Fate of the North Star 2.0

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1 Introduction

The HNK franchise is about a near post-apocalyptic future when everybody dresses like *Mad Max*, and masters of fictional ancient Chinese martial arts fight for hegemony, survival or a range of melodramatic personal reasons. The geographic location is never made explicit, but it is implied to be somewhere in continental Asia. The technological level is shown to have dropped significantly but not consistently. Fossil-fueled vehicles are still there, but fuel is precious and hard to get. Firearms, on the other hand, are exceedingly rare, and for war and personal defense most people resort to melee weapons, bows or even their bare hands. Martial artists are especially good at this, because they know secret arts capable of extraordinary feats.

2 Setting Creation

In the classic Fate fashion, the GM and the players should first of all define their chosen setting. The world of HNK, as a whole, has the following issues: *Moral Wasteland* (Current), *Prophecies are Coming True* (Impending). These two are always on the table and can be invoked and compelled accordingly. The table must, on the other hand, create a starting location, like a village or town. It should also be given one current and one impending issue. In turn, the people at the table can populate the location with a bunch of faces, no less than three and no more than five or six.

3 Character Creation

4 Aspects

I will henceforth assume that all PCs are martial artists, that is, that they are trained in a Kenpo school.

Their High Concept must refer to their martial artist status. Kenpo is not just a subject of study, it is a way of life that shapes characters since their early childhood. Typically, they would have been taken in charge by a master between age 6 and 8, and would have lived (comparatively) secluded lives. For this reasons, in *Fate (Accelerated) of the North Star* (henceforth, FANS), characters who know Kenpo *are* their Kenpo, i.e., all martial artist characters must refer to their training in their High Concept: Successor to Hokuto Shinken, Last Nanto General etc. are all valid examples. Normally, this aspect should refer specifically to the Kenpo School to which the character belong. Trouble aspects are your run-of-the-mill melodramatic stuff: maybe your ambition is driving you crazy, maybe you are obsessed with avenging your loved ones, or you have sworn to protect the weak and you never refrain from helping.

In the light of the source material, the remaining aspects should emphasize relationships, not necessarily to other PCs, but rather allies and antagonists. In the course of a campaign they can be changed at appropriate milestones to reflect the fact that, for instance, you best friend or sworn enemy are dead, or that the village of Bumville you were supposed to protect has been burned to ground by unpleasant people.

5 Stunts

For martial arts stunts, see below. For other Stunts, the patterns presented in the FAE books can be used as they are. Again, one must assume that players will spend their stunt slots prevalently or exclusively on Kenpo stunts.

6 Extras

A vehicle is an extra, like a capable Ally (not to be confused with a weak dependent) or a small group of allies (a gang, an "army"). Technical equipment and weapons are not usually to be bought as extras, unless they are exceptionally rare and precious: a firearm, especially a powerful one, could require an extra slot, but a mace or a sword do not. For guidelines on all these kinds of extras, see the relevant sections of the Fate core books (*Fate Core, Fate Accelerated, Fate System Toolkit*).

7 Kenpo Schools

PCs and many NPCs have High Aspects that reference to them as martial artists. These are called Kenpo practitioners. They differ from other characters in the following ways.

They can Defend against melee weapons when unarmed.

Kenpo practitioners can defend against missile weapons (arrows, darts, throwing knives, shuriken) both by dodging and by parrying, provided that the defender is aware of the attack.

The defender should always be given the chance to roll (with an appropriate difficulty) to become aware of an incoming shot: martial artists are hardly ever taken by surprise.

A school must be referred to in the High Concept of the character. This is and will always be the school that the character truly belongs to, but see below for becoming acquainted with other schools. Some schools further subdivide into different styles, but this is immaterial for most matters: styles are just names for different choices of Stunts and different flavours. Schools are not created equal: some schools (Hokuto, Nanto and few others) are said *major* schools. All others, of which great many exist, are dubbed *minor*.

The following generalizations hold:

- Whenever in a physical conflict major practitioners face one or more opponents of another school, be it minor or major, they get one free invocation of their High Concept in an action involving Kenpo. This is meant to express the advantage given by millennia of secret martial knowledge (players should indulge in monologues elaborating on this element).
- If all the opponents are non-practitioners, major practitioners get two free invocations.
- Other invocations of the same or other aspects in a fight are handled normally.
- Different styles (see below) do not count as different schools, so they get you no free invocations. Still, a Create an Ad-

vantage action can be attempted to create an advantage based around differences in styles.

• Non-practitioners never benefit from Getting Help bonuses (FAE, p. 17) when facing practitioners.

As said above, one's School defines one's Kenpo for life. A PCs cannot actually be disciple of two schools at once. Nonetheless, the source material gives examples of exceptional characters that manage to get deeply acquainted with a major school other than their own. This unusual fact must be reflected in one of the character aspects, and this should not be allowed at character creation: it should be the result of a Milestone. If a character has an aspect that reflects his knowledge of the ways of the rival school, his opponents lose their free invocations of their High Concept (see above). As further exceptions, truly epic characters (Kenshiro, Raoh) are shown to be able to master Stunts of a school other than their own. This has a further Aspect related permission: the character's High Concept must be changed to reflect their special genius or destiny (e.g., "The Great Unifier").

8 Initiative in Combat

The default FAE rule for turn order (initiative) in a conflict is that order is determined by the Quick value in physical conflicts and Careful value in mental conflicts. These rules can stay as they are, but I propose the following addition as a dramatic option: Kenpo practitioners can always spend a Fate Point to go first in a physical conflict, as a sort of built-in Kenpo stunt. In case two Kenpo practitioners are facing each other, the one currently losing the initiative can always spend a fate point to go first: in the rare cases where acting first is perceived as paramount, this can lead to considerable expenditure of fate points on both sides. This can be interpreted as a particularly suspenseful stand off.

9 Being Taken Out and Death

Unlike your run-of-the-mill FAE game, here combat is both lethal and gruesome. All other things being equal, when NPCs are taken out, they die. With this simple assumption and the rules about facing a superior Kenpo, FAE is able to emulate pretty closely the combat lethality of the source material. To see how, take the categories of NPCs in the FAE book.

- The lowest kind of mooks have no stress boxes: one single hit will usually kill them. Military troops and analogous elite rank fighters have one one-shift box. Kenpo practitioners benefit for two free invocations in fighting them, so they will not last long.
- Mook leaders (e.g., sergeants and minor bosses) have two stress boxes and can absorb up to three shifts. They can, at times, know some minor Kenpo. They will put up some resistance, but will also typically be killed in a couple of exchanges.

- Bosses are to be considered supporting NPCs, rather than nameless NPCs: as a result, they have multiple stress boxes and consequence boxes. They almost always know some minor Kenpo school and have a high level in Forceful. They are usually able to inflict some shifts (bruises, scratches, occasionally minor injuries) to major Kenpo practitioners, by they are usually taken out in a few, well put blows, because they are no match for their Kenpo.
- The main villains of a story arc are main NPCs and are, as a result, as tough as the PCs in terms of Approaches, stress boxes and consequences. They always know a major Kenpo school. Depending on their Approach levels, they can be either a serious challenge or even a life threat for the PCs.

10 Special Effects

Major Kenpo schools also have *special effects*. A special effect is the exact description of a killing blow. The effects tend to differ depending on the school. Hokuto victims typically have their bodies smashed (for simple, forceful attacks) or exploded (as a result of pressure points). Nanto victims have their bodies penetrated, cut in depth or even shredded. Consequences taken as a result of Kenpo attacks also reflect the same narrative inspiration, on a lesser scale.

11 On "techniques"

FAE's abstract approach makes it impractical to model every single martial art techniques individually. In fact, the effort would also most likely to be desperate: the source material is often very vague about what counts as a "special" move, what makes this techniques different from that one, what makes this fearsome technique so terribly fearsome. In FANS, you can name a technique whenever you feel like it. Successful Create an Advantage actions, Attacks that succeed with style are all good candidates for "named techniques". Usually, a stunt is meant to be interpreted in-setting as a named technique, but this is not always the case. In particular, some stunts have no in-setting name and others lump together things that in-setting would be different techniques with different names, because their game effect is similar.

12 Hokuto Shinken

Hokuto stunts involves either the use of pressure points or, alternatively, of one's fighting spirit (Chi). It would be unfeasible to list and name pressure points individually. In fact, a proficient Hokuto user is expected to know many of them. The stunts will have to be generic and effect-based. GM and players, though, are encouraged to name the instantiations of the stunts and detail their effects (see On "techniques" above).

The three most accomplished Hokuto champions (Kenshiro, Toki, Raoh) show that very different approaches (with a small *a*) are viable to the fist of the North Star. Correspondingly, in FANS some advanced Hokuto Stunts exploits different Approaches (with a capital *a*) depending on their possessors.

Hokuto Fury! Whenever one of your Aspects is compelled against you, you can trade the fate point for a situation aspect *Furious!* with a free invocation, which can be invoked in all feats of strength and resistance and in forceful Attack actions.

Pressure Points. If you force your opponent to take a consequence of any given severity, you can name the consequence (as opposed to letting the victim name it, as usual) by paying one fate point. Besides the obvious choices, you can choose unusual, less brutal physical consequences such as blindness or paralysis, or mental consequences such as amnesia, neurosis or psychosis. The severity of the consequence must be assessed fairly and is subjected to the approval of the table. Also, if you take out an opponent, if for whatever reason you find it useful to put an aspect on your opponent (instead of killing them) you can do it at the same conditions. The stunt also allows to delay the effect of the chosen consequence (or of death, or of the induced aspect) of a short lapse of time (seconds) at no cost. Longer delays (up to three days) cost one additional fate point. Complex conditions (e.g., "the effect will kick in as soon as the victim pronounces a certain word") are not allowed.

Healing Touch. You can use Hokuto to Carefully heal physical and mental consequences. Recovery follows as normal. If a fate point is spent, the recovery time can be shortened by one category (i.e., a moderate consequence recover like a mild consequence). The penalty for healing oneself is ignored. The stunt works for many mental consequences, minor injuries (dislocated limbs) and non-cruent physical impairments (blindness, paralysis): for wounds or mutilations, basic medical attention is still necessary. [Requires **Pressure Points**]

Fist of Strength (Raoh). Spend one fate point to Forcefully Attack with an unstoppable fist at +2. [Requires **Pressure Points**]

Still Water (Toki). You can second your opponent instead of opposing him, thus using his own strength against him. When you succeed with style on a Careful Defense, instead of taking a boost, you may spend a fate point to inflict a number of shifts equal to the best of your opponent's Forceful Approach and your shifts on the defense roll. [Requires **Pressure Points**]

Chi Wave (Raoh, Toki). You can spend one fate point to Flashily or Carefully Attack (choose one when you learn this stunt) to make a physical attack at a distance. Opponents can defend. [Requires **Pressure Points**]

Rebirth Through Nothingness (Kenshiro, Raoh). A legendary technique, it can only be mastered by those who turn their sorrow into a medium of communion with their fallen opponents and mankind in general. The master becomes impervious to attacks and yet capable of hitting unfailingly. If you perform an action with Hokuto which would grant you a boost, you get to create the Aspect *Inner Nothing* instead. For the whole conflict, for each regular (payed) invocation of this Aspect, you get one extra free invocation. At the end of the conflict, the character gets the Mild Consequence *Dizzy*. [Requires all other Hokuto stunts in your game, plus an appropriate Aspect]

13 Nanto Seiken

Nanto stunts are different depending on the style of the practitioner. The most respected and powerful are the styles of the Six Sacred Fists, each with one current master: Crimson Crane (Yuda), Lone Eagle (Shin), Phoenix (Souther), Waterbird (Rei), White Heron (Shu). The sixth Sacred Fist (the mysterious Last Nanto General) has no combat style as such. 108 styles of Nanto Seiken are known to exist. PCs is encouraged to name their own style and invent both stunts and fluff (e.g., special effects) for it. As always, even mere attacks or Advantages created with Kenpo (Nanto) can be named and detailed for flavour. The following stunts, liberally adapted from Nanto characters of the source material, can be taken as inspiration. Notice that each style privileges the Approach which more fully capture the style and demeanor of the corresponding character (all Approaches are represented, except for Forceful, which does not feel very Nanto-like to begin with):

13.1 Sacred Fists Styles

13.1.1 Waterbird Style (Rei)

Universally regarded as the most elegant Nanto style, it emphasizes mobility and privileges aerial attacks.

Flying Waterbird. Move one additional zone or ignore any obstacles in a conflict if you can take a long leap.

Graceful Dance. Once per conflict, if you can move at least one zone before attacking, you can Cleverly perform an aerial attack with both hands and increase your shifts by two. [Requires **Flying Waterbird**]

Resolution Technique. The ultimate technique of the style is a suicidal attack. Once per session, if you can move at least one zone before attacking, you can Cleverly Attack and increase your shifts by 4, but any shifts inflicted to the opponent must also be taken by the attacker. [Requires **Graceful Dance**]

13.1.2 Crimson Crane Style (Yuda)

A relatively static style, yet endowed with great offensive capability. It privileges hand attacks.

Treacherous Wings. The Crimson Crane stylist is a master of deception. You can Sneakily Defend against all sorts of close combat attacks. If you succeed with style, you get to attach a full aspect with a free invocation to your opponent instead of a boost.

Crimson Talon. Whenever you succeed with style at a Sneaky Nanto Attack, you can choose to inflict two extra shifts. Special effect: the victim is bisected by one single vertical cut.

Murderous Wave. Once per conflict, use Nanto to Sneakily Attack one zone away [requires Crimson Talon].

13.1.3 Lone Eagle Style (Shin)

By Nanto standards, a crude but effective style. Its special effects involve perforation of tissues rather than cuts.

Feather Bullets. Once per conflict, use Nanto to Quickly Attack one zone away with small light objects like a feather or a playing card.

Hand Stabs. If you succeed with style at a Quick Nanto Attack, and you force your opponent to take a consequence, you can pay one fate point to increase the severity of the consequence by one degree.

Infernal Slaughter Kick. Once per conflict, if you move one zone before Quickly Attacking with a flying Nanto kick, you can force the opponent to take a consequence instead of checking stress boxes.

13.1.4 Phoenix Style (Souther)

Aggressive and forceful, it is often held to be the most fearsome Nanto style.

Dazzling Flash. You can move one extra zone before or after a Flashy Attack with Nanto, provided that there are no obstacles to your lightning-fast run.

Cross-Shaped Fist. The style shuns defensive stances. You can Flashily Attack and increase the shifts of your attack by two. The attack is a wide, direct attack brought with both hands at your opponent's chest. Regardless of the outcome of the attack, you grant your opponent a boost on her next turn. [Requires **Dazzling Flash**]

Heavenly Phoenix Jumping Attack. Once per session, you can perform a spectacular jumping attack (without needing to take a run-up) that lets you Flashily attack an opponent up to one zone away and attack at +2. [Requires **Cross-Shaped Fist**]

13.1.5 White Heron Style (Shu)

An elusive style that privileges legs attacks.

Illusion Alluring Palm. Once per conflict, you can Create an Advantage *Illusionary Hands* for free, with no free invocations. To overcome this aspect, one needs a Good Clever (+3) roll. **Air Dance of the Fierce Feet**. When you succeed with style at Carefully Creating the Advantage *White Heron Stance*, you can give up your free invocation to Attack one single opponent immediately at +2 by executing an acrobatic double kick.

Beheading Upside-Down Spinning Kick. When you succeed with style at Carefully Creating the Advantage *White Heron Stance*, you can give up your free invocation to Attack immediately at +2 as many enemies as you want in your zone with a sweeping rotating kick (you still have to divide your shifts). Special effect: opponents taken out have their heads cut off. [Requires **Air Dance**]

13.2 Minor Nanto Styles

Not all Nanto styles in the source material are as powerful and majestic as the styles of the Sacred Fists. The following are the stunts identifying the styles of the Five Chariot Stars, who are the personal guard of the Last Nanto General. The styles are comparatively plain and trivial, even though the Kenpo (Nanto) skill in itself is a big asset to begin with. The Chariot Stars themselves should be modeled as supporting rather than as main NPCs.

13.2.1 Cloud Style (Juza)

An eclectic, free-form style that eludes categorization. The most formidable of the five.

Like the Cloud. Whenever any practitioner of a major Kenpo school fights against you, the Aspect *Elusive Style* is created, with a free invocation. This aspect cannot be overcome.

13.2.2 Flame Style (Shuren)

A fierce style with a tricky side. It encourages the use of fire to distract and injure its opponents.

Flames of Fury. Once per conflict, use Nanto to Flashily Create the Advantage *On Fire!* and stick it to the opponents or the situation, provided that you have a small quantity of phosphorous.

13.2.3 Mountain Style (Fudo)

A simplistic but imposing style which emphasizes stamina.

Mountain Armour. Spend a fate point to get +2 to Forcefully Defend against physical attacks. This effect lasts until the end of the scene.

13.2.4 Ocean Style (Rihaku)

A basic style with no special moves. It encourages the use of deception and traps.

Deadly Spot. Use the best of Clever and Sneaky to set booby traps in a place. The time required to set the traps must be considered reduced by one step, and you can do with very basic materials. By spending one fate point, you can also make active rather than passive opposition whenever the traps are concerned.

13.2.5 Wind Style (Huhey)

An elegant style which nonetheless lacks focus and power.

Killing Wind. Once per conflict use Nanto to Quickly Attack from a distance.

14 Designing Kenpo Stunts

When designing their own Kenpo stunts, players should not follow the general guidelines for Stunts in FAE. Rather, the more complex guidelines in Fate Core should be followed. Of course, since these Stunts are meant to model (mostly offensive) martial arts, the range of possibilities is somewhat more restricted. Here is the design philosophy behind the Stunts detailed above.

Hokuto stunts tends to be restricted by fate point expenditure, Nanto stunts to be restricted by a once per conflict/once per scene clause. In part it is a matter of taste, in part it is a matter of game balance. It can be rationalized as follows. Stunts that make it possible for the character to do entirely different things from what she is otherwise able to do are game changers or, better to say, story changers: so it is reasonable that they be powered by the source of narrative power in FAE, i.e., fate points. Pressure points are a case at hand: they can create aspects (mostly, consequences) that have a lasting effect and can influence the story in many ways. Nanto stunts, on the other hand, are almost always special offensive moves, that are just meant to be better than your run-of-the-mill fist or kick, and they must be restricted somehow. One can assume that the complexity of the moves is such that a workable opportunity (space, tempo etc.) for their use occurs at most once per conflict or, in case of moves whose execution is especially elaborated or burdensome, once per scene (potentially involving more than one conflict).

If you fear that the fate point requirement on Hokuto stunts may handicap Hokuto practitioners, also consider that in the source material Hokuto practitioners have plenty of aspects that are compelled on them. Unlike the more individualistic Nanto school, Hokuto must bear the weight of its age old rules and the burning passion of its practitioners. Aspects involving sense of duty, compassion, obsessions are all very appropriate.

15 Appendix A: Sample Characters

15.1 Kenshiro

Aspects: High Concept: The Chosen Heir to Hokuto Trouble: "They Took Julia From Me" "All This Suffering Makes Me Cry" Always Right A Wrong The Man With the Seven Scars

Approaches:

Careful: Fair (+2) Clever: Good (+3) Flashy: Mediocre (+0) Forceful: Fair (+2) Quick: Average (+1) Sneaky: Average (+1)

Stunts: Hokuto Fury Pressure Points Healing Touch

Stress boxes: three.

15.2 Shu

Aspects:

High Concept: The Fist of the White Heron Trouble: "My Eyes are Blind, My Heart is Not" Everything for the Children "I Sacrified for Kenshiro That Day" Souther Must Be Stopped

Approaches:

Careful: Good (+3) Clever: Fair (+2) Flashy: Average (+1) Forceful: Mediocre (+0) Quick: Average (+1) Sneaky: Fair (+2)

Stunts:

Illusion Alluring Palm. Air Dance of the Fierce Feet Beheading Upside-Down Spinning Kick.

Stress boxes: three.

15.3 Raoh (Main NPC)

Aspects: High Concept: *The Great Hokuto Conqueror* Trouble: The Conquest has No End Brutal but Fair "My Foster Brothers Got It All Wrong" "Martial Arts Have Few Secrets for Me"

Approaches:

Careful: Average (+1) Clever: Fair (+2) Flashy: Fair (+2) Forceful: Good (+3) Quick: Average (+1) Sneaky: Mediocre (+0)

Stunts: Pressure Points Hokuto Fury Healing Touch Chi Wave Fist of Strength

Stress boxes: three.

Extra: Black King High Concept: Gigantic War Horse Trouble: Faithful but Hot Blooded "Only Honourable Warriors Can Mount Me"

Skilled (+2) at defending from physical attacks; attack by tram-

pling your opponents Bad (-2) at everything else. Stress boxes: two.

16 Appendix B: Examples of Play

16.1 Example 1: Ken vs the Zeed Gang

A street gang led by a brute called Zeed has long harassed the village and is now holding hostage a little girl. Ken, freshly escaped from prison, confronts them.

There are three punks (+2 at fighting and intimidating, -2 at anything else, no stress) and Zeed (+2 at fighting and leading street punks, -2 at diplomacy and empathy, two stress boxes), who is one zone away.

Zeed sends the punks ahead. The GM agrees that Ken has initiative in any case. He Forcefully Attacks at +2 with one sweeping kick. He rolls +3, for a total of +5. The punks roll (one roll for the three) +0. Add their +2 at fighting, and you get +2. Ken beats them with a Good (+3) result (Success with style). He does not even bother lowering his result by one and take a boost: he distributes his shifts among the three punks, one shift each. Since they do not have stress boxes, they are all taken out. In a game of *FANS*, this means that they have their head smashed by Hokuto.

Now is Zeed's time. Zeed closes in (crosses into Ken's zone) and attacks him. He rolls +1, and has +2 at fighting. His total is +3. Ken, though, Cleverly fends his attack with Kenpo: he rolls +0, for a total of +3. Ken decides he is not wasting time with this child kidnapper. He Cleverly attacks by aiming at Zeta's pressure points and uses up both his free invocations on the aspect *The Last Heir to Hokuto*. He rolls +0, plus his +3 approach and his two invocations, we get a big +7. Zeed defend and rolls a -1, for a total of +1. Ken gets 6 shifts. Zeed's highest stress box worths 2 shifts, and he has no consequences, so he cannot absorbs all the damage. He is taken out, which in *FANS* means that he is "already dead." Ken did not even sweat it (he has taken no stress).

16.2 Example 2: Ken vs Shu

Kenshiro and Shu have met for the first time and are evaluating each other. Both Shu and Ken have Average (+1) Quick, so there is tie in determining turn order. Shu chooses to pay one Fate point to go first. Shu chooses to Create the Advantage *Illusionary Hands*. (He has no free invocation on this one.) Now it is up to Ken. Smelling trouble, he tries to Carefully Create the Advantage *Heightened Alertness*. The GM states that the passive opposition is Average (+1). Ken rolls 0, plus his +2 Careful, for a total of Fair (+2).

Shu now Quickly attacks with a fierce storm of stabbing thrusts, using both *Illusionary Hands* (one fate point) and his free Nanto invocation. He attacks with a fat +4 bonus, and rolls +1: added to his Average (+1) Quick, it amounts to to a huge +6. Ken Carefully Defends (+2): he rolls a +1, for a total of +3. but he also uses up his free invocation on *Heightened Alert*-

ness, for a total of +5. He still takes one shift, and has to fill in his first stress box. Ken now tries to Overcome *Illusionary Hands*: the difficulty is Good (+3). He rolls a +2, plus his Good (+3) Clever: a total of +5. He succeeds, Shu's illusion is gone.

Shu now tries and take the infamous *White Heron Stance*: he rolls +1, the difficulty is Average (+1). His Careful approach is Good (+3), so he succeeded with style: he gives up his boost to attack immediately with an upward double kick at +2. He rolls a Sneaky Attack and gets +1, for a total of +5. Ken Carefully defends (+2), and rolls +2, for a total of +4. He must fill in another stress box. Things are getting serious. Ken decides to Cleverly Attack by exploiting what he has learned about his opponent. He gets a lucky +3, for a total of +6. In addition, he uses up his free Hokuto invocation. He is then attacking with +8. Shu Carefully defends and rolls 0, and has a total of +3. He must absorb +5 shifts. He fills his highest physical stress box (3 shifts) and take the Mild consequence *Large Bruise*. (Ken, if so wished, could spend one fate point and name the consequence as he sees fit, but he is not interested in doing so.)

Shu's player announces that she concedes the conflict. She gets one fate point. The GM suggests that Kenshiro is likely to be interested in so worthy an opponent, and once the conflict end the players engage in roleplaying a conversation between the two martial artists.