with level 0 in the style are considered novices, while level 1 is intermediate skill and level 2 indicates mastery. Masters can continue to increase their skill in the style, but further levels simply add the usual benefits of high skill.

A character can only use one style in any given combat round, declaring it at the start of the round. Benefits from other styles cannot normally be used, though a few styles specifically grant perks that are always in effect. If a character's styles apply more than one bonus to a given roll, only the better bonus applies- they do not stack.

Martial art styles have associated weapon types. The benefits of the style can only be used when wielding those weapons, including powered or high-tech equivalents. It's for the GM to decide whether a given weapon qualifies for a style. The "unarmed" weapon type in-

cludes punches, kicks, and any other variety of bare-handed strike. Unless specifically noted otherwise, strike-augmenting "unarmed" weapons like kinesis wraps and body arsenal arrays cannot be used in conjunction with a martial art style.

Martial arts style skills are treated as Combat/Unarmed for all other purposes, and can be used whenever Combat/Unarmed might normally be checked. Skill levels add directly to both hit rolls and damage, and a character with at least level 2 in a martial art can inflict bare-handed or weapon damage with that style even on targets that would otherwise be immune to low-tech attacks.

Martial arts can still be used if a GM isn't using skills in his or her campaign, or is using a game system that doesn't have skills. Every PC with a background or class appropriate to a mastery of martial arts can begin play with the Novice benefits of one style. At each level thereafter, a Warrior can either improve an existing style up to Master-level proficiency or pick a new style to learn at Novice level. Non-Warriors or those lacking a martial class can improve their martial arts every even-numbered level.



Martial Art Styles

The following styles are simply a sample of the countless different styles to be found spread throughout human space. Many of them have principles and traits familiar to present-day martial artists, but almost all of them have experienced substantial drift, alteration, and blending over the centuries. Even within the styles below, the special benefits and focus might vary substantially among different teachers, worlds and sectors. Most modern martial arts are all but unrecognizable in the year 3200 CE.

Some styles specify abilities that work against humanoid targets. Generally, this means only humans and human-like aliens. Martial artists with at least level 0 proficiency in an alien's Culture skill can use their techniques against those aliens.

Some styles trigger effects when maximum damage is rolled on a hit. The martial artist cannot choose to use a smaller-than-normal damage die with these attacks, such as using the 1d2 default unarmed damage for humans.

Damage done with a martial art style is normally lethal in nature. In the rush of mortal combat, it's not easy to ensure that a strike doesn't actually kill or mortally injure a victim. If an unarmed combatant does not wish to use lethal force against a target, they can roll to hit at a -4 penalty. A victim reduced to 0 hit points by such attacks is either unconscious for 1d4 minutes or helplessly restrained by the martial artist, at the artist's discretion.

DIRTY FIGHTING

This "style" is acquired in dive bars, dirty colonial streets, and military training courses. The details vary from world to world, but every manifestation tends to focus on low blows, cheap shots, and the ugly little tricks that give a combatant victory before his enemy realizes that he's in danger.

Weapon Groups Unarmed, knives, improvised weapons

Level 0 Novice The brawler knows how to throw a punch: base unarmed damage is 1d8.

Level 1 Intermediate The brawler is an old hand at using furniture, drinks, trash, and other detritus to impede an enemy. Enemies suffer a -2 to hit the brawler when in melee range, provided there's something the brawler can grab to throw at them, tip over, or get in their way.

Level 2 Master The brawler's got a kick like a mule: base unarmed damage is now 2d6. If maximum damage is rolled, a humanoid target must make a Physical Effect saving throw at a penalty equal to the brawler's Combat/Brawling skill or be dazed and lose their next round's action.

EMPTY HOLSTER STYLE

This style was favored by rebels and conspirators in the latter days of the Terran Mandate, and is designed to counter the advantages of an enemy gunman. Most Mandate firearms during the Second Wave were Net-locked to their possessor, so disarming security officers was rarely as useful as forcing them to turn their weapons on each other.

Weapon Groups Unarmed, clubs, staves

Level 0 Novice The novice's unarmed combat damage is 1d6+1.

Level 1 Intermediate Intricate blocks and sidesteps make it difficult for a gunman to bring his weapon to bear on the martial artist at close range. Gunmen suffer a -2 penalty to hit the martial artist when within melee range.

Level 2 Master The novice's unarmed combat damage is 1d10. The martial artist may give up his attack to fall into a defensive stance, forcing any gunmen within melee range to suffer a -2 on hit rolls against the artist. If a gunman shoots at and misses the martial artist in this stance, he must roll another to-hit roll against another target of the martial artist's choice at a -4 penalty to hit. The gunman cannot be forced to shoot at himself.

GENTLE WAY

One of a number of aikido-descended martial arts, the Gentle Way has survived on many worlds thanks to its popularity as a security officer style before the Scream.

Weapon Groups Unarmed, Chain

Level 0 Novice The novice's unarmed strikes do 1d6 damage. This damage done by this style is non-lethal and a victim reduced to 0 hit points is either unconscious for 1d4 minutes or helplessly restrained by the martial artist, at the artist's discretion.

Level 1 Intermediate On a successful hit, the martial artist may choose not to do damage, but instead throw or trip a humanoid victim to leave them prone. Prone combatants must spend their round's movement allowance to stand up. Prone combatants suffer a -2 AC penalty against melee-range assailants, take -2 to hit other targets in melee, and can crawl at only one-quarter usual movement speed.

Level 2 Master The master's strikes do 1d10 unarmed damage. The master may perform a disarming strike as an attack, taking a -4 hit penalty on the roll. If it succeeds, the victim must roll an Evasion saving throw at a penalty equal to the attacker's Combat/Gentle Way skill or the attacker ends up holding their weapon. Weapons gripped with two hands grant a +2 bonus on the saving throw.

GHOST WALKER STYLE

Derived from certain styles of Reconstructed Ninjitsu in the late twenty-fifth century, the elaborate defensive footwork and flamboyant combat maneuvers of this style made it popular among enthusiasts throughout Second Wave human space. Beneath the popularized flash peddled by many teachers there remains a highly effective style focused on the evasion of pursuers.

Weapon Groups Unarmed

**Level 0
Novice** The novice's strikes do 1d6+1 unarmed damage.

**Level 1
Intermediate** The martial artist never needs to make fighting withdrawals when using this style and can move through a pitched melee battle without drawing extra enemy attacks. They can use Combat/Ghost Walker Style in place of Athletics for skill checks related to acrobatics, climbing, or jumping.

**Level 2
Master** The novice's strikes now do 1d10 unarmed damage. They can add Combat/Ghost Hand Style as a bonus to all Evasion saving throws at all times, even when not in this style.

KENJUTSU

"Kenjutsu" became something of a generic term during the late Second Wave, often applied to sword styles that had absolutely nothing to do with ancient Japan. Individual masters proliferated, but the most florid of their additions were pared away during the Silence. On many worlds, the quick and effective use of a bladed weapon ceased to be an affectation of social nobility or Terran traditionalism and became a matter of life and death.

Styles similar to Kenjutsu exist for weapons other than swords on many worlds, particularly those that derived from cultures that esteemed different weapons as signs of nobility. Spear-based variants of the style are common on many lostworlder planets that lack the metallurgic resources for forging long metal blades.

Weapon Groups Swords

**Level 0
Novice** If the martial artist has a sword worn as a readied item and uses this style for the round, they gain a +2 bonus on the initiative roll.

**Level 1
Intermediate** The martial artist's form is perfect. If a 1 or 2 is rolled on a hit roll with this style, the attack may be rerolled. The second roll stands even if it, too, is a 1 or 2.

**Level 2
Master** Every cut is a killing blow. The martial artist may add double their Combat/Kenjutsu skill to all damage rolls with swords.

MINDWALL STYLE

Psionic-based martial arts were always a niche within a niche in the history of human space. Most psychics spent too much time focused on refining their mental abilities to put much effort into their physical capacities, and even then, training in the use of firearms was often a quicker, easier way to improve self-defense.

Still, a few psychic styles were perfected by researchers who refined the small, subtle side effects of standard psionic disciplines into tricks that were useful in the heat of combat. Psychic styles are not disciplines or newly-learned abilities, but instead just ways to use the normally-trivial side effects of a discipline in useful ways.

The Mindwall style was one of the first developed by military psionics researchers who needed to supply their combat psychics with techniques that could keep them alive in a firefight. Recognition of a psychic meant that they became the instant target of choice for enemies. Mindwall defensive manipulations keep a psychic too busy to use their psionic powers, but they can keep them alive until allies can clear the hostiles. Masters of the style are even capable of limited offensive action while the stance is active.

This style requires both as many levels of the Precognition and of Telekinesis discipline as the character has Combat/Mindwall Style levels, with a minimum of 1 level in each. Psychics can learn this style as if it were a class skill. All attacks with Mindwall Style use either Wisdom or Constitution as the ruling modifier for hit and damage, rather than Strength or Dexterity.

Weapon Groups Swords, Staves

**Level 0
Novice** The novice obtains an instinctive sense of incoming projectile or energy fire, interposing their weapon between them and the attack and reinforcing the block with telekinetic force. As their action for the round, the martial artist can drop into a defensive stance, causing energy weapon or projectile attacks suffer a penalty to hit them equal to 2 plus the martial artist's Combat/Mindwall Style skill. Maintaining this stance costs 1 psionic power point per turn.

**Level 1
Intermediate** While in a Mindwall defensive stance, the character can reflect one missed ranged attack per round back at the attacker. The psychic makes a standard roll to hit, using Combat/Mindwall Style and the better of Wisdom or Constitution as the hit modifier and doing the attack's base, unmodified damage to the target if it hits.

**Level 2
Master** While in a Mindwall defensive stance, the psychic can make one normal attack against an enemy within melee range as part of their round's actions. This is the only action they may make while still maintaining the stance, aside from normal movement.

RED DAWN STYLE

This psychic style was originally developed almost instinctively in 2530 by Matthias Ashigawa, a pit fighter on the renegade pirate world of Egalite. Matthias was a feral precognitive, and his eventual burnout resulted in a madness that was minimally compatible with human interaction. His spectacular bloodthirstiness and aptitude for physical violence drew him to the eventual rule of Egalite and a sector-spanning empire of iron and blood. The empire was still functioning at the time of the Scream, and while it is profoundly unlikely that Matthias' pretech anagathic treatments have managed to preserve him this long, no firm proof of his death or the collapse of his empire has ever come to light.

The style itself was taught to psychic missionaries dispatched to spread the word of Matthias' predestined glory. While their message struck few chords in hearers, some psychics managed to come away with knowledge of the style before the zealots or their enemies terminated the relationship in a permanent fashion. These psychics spread the details of the style through numerous psionic associations before the Scream ended the availability of living instructors. Basic instructional tapes and manuals still persist in some sectors of former human space.

This style requires at least as many levels of the Precognition discipline as the character has Combat/Red Dawn Style levels, with a minimum of 1 level of Precognition. Psychics can learn this style as if it were a class skill. All unarmed attacks with Red Dawn Style use either Wisdom or Constitution as the ruling modifier for hit and damage, rather than Strength or Dexterity.

Weapon Groups Unarmed, Psitech weaponry

**Level 0
Novice** The psychic's unarmed strikes now do 1d6 damage. The response to danger comes almost before the event; the psychic gains a +2 bonus to Initiative checks.

**Level 1
Intermediate** The psychic can feel the impending evasive maneuvers of an enemy and focus on countering them. The martial artist may accept a penalty to their AC in exchange for an equal bonus to their next hit roll with this style, up to a maximum penalty/bonus equal to their Combat/Red Dawn Style skill. The AC penalty applies until the start of the martial artist's next turn.

**Level 2
Master** The psychic's unarmed strikes now do 1d10 damage. If maximum damage is rolled on a hit, the target must save versus Mental Effect at a penalty equal to the martial artist's Combat/Red Dawn Style level or be subject to an immediate second attack from the martial artist as a different possible impact crashes over them at the same time. This effect can keep going as long as the psychic keeps rolling maximum damage and the victim keeps failing saves.

SILVER PETAL STYLE

Before the Scream, some worlds forbade the possession of firearms, and even now some of the safer or more tyrannical planets likewise limit the weaponry of their citizens. The Silver Petal style was developed to maximize the utility of common knives as throwing weapons, and is equally effective with any other small, sharp object that can be thrown or wielded in one hand.

Weapon Groups Knives, Shuriken

**Level 0
Novice** Knives used by the character do a minimum of 1d6 damage, if not already a more powerful monoblade knife. Knives can be thrown up to a maximum distance of 15 meters with no range penalty. Four knives count as only one readied item to the character.

**Level 1
Intermediate** As an attack, the character can hurl a sweep of readied knives, attacking once plus once more for each level of Combat/Silver Petal Style. The character cannot move in the same round they perform this attack. A single victim can be targeted by only one knife.

**Level 2
Master** The martial artist may add twice their style skill level to the damage they do with knives or shuriken in this style.

TEMPTER'S HAND

A style with enigmatic antecedents, supposedly taught originally by the little-understood Sons of Samael. In the violence after the Scream it has become a favorite of assassins. It focuses on quick footwork and feints that lure targets into dropping their guard.

Weapon Groups Unarmed

**Level 0
Novice** If the novice hits a surprised humanoid target, the victim must make a Physical Effect saving throw at a penalty equal to the attacker's Combat/Tempter's Hand skill or be dazed for 1d4 rounds and unable to do anything but defend. Targets dazed by this blow cannot cry out or speak.

**Level 1
Intermediate** The martial artist's unarmed attack damage is now equal to 1d6. The martial artist can launch a feint attack against a humanoid target, rolling to hit normally. If the attack hits, no damage is done, but the next round the attacker can strike as if the target was surprised, dazing them if the blow lands.

**Level 2
Master** The martial artist's unarmed attack damage is now equal to 1d10. The martial artist may give up his attack for the round to fall into a defensive stance, forcing a -2 hit penalty for their attackers within melee range. If an attacker strikes at them in this stance and misses, the martial artist may make a free counterattack. The artist can make as many of these counterattacks in one round as they have levels in Combat/Tempter's Hand.

TYRIAN LOCKS

Some worlds are so hostile that the vast majority of its citizenry are forced to wear environment suits whenever outside the protective domes or tunnels they inhabit. For the hell-world of Tyr, this miserable state was often found *inside* the habitat tunnels, and most inhabitants never removed their armor outside of specially-prepared safe rooms. As a consequence, combat techniques developed to deal with this feature.

Tyrian locks involve joint locks, twists, servo hits, and integument cracking to let in the hostile atmosphere. Any suit flexible enough to allow a human good freedom of motion is flexible enough to allow an attacker to injure them with the correct forced movement, and Tyrian joint locks are designed to do just that. Against a master, an opponent's heavy armor or rigid FEP field plates become weapons used against their wearer.

A victim reduced below 10 hit points by a hit from this style must make the normal checks for vacc suit tears when the environment makes it relevant.

Weapon Groups Unarmed

Level 0 Novice The novice's strikes do 1d6 unarmed damage and can affect even targets wearing powered armor, a FEP, or other defenses that would normally ignore unarmed attacks.

Level 1 Intermediate The martial artist knows how to maneuver so as to hamper heavily-suited attackers. Humanoid assailants wearing vacc suits, powered armor, FEPs, plate armor, or woven armor suffer a -2 to hit the martial artist when within close combat range.

Level 2 Master The novice's unarmed strikes do 1d10 damage. Heavy armor becomes a liability against the martial artist as he knows how to use it against its own wearer; he gains +4 to hit with this style against humanoid targets wearing powered armor, plate armor, or a FEP.

Designing Your Own Styles

GMs should feel free to create their own new armed and unarmed styles to match the particular interests of their players and campaign, but a few important guidelines should be kept in mind.

The goal of a style is not to make unarmed or primitive combat skill better than projectile or energy weapons, but only an equally reasonable option. For damage comparisons, look at mag rifles and shear rifles to see what sort of weaponry they'll be compared against. If the style does more damage than those weapons in the hands of equivalent masters, then the style is doing too much damage.

Styles should not normally mix. It's too easy to lose track of the interactions if PCs can mix and match the best pieces out of each. PCs should be obliged to use only one style per round.

Unarmed styles should give skill level 0 novices 1d6 base unarmed damage along with their novice-level perk. If all they do is improve the martial artist's damage, it should be 1d8 or 1d6+1 damage. Master-level proficiency should grant 1d10 base unarmed damage, or 2d6 if the style isn't terribly useful for anything but direct damage.

Weapon styles should ensure that the weapons do damage roughly equivalent to the unarmed style. Martial arts skill levels *do* add to weapon damage from their group, so keep that in mind when assigning bonus damage to a style.

Armor class bonuses or enemy hit penalties granted by the style should always be conditional to a specific type of assailant, usually enemies within melee range. If the style gives a bonus that's effective against almost every assailant, firearms specialists will take it just for the universal benefit. As it stands, most firearms devotees will want to stand well away from their targets, so they have less reason to all seek martial arts training.

Finally, don't hesitate to make new styles "provisional" in a game. If all the players suddenly want to learn it or if it's disrupting the balance of the table, kill it and refund the martial artist their skill points. When adding experimental rules additions, everyone in the group should be ready to acknowledge it when things don't work out as planned.

COMMON MARTIAL ARTS WEAPONRY

Weapon	Damage	Range in Meters	Cost	Attribute	Tech
Improvised Weapon	1d4	3/6	-	Str/Dex	0
Walking Staff	1d6	-	-	Str	0
Metal-Shod Fighting Staff	1d8	-	5	Str	1
Chain	1d6	3*	8	Dex	1
Shuriken**	1d2	6/9	2	Dex	1

Ranges are expressed in normal and maximum ranges. Firing at a target beyond normal range applies a -2 hit penalty.

* Chains are melee weapons, but can strike enemies up to 3 meters away. ** Shuriken are so small that 10 count as one readied item.