

GADGET GUIDE: ASIAN WEAPONS

Heroes and villains in pulp fiction and early comic books often wielded powers or weapons from “the mysterious East” and the fascination with Asian martial arts (especially ninjas) in the 1980s made various historic Asian weapons a superhero staple. This **Guide** looks at archaic Asian weapons and those often used to supplement unarmed martial arts, along with gadgets employed by ninjas.

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

Due to the laws and customs of many of their original cultures, many Asian weapons evolved from otherwise mundane tools or agricultural implements, items peasants could easily own and carry without raising the kind of suspicion a sword might (to say nothing for the cost of a finely-made sword for a poor peasant farmer). Thus nunchaku developed from the threshing flail, the kama from the sickle, and the tonfa from a mill wheel handle, for examples. Although the purpose of many of these weapons was concealment, they are not considered Subtle effects, as their “concealment” is more of a cultural matter (and largely out of context in the modern world anyway). Only truly hidden or concealed weapons need the Subtle modifier. See **Concealed Weapons** later in this **Guide** for examples.

PAIRED WEAPONS

Many Asian melee weapons are wielded in pairs as part of a two-handed fighting style. In **MUTANTS & MASTERMINDS**, having and wielding a pair of weapons can be treated as an application of the Split extra (*Hero's Handbook*, page 144): pay an extra point for the second weapon in the pair, and then split the total damage for one weapon into two.

Specific constructions may also treat paired weapons as Linked effects, a Multiattack, or even a Secondary Effect, but this **Guide** uses the Split version.

SAMPLE WEAPONS

The information in the **Archaic Weapons Guide** can build a wide range of weapons. The following are provided as examples and benchmarks for your own Asian weapon creations and as a quick-pick list for players and GMs looking to outfit a character with weapons.

BLADES

Various bladed weapons have as much importance in Asian culture as the swords and daggers of Western culture.



Hook Sword: These Chinese weapons, usually wielded in pairs, are designed with curved hooks at the end of the blade, a crescent-shaped hand-guard, and a sharp, dagger-like pommel, allowing them to be wielded in a number of different ways. Hook swords are effective at tripping, catching opposing weapons, and blocking. They can even be hooked together at the tips, swinging the second sword out so its pommel slashes, extending the wielder's reach.

Kama: A weapon adapted from the type of small sickle used to harvest crops throughout southeast Asia. Kama are used in Indonesian, Filipino, and Japanese martial arts, often wielded in pairs.

Katana: The famous “samurai sword” wielded by noble warriors in feudal Japan. Katanas are slightly curved single-edged blades, worn by samurai with the edge facing up to facilitate quick drawing (the Quick Draw advantage is a common element of Japanese *kendo*, or sword fighting). It is traditionally worn as part of a pair (or *daisho*) with the shorter wakizashi blade.

Katar: The Indian “punch dagger” has an H-shaped grip, so the wielder's knuckles rest behind the wide, triangular blade, allowing it to thrust with considerable force, although they can also make slashing attacks. Katar are effective in punching through armor.

Kris: An Indonesian dagger with a distinctive wavy or “flame” blade design, the kris is a cultural icon, and every adult male in Indonesia was expected to own one, often passed down as family heirlooms. The blade design allows kris to inflict terrible wounds.

Indonesian legend attributes many supernatural powers to the kris, including the power to kill at a distance simply by pointing at a target, attacking targets by stabbing their shadow or footprints, alerting the wielder to imminent danger, and even controlling fire (flames being similar to the knife's own blade).

Kukri: A heavy Nepalese knife with an inward curving edge, used as both a tool and weapon. Kukri are perhaps most famous as weapons wielded by Gurkha regiments, including the Royal Gurkha Rifles of the British Army.

Ninja-to: A short, straight sword carried and used by ninja. The ninja-to is single edged with a chisel point and a square guard, typically worn in a back sheath and drawn over the shoulder.

Sai: Tapering metal batons, often wielded in pairs, with curved side prongs that serve as hand guards and to catch

opposing weapons. Although sais are traditionally blunt, in the comics they're typically pointed and also used as stabbing weapons.

Wakizashi: The shorter companion blade to a katana, the wakizashi was primarily useful for close-in fighting (particularly indoors). It was also used for beheading a fallen foe and, most famously, to commit ritual suicide (*seppuku*).

War Fan: A weapon based on the more common folding fans found in different Asian cultures. War fans typically have bronze, iron, or hardwood struts (sometimes in combination) or folding metal panels while others are solid metal and do not fold. In Japan an entire combat style—*tessenjutsu*—developed around the use of the war fan. The edges of the struts or panels may be sharpened, and the fan can be welded closed like a club or slashing weapon or open like a small shield.

Wind and Fire Wheels (*feng huo lun*): Chinese weapons consisting of metal rings with grips and flame-styled blades extending from the rest of the ring. Typically wielded in pairs as slashing weapons able to block and disarm opponents. Legend has it the first wind and fire wheels were gifts from the Taoist immortal Taiyi and could be used together as a magical flying vehicle by standing on them.

BLUDGEONS

Asian bludgeoning weapons tend to be simple monkish or peasant tools, but should not be underestimated in their effectiveness.

Bo: A simple wooden staff, often doubling as a walking stick, making it a useful weapon and tool for wandering monks. The tetsubo or kanabo is a more powerful club shod with iron studs. Legend has them as the weapons of the monstrous *oni*, and the Japanese saying “like giving a kanabo to an oni” means giving greater advantage to someone who already has an advantage (great strength in the oni’s case).

Nunchaku: A pair of sticks or batons (about a foot in length) connected by a short piece of rope or chain, originally an adaptation of a threshing flail. Nunchaku are wielded with circular and twirling motions to deflect incoming attacks and give momentum to the wielder’s strikes. The three-section-staff is similar, but has three segments, and therefore greater reach and can be used as a double weapon (add Reach and Split to the basic traits).

Tonfa: Originally a mill wheel handle, the tonfa is a stick slightly longer than forearm length, with a handle

at a right angle, allowing the stick to extend along the wielder’s forearm. Tonfa are common close combat weapons for law-enforcement, where they’re commonly known as side-handle batons or “T-batons”.

POLEARMS

Polearms primarily offer the wielder greater reach and leverage than their opponents and the ability to strike opponents on horseback or otherwise out of reach of shorter weapons.

Naginata: The Japanese *naginata* is a wooden haft topped with a curved blade similar to that of a katana or wakizashi. The Chinese *guan dao* (“reclining moon blade”) is a similar weapon with a broader, more cleaver-like blade, traditionally with a red scarf or tassel attached between the blade and shaft. In Japan after the Edo period, the naginata became a symbol of status for women of the samurai class and a common “woman’s weapon”—use is still taught to some Japanese schoolgirls as a sport.

Nine-dragon Trident (*geo loon cha*): A polearm topped with a complex collection of curving and hooked points, particularly effective in blocking and catching enemy weapons and in hooking and tripping opponents, as well as impaling them on one or several of the points.

Spear: Both the Chinese *qiang* and the Japanese *yari* are polearms with pointed, often leaf-shaped, blades. In addition to the benefits of reach, such spears often had tassels or whistling notches intended to distract opponents, allowing the wielder to make a check to feint using attack bonus rather than Deception (adds 1 point to cost).

ENTANGLING

Some Asian fighting styles use entangling weapons to both disarm foes and to disable them with the minimum of injury.

Chain: A number of Asian weapons are based on the use of entangling metal chains, including the chain whip and Japanese *kusari* (also known as the *manrikigusari* or “ten thousand power chain”). The *kusari-fundo* attaches weights to either end of the chain while the meteor hammer goes a step further, adding heavy metal striking heads. The *kusari-gama* is a kama (see Blades) with a kusari attached to the handle, allowing the wielder to strike with the chain or the sickle (or swing the sickle out at the end of the chain for greater reach).

CULTURAL WEAPON LEGENDS

Much like the sword in the European Middle Ages, or the six-shooter in the American Wild West, various weapons play key roles in certain Asian cultures, placing them at the center of different legends and beliefs about their capabilities. In a superhero setting, some or all of these legends might be true, and those weapons may grant their wielders special powers (or certain specially-trained or chosen wielders may have access to those powers). Specific examples are cited in the weapon descriptions, along with examples of the powers granted by the weapon, but are not included in the mundane weapon’s game information. They should be handled on a case-by-case basis between the player and Gamemaster, just like any other power-granting device.

Garrote: A length of waxed cord or metal wire, often with handles to help pull it tight around a victim's throat. It is an assassin's weapon, generally used to attack from surprise and get the victim into a chokehold.

Sash whip: A number of Asian cultures used a length of cloth (a belt, sash, or even sarong), often with small weights sewn into it, which could be wielded and cracked like a whip, and easily concealed as a mundane garment when not in use.

RANGED

Ranged weapons either use ammunition (such as arrows, darts, or even handfuls of *shuriken*) or are singular throwing weapons. In the latter case, the weapon may return to the thrower to be used over and over as part of a normal Ranged modifier. Otherwise, the weapon is good for only one throw, and then the wielder is deprived of its use until it is recovered (Recoverable is a +0 modifier).

Arrows: The Japanese bow or *daiku* features an asymmetrical grip so it can more easily be used on horseback. Arrows may use different types of heads for different purposes.

- **Dragon's Tongue:** A rounded, tapering arrowhead designed to penetrate armor.
- **Frog Crotch:** A Y-shaped arrowhead, with the inner angle sharpened, useful for cutting cords and—legend has it—even the wood hafts of weapons.
- **Skinsplitter:** A broad, triangular head designed for inflicting shallow, bleeding wounds.
- **Willow Leaf:** A long, thin arrowhead to slip between small openings in armor or even the slits in a helm or similar target.

Blowgun (*fukiya*): A hollow tube used to fire small darts by blowing into one end. The blowgun is typically a weapon for hunting or assassination using darts tipped with poisons, since the actual damage the weapon inflicts is negligible.

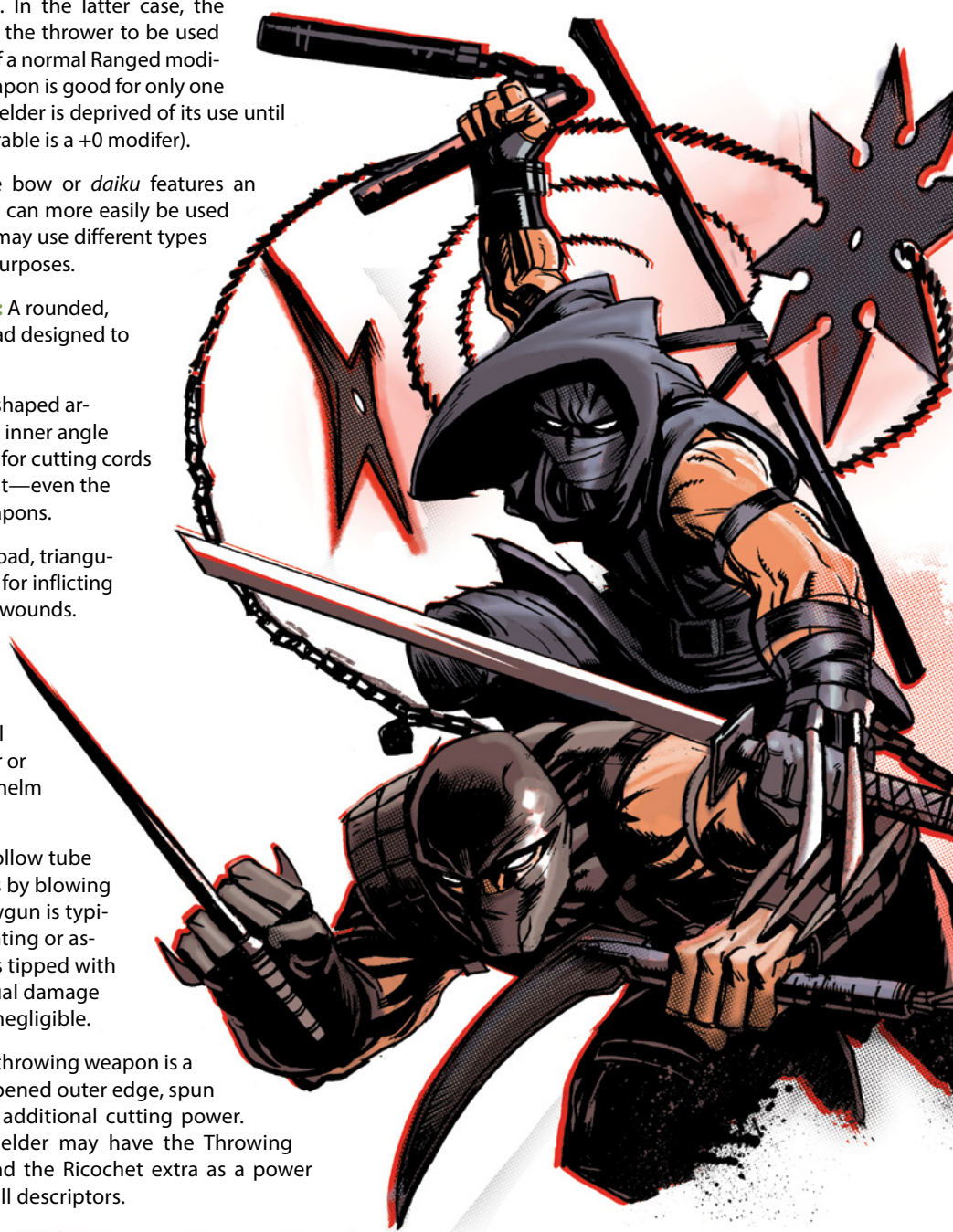
Chakram: This Indian throwing weapon is a metal ring with a sharpened outer edge, spun when it is thrown for additional cutting power. A master chakram wielder may have the Throwing Mastery advantage and the Ricochet extra as a power with the training or skill descriptors.

Shuriken: These Japanese throwing weapons come in

two main types: spike or bo shuriken are short metal spikes similar to large nails, while star shuriken are flat star-shaped wheels with sharpened edges. Both are fairly easily concealed in sleeves or sashes and typically thrown several at a time (giving them the Multiattack modifier).

Ninjas are infamous for applying poisons to the points and edges of shuriken, adding an Affliction effect (resisted and overcome by Fortitude) to the weapon's damage.

High-tech or magical shuriken may have a number of extras, ranging from Penetrating ultra-sharp edges (or energy fields) to Homing ability.



NINJA GADGETS

In addition to weapons like the ninja-to, the legendary ninja of Japan were renowned for their use of cunning and concealed gadgets to carry out their missions. Modern ninja in an M&M setting might use versions of their traditional gear (perhaps made with modern materials and methods) and could supplement it with high-tech or even magical gadgets ranging from night-vision goggles to enchanted ninja uniforms or versions of their mundane gear. Most of the contents of the **Utility Gadget Guide** would find use in a ninja's arsenal.

CONCEALED WEAPONS

Often working in disguise, ninjas carried weapons concealed within otherwise mundane objects or easily hidden in sleeves or sashes (such as shuriken, under **Ranged**, previously). The most common concealed weapon is a blade hidden within an ordinary staff, much like a European sword-cane, or a staff able to split apart into sections connected by chain, forming a nunchaku or three-section staff (or both, depending on which sections are detached).

The effect of a concealed weapon is a rank of the Subtle modifier, making the weapon difficult to detect when not in use. Ninja often make additional use of the weapon's concealment, such as using the hollow staff that contains a blade as a snorkel, or having a hidden compartment for a vial of poison or other small objects. These can be treated as Features of the item, or simply stunts the ninja performs on an as-needed basis by spending hero points.

Concealed Weapon: Subtle added to weapon cost • 1 point.

CLIMBING CLAWS

These metal claws fit over the wearer's knuckles, with the claws facing inward (from the palm) to improve climbing ability on most surfaces where the claws can get purchase. In a pinch, climbing claws can also be used as a weapon, changing the wearer's normal bludgeoning Strength damage to slashing damage, best handled as an occasional stunt rather than a regular effect.

Climbing Claws: Movement 1 (Wall-crawling), Limited to surfaces where the claws can get purchase • 1 point.

ANIMAL WEAPONS (OR "SNAKES ON A CHAIN")

In addition to the relatively common Asian weapons in this **Guide**, there are a number of examples of animal-themed weapons ranging from the exotic to the strange, which players and Gamemasters may wish to include in their **MUTANTS & MASTERMINDS** games. Examples include various metal throwing weapons shaped like animals and usually named for them (e.g. iron duck, iron toad, steel scorpion, etc.) made so wingtips, beaks, claws, and the like form sharp edges and points while the rest of the weapon is simply blunt striking surface. Meant to invoke some of the spiritual power of the animal, these weapons may actually do so for some characters.

The other type literally uses certain animals as weapons! Particular examples include a long chain or pole that grips a poisonous snake by the neck; the wielder swings so as to strike the target with the (understandably irritated) snake so it will bite and poison them. Similar is a clay vessel containing scorpions, wasps, or other poisonous vermin, which shatters on impact, releasing the creatures to sting the victim. In M&M game terms, these are best handled as Limited Afflictions based on the animals' attack (and venom), likely Unreliable and possibly with Side-Effects for a failed attack.

NAGETEPPU (GRENADES)

Ninjas produced grenades by filling empty eggshells with combinations of powers that combust rapidly upon contact with fire, typically a campfire or household brazier or hearth. They were kept in padded pouches or in sleeve pockets, but were prone to breakage (a potential complication). Given their costs, an array of grenades may be common ninja ordinance.

These grenades have limited range, given their design. The user is assumed to be just *outside* their radius when used, rather than at the center of it.

Unless *nageteppo* have magical properties or great cultural significance, modern ninja are more likely to use compact modern ordinance, described in other **Gadget Guides**.

- **Black Powder:** A charge of black powder sufficient to cause a small explosion, possibly mixed with tacks or other small, sharp objects as shrapnel.
- **Flash Powder:** The powder flares with a blinding flash, particularly in nighttime settings where the fire is being used for illumination (such as a campfire).
- **Lacquer Poison:** A combination of powdered lacquer releases a smoke that is painfully irritating to the eyes, throat, and skin, helping to distract the ninja's targets.
- **Smoke Powder:** The *nageteppo* released a thick cloud of dark smoke, allowing the ninja to move and act with visual concealment.

Nageteppo: See **Asian Weapons** table for effect and cost.

WATER-WALKING SHOES

Special folding shoes made of woven reeds allow the wearer to remain buoyant enough to "walk" on the surface of water without sinking.

Water-walking Shoes: Movement 1 (Water-walking), Limited to half speed • 1 point.

ASIAN WEAPONS

WEAPON	EFFECT	CRITICAL	COST
BLADES			
Hook sword	Strength-based Damage 3 (slashing), Double or Reach, Tripping	20	5
Kama*	Strength-based Damage 2 (slashing), Dangerous	19–20	3
Katana	Strength-based Damage 3 (slashing), Dangerous	19–20	4
Katar	Strength-based Damage 2 (piercing or slashing), Penetrating 1	20	3
Kris	Strength-based Damage 2 (piercing or slashing), Dangerous 2	18–20	4
Kukri	Strength-based Damage 2 (slashing), Dangerous	19–20	3
Ninja-to	Strength-based Damage 2 (slashing)	20	2
Sai*	Strength-based Damage 1 (piercing), Defensive, Disarming	20	3
Wakizashi	Strength-based Damage 2 (slashing), Dangerous	19–20	3
War fan*	Strength-based Damage 1 (slashing), Concealed, Defensive	20	3
Wind and Fire Wheel*	Strength-based Damage 2 (slashing)	20	2
BLUDGEONS			
Bo	Strength-based Damage 2 (bludgeoning), Double, Reach	20	4
Nunchaku*	Strength-based Damage 2 (bludgeoning), Disarming, Impressive	20	4
Tonfa	Strength-based Damage 2 (bludgeoning), Defensive	20	3
POLEARMS			
Naginata	Strength-based Damage 3 (slashing), Reach	20	4
Nine-dragon Trident	Strength-based Damage 2, Dangerous, Disarming, Reach	19–20	5
Spear	Strength-based Damage 2 (piercing), Dangerous, Reach	19–20	4
ENTANGLING			
Chain	Damage 2, Disarming, Grabbing, Reach	20	5
Garotte	Grabbing (no damage), Chokehold	—	2
Sash whip	Damage 1, Disarming, Grabbing, Reach	20	4
RANGED			
Arrow			
Dragon's Tongue	Ranged Damage 3, Penetrating 1	20	7
Frog Crotch	Ranged Damage 3, Smashing (limited to cutting)	20	7
Skinsplitter	Ranged Damage 3, Dangerous	19–20	7
Willow Leaf	Ranged Damage 3, Precise	20	7
Blowgun	Ranged Affliction (poison; Resisted and Overcome by Fortitude; Impaired, Disabled, Incapacitated; Resistible (Toughness))	20	1/rank
Chakram	Ranged Damage 3, Dangerous	19–20	7
Shuriken	Ranged Damage 1, Multiattack	20	3
GRENADES			
Black powder	Burst Area Damage 3	—	6
Flash powder	Burst Area Dazzle 3 (<i>Hero's Handbook</i> , page 103)	—	6
Lacquer poison	Cloud Area Affliction 3 (Resisted and Overcome by Fortitude; Impaired, Disabled; Limited Degree)	—	6
Smoke	Cloud Area Concealment Attack (visual) 2	—	6
*Often paired as a Double weapon (adds +1 point to cost)			

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