

# Shatter Your Nightmares

BY STEPHEN PETERMANN WITH LOREN FRANCK

All self-defense techniques are not created equal. Some, such as distancing moves, keep attackers at bay and ensure your safety. Others, including escapes from chokes, can save your life. Throughout my 30 years of teaching hapkido, few topics have been more important than extrication from strangleholds.

One of the martial arts' most effective self-defense systems, hapkido has a vast array of open-hand self-defense weapons. The art continues to skyrocket in popularity throughout the world, focusing on personal protection instead of sport.

Although a sixth-degree hapkido black belt, I'm continuously learning better ways to escape chokes. Besides our highly acclaimed kicks, hapkido emphasizes situational self-defense. That is, if an attacker does this, you do that. And chokes are among the most lethal assaults you'll ever face.

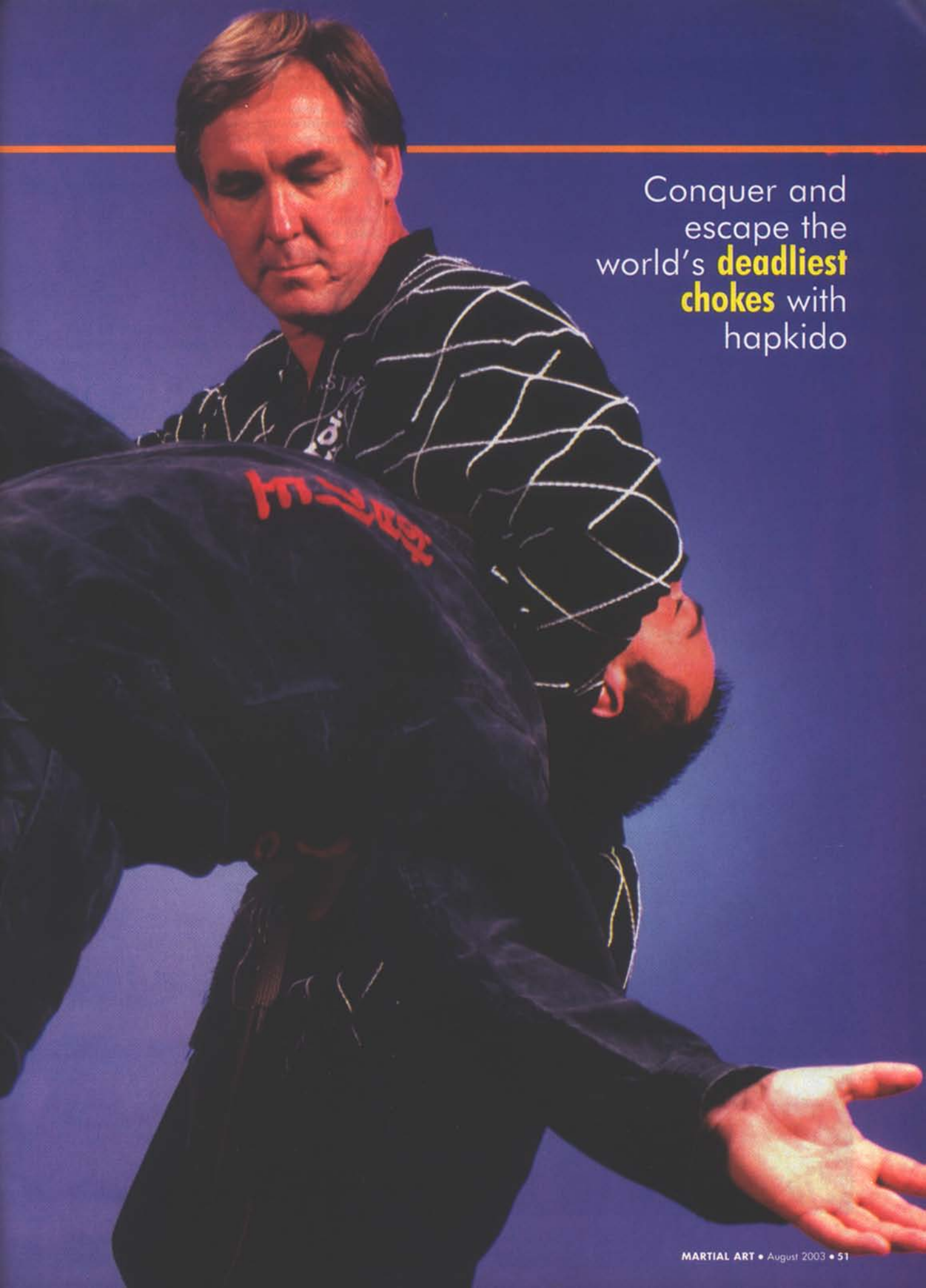
## WHAT TO EXPECT

Attackers who apply chokes range from unskilled cretins to highly experienced jiu-jitsu practitioners. Given the right circumstances, almost any attacker could choke you into eternity, so be prepared to deal with a gamut of adversaries. A skilled fighter's arsenal of strangleholds is usually replete with arm, hand and leg chokes. He'll also choke you with sticks, garrotes and clothing, such as your collar. All of these attacks are very real—and extremely deadly.

During self-defense, however, you'll most frequently encounter hand and forearm chokes. And yet, the chokes themselves aren't the real danger. That dubious honor rests with the person who chokes you. If he's adroitly skilled, you're in big trouble.

Most people don't





Conquer and  
escape the  
world's **deadliest**  
**chokes** with  
hapkido

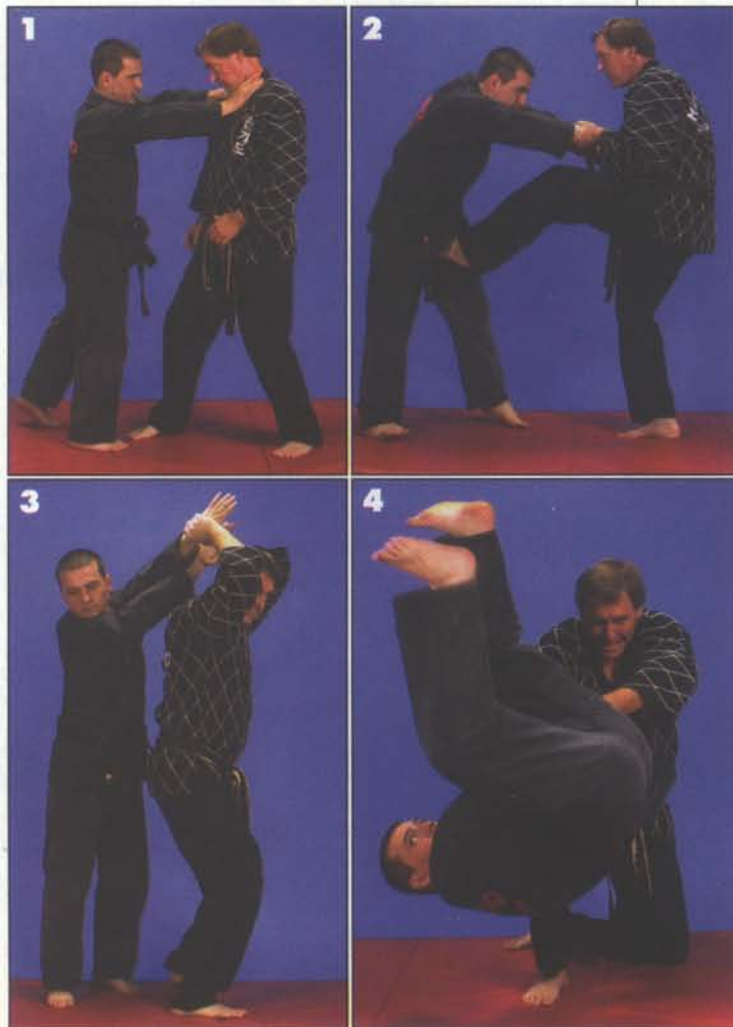
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know the total truth about chokes. Unless you practice escapes from these lethal holds, your main source of information on them will be the media. You'll be among the millions of moviegoers and TV addicts who believe chokes are sedate tranquilizers that lull their victims to sleep. In truth, these techniques are extremely violent, and they hurt — a lot. People who've been choked know how painful it can be. In fact, first-time choke victims often exclaim, "I didn't know it could hurt so much."

The reason for such pain is easy to understand. If attacked with certain types of chokes, such as those in judo and jiu-jitsu, the amount of pressure inside your head can be unbearable, and you'll fall unconscious very quickly. It's like a balloon ready to pop. My worst nightmare would be a skilled jiu-jitsu practitioner locking a choke on me from behind.

## FRONT TWO-HANDED CHOKE

When Daniel Aul attacks using a front two-handed choke, Steve Petermann drops his chin to protect his throat (1). Petermann then responds by grabbing his attacker's wrists and throwing a kick to the groin (2). Stepping under his adversary's arms, Petermann pivots on the balls of his feet (3). Lowering himself to one knee, Petermann continues to pull on the attacker's wrists, causing him to fall (4).



## Hapkido at a Glance

### MEANING

"Hap" means harmony of body and spirit, while "ki" denotes internal power, life and body energy. "Do" refers to a way of life or a way of learning. Loosely translated, then, hapkido means "the way of life that emphasizes body and spirit harmony based on internal power."

### HISTORY

Two Korean martial arts grandmasters, Choi Yong Sul (1904-1986) and Ji Han Jae (1936-present), are often credited as being hapkido's founders. Both lent their extensive experience in Korean fighting arts to hapkido's establishment in the mid-1900s.

### THREE PRINCIPLES

1. **CIRCLE.** Most hapkido movements are circular and resemble movement inside a ball. An attacker's force is redirected, and then neutralized at the surface of this imaginary sphere.

2. **RIVER.** A river adapts freely to its surroundings and yet possesses incredible strength. In like manner, hapkido techniques are flexible but extremely powerful.

3. **INFLUENCE.** Through arduous training, practitioners, hapkido movements become reflexive — and almost unstoppable.

### WORDS OF WARNING

What are the essential principles of hapkido choke escapes? Protected airway and safeguarded blood flow to the brain. And the best way of doing both is to drop your chin. No matter what type of choke you confront, tuck your chin toward your chest as it approaches. Unfortunately, some choke attempts will miss your throat and land across your jaw. That can hurt as much as a choke, so be sure to drop your chin. It's your best defense. Practice until it becomes instinctive.

Sometimes you can lower your chin after you're choked. For example, if forearm choked from behind, rotate your chin toward the crook of the strangling arm, or turn your head to one side and wiggle your chin underneath your attacker's elbow. These defenses will maintain your airway, your cranial blood flow and will buy time to escape.

To fortify their necks against chokes, some martial artists do isometrics, neck sit-ups and neck raises. These can mitigate chokes somewhat, but there's really no contest between my throat and an attacker's arm. Besides, you won't have much time to escape a choke, because if it's a good one, you'll be unconscious momentarily. When your vision and alertness fade, you won't be able to think, so respond quickly.

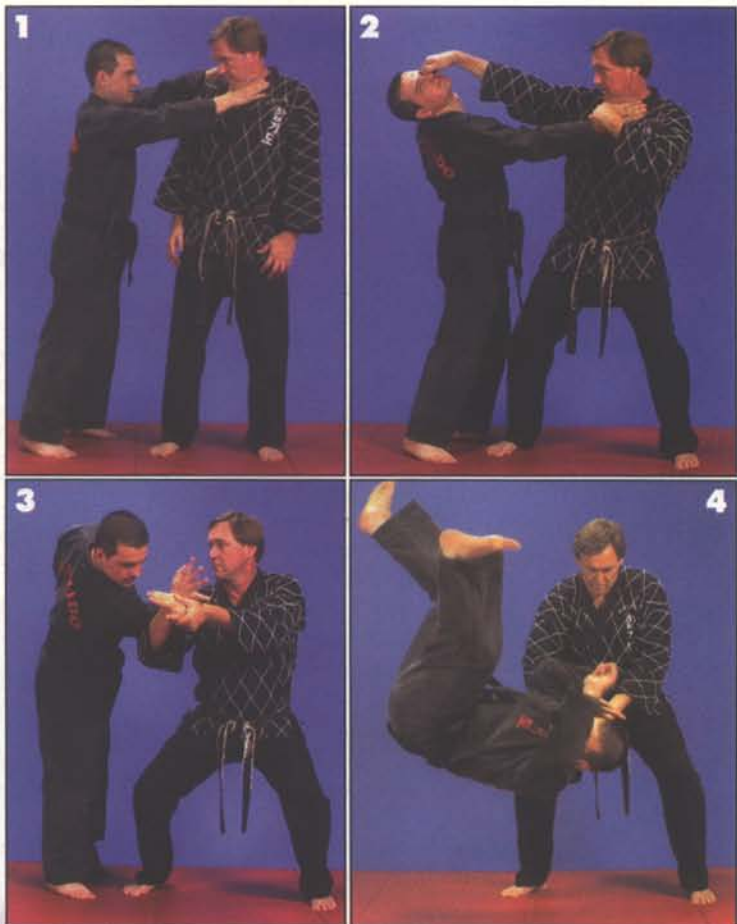
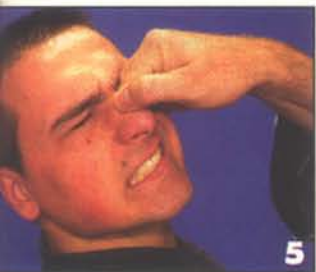
### CHOKES IN PERSPECTIVE

When someone chokes you, he can easily end your life. Therefore, don't merely hope he'll render you unconscious and then let you go. His stranglehold has the deadly force of a gun or knife. And even if you're choked hard and released seconds later, your neck can swell, perhaps making the attack fatal minutes afterward. So don't give a choker any sympathy.

Your body position when choked can severely

### SIDE TWO-HANDED CHOKE

Daniel Aul attacks Steve Petermann with a side two-handed choke (1). Petermann drops his chin to cover his throat. Petermann simultaneously grabs Aul's hand and performs a knuckle strike to the corner of his eye (2). Lowering his center of gravity, Petermann moves his right arm under Aul's captured hand (3). As Petermann continues to twist Aul's arm, the attacker falls (4). A close look at the knuckle strike (5). You can also strike to a pressure point under the nose or at the base of the throat.



affect the attack's effectiveness. For instance, when you're on the ground or against a wall, a choke will be much more dangerous than if you're standing. While you're positioned against a solid object, your throat takes the full force of the stranglehold. And in this position, when a certain level of pressure crosses your throat, such assaults can be three times more effective than when you're standing.

### LIFESAVING TIPS

Unlike some martial arts instructors, I don't teach students how to choke. There are no preemptive, counter or defensive strangleholds in my curriculum. Instead, I emphasize choke defense,



### Fun With "Freebies"

Has a simple training task ever taxed your mind to the max? One of my favorites is called "freebies." During class time, one line of students faces a defender, who must counter whatever choke comes in. These usually include one-hand or two-hand chokes and students approach from all directions. Every conceivable choke is performed at least once per session.

Freebies improve defenders' response time and self-confidence tremendously, which is why we do them. In fact, we perform freebies with all types of techniques, not just chokes. Practice choke-escape freebies twice a week and nobody will touch you on the street.

— Stephen Petermann with Loren Franck

choke escape, throat destruction and throat pressure points. Please understand that I believe in choking. Indeed, I've worked with some of the world's best judo players, and they've convinced me that chokes can be extremely effective.

When an attacker tries to strangle you, back away. This should be your first move. It's not hard to escape a hand choke while you're standing. As in other self-defense techniques, it's usually more effective to avoid attack than to counter it, so prevent chokes whenever possible.

If you have to fight, though, respond viciously. As I tell my students, "Go ugly early." Don't simply control joints and pressure points. Destroy them. When you're safe, you can establish control. But until his hands are off your throat and there's no lingering dam-

# Shatter Your Nightmares

age, I strongly advise you to counterattack. Strike pressure points around his eyes, nose and other vulnerable areas. Hit him with throat strikes and persist until you escape.

That's our main goal in hapkido. My measure of success is whether I go home to my family. If choked by an attacker, I don't need to analyze him psychologically or solve the world's problems. I need to go home. So, when I'm free, I'm gone. Some people call this "Nike self-defense" because you hit the road as soon as possible.

## COMMON-SENSE DEFENSE

When young and bubbling with martial arts enthusiasm, you might be tempted to use flashy kicks for self-defense. Admittedly, they're fun, potentially effective and they impress even the dullest onlookers. But after a while, when the thrill is gone and you've performed your share of fancy footwork, you'll simply want to flee.

When applied judiciously, kicks can facilitate choke escapes. Primarily, they distance you from attackers, and the greater that distance, the more likely your escape. Consider every situation separately, though. Instep stomps can establish distance. But when you're close to your assailant, the top of his foot might be hard to find, so stomp his instep only when you can see it. Similarly, when your attacker chokes from behind, you can lose your balance, and that can make kicks difficult. Balance problems are much less

## Avoid These Mistakes

By Stephen Petermann with Loren Franck

There's no shortage of good intentions among martial artists. Most want to remain safe, and virtually all desire to use correct techniques. Unfortunately, mistakes creep into all fighting systems, and even the most minuscule faux pas can make or break your escapes from chokes. Here are four mistakes to avoid:

### RESPOND SLOWLY

When choked, especially by a skilled martial artist, you'll have seconds to escape. If you don't counter immediately, say bye-bye.

### RESPOND HALFWAY

If an assailant chokes you, he's trying to end your life. Respond with equal determination. Whatever escape you choose, execute it as if your life depends on it — because it does.

### DON'T PRACTICE

Practice is the most important element in choke escapes. Regrettably, some martial artists don't practice defense against deadly attacks. Instead, they focus on flash. But if you want to train smart, practice against chokes and other deadly assaults — and practice often.

### LIMIT YOUR ARSENAL

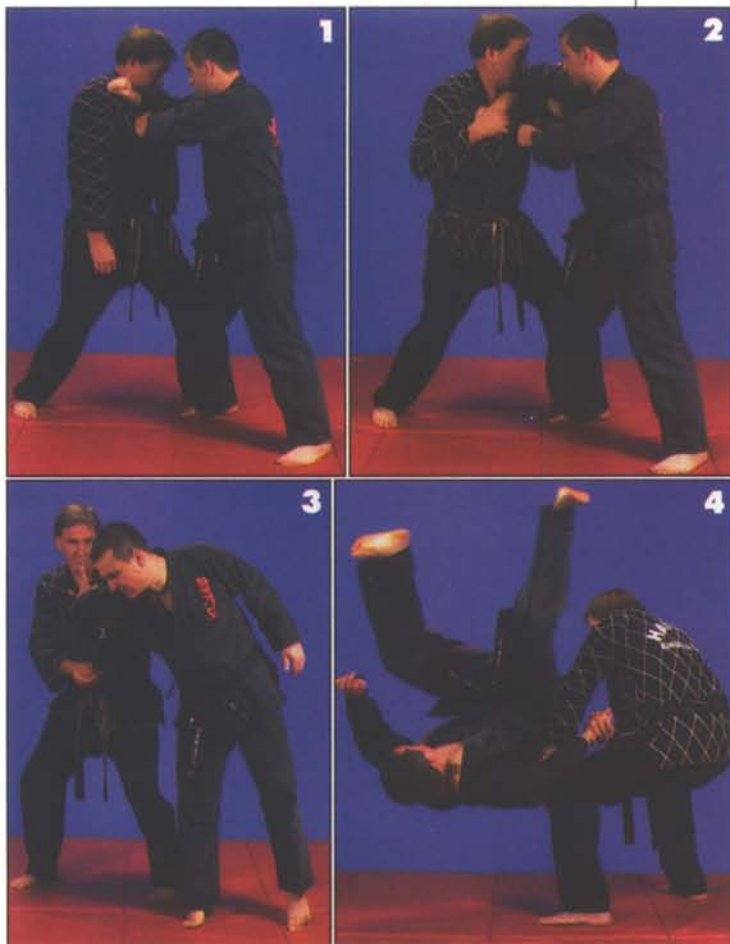
The more choke escapes you know, the better off you'll be, so don't limit the range of your techniques. Learn all you can. My students practice twists, arm bars, joint locks and throws against chokes. We cover every effective technique imaginable.

frequent when you kick to the front.

Of course, you can do the Hollywood version of any technique. But when fighting for your life against deadly strangleholds, it's best to leave Hollywood techniques where they belong — in Hollywood. Like many longtime martial artists, I love to kick high, but now I'm content to watch high kicks. However, if you can effectively use high kicks to escape lethal chokes, more power to you.

Throughout my hapkido training, I've seen excellent spin kicks, which can be terrific choke-escape tools. When hit with these forceful blows, you're in serious trouble, whether they land low, middle or high. I've seen spin kicks knock people out. So, if you're a good spin kicker, feel free to add these moves to your choke-escape arsenal.

I've always believed that a person's self-defense method is his own business. Nevertheless, I don't teach flashy kicks as automatic responses to chokes. We might execute such



### FOREARM CHOKE

Aul grabs Petermann's lapels and begins a forearm choke (1). Petermann immediately drops his chin to protect his throat. Petermann grabs Aul's hand and pushes up on his elbow, decreasing the intensity of the choke (2). Petermann steps back and increases the torque on Aul's arm, creating pain in the attacker's shoulder (3). Petermann continues to crank on the shoulder, causing Aul to fall (4). A tight look at the choke (5).

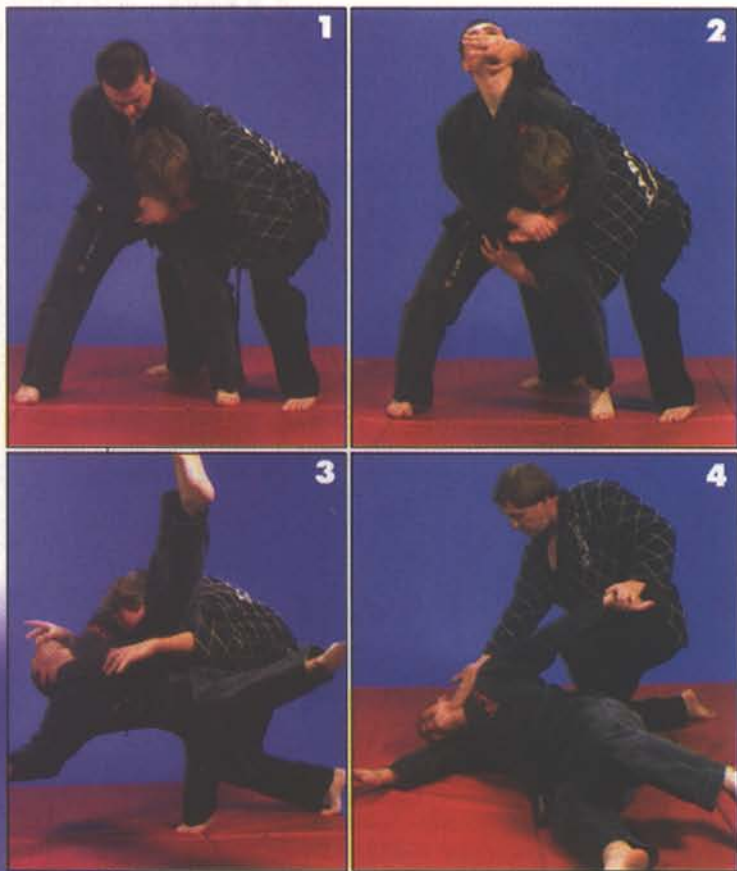


kicks during demonstrations, but rarely during choke-escape training.

## THE POWER OF PERSEVERANCE

Sometimes you need several countermoves instead of a lone technique to escape a choke. Accordingly, if an attacker overpowers you with a stranglehold, your initial defense might be futile, so you'll need to get down and dirty. You'll need to persevere, which shouldn't be a problem. Remember, you're battling for your life, so attack vulnerable targets, especially the eyes and groin.

Overcoming a powerful assailant can be difficult for those with weak upper bodies. Some attackers are brutally strong, and you must compensate for that if you plan to escape their chokes. If you're weak and your attacker is strong, it will be nearly impossible for you to unwrap his fingers



### HEADLOCK CHOKES

Daniel Aul grabs Steve Petermann's neck from the side and begins a headlock choke (1). Note again how Petermann drops his chin to protect his throat. Petermann then places a knuckle under Aul's nose and uses the other hand to attack his groin (2). Stepping backward and pushing hard against the opponent's nose causes the attacker to drop (3). Petermann then uses a fingertip stab and armar to subdue his opponent (4). A tight look (5).



from around your throat or to remove his arm from your neck.

The solution? Distract him. Make him focus on your countertechnique instead of his choke. Select the most vulnerable targets to counterattack. As previously noted, the groin is often unprotected, and if it's struck solidly, your attacker will usually bow out of the fight — literally. Don't forget to counterattack your assailant's armpits, eyes and nose too.

### A DISTINCTIVE DIFFERENCE

Every hapkido technique fits into at least one of the art's three main principles. When escaping an attacker's life-threatening throat grasp, you can apply techniques from any fighting system. But if your moves don't fit into the water, circle or power principle, they won't match hapkido curriculum.

Using these three principles, you'll effectively contain your assailant, turn his power against him and move circularly. These principles allow you to maximize your power, deflect his choke and escape. On the surface, this approach appears to resemble

*Continued on page 92*

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Continued from page 55

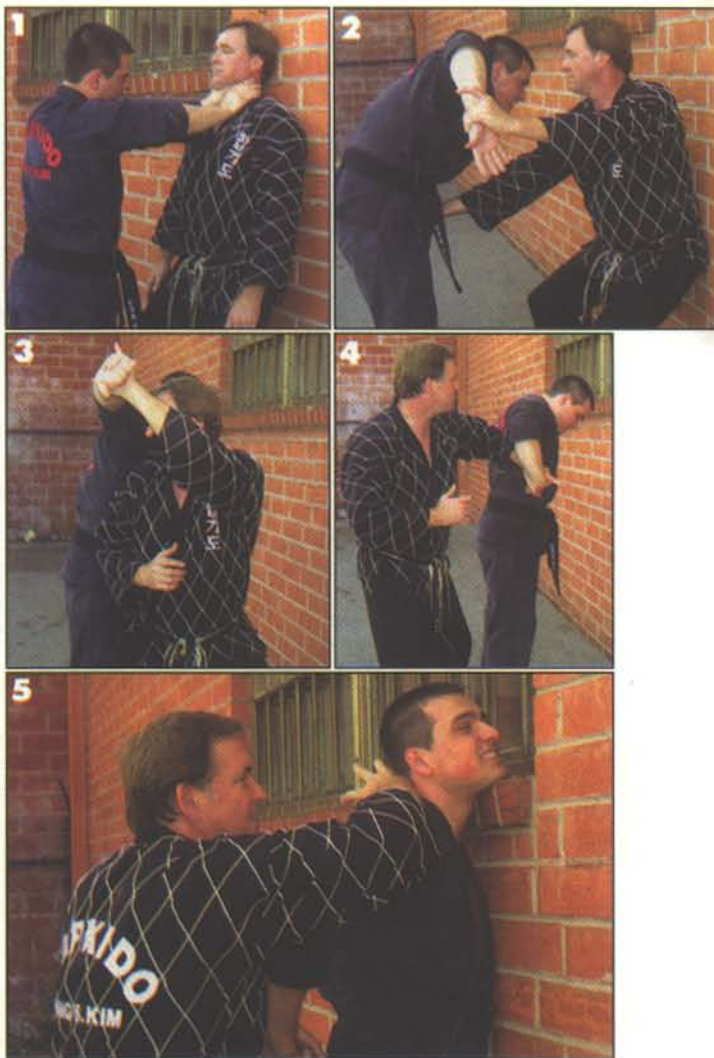
other fighting arts, but it's actually unique to hapkido.

Despite the art's distinctive applications, lifesaving choke escapes are common among hapkido practitioners, who base their training on tailored self-defense. Throughout the years, I've trained thousands of eager martial artists, and I can say with assurance that hapkido choke escapes work against even the most brutal chokes. And my students? They wouldn't have it any other way. ☯

*About the writer: Loren Franck is a Los Angeles-based journalist who writes frequently for Martial Art magazine.*

## For More Info

Stephen Petermann is available for exhibitions, instruction and seminars. Contact him at Kim's Hapkido, 1437 W. Arrow Highway, San Dimas, CA 91773 or call (909) 305-0700.



### FRONT TWO-HAND CHOKE AGAINST A WALL

Daniel Aul uses a front two-handed choke, and Steve Petermann drops his chin to protect his throat (1). Petermann grabs one of his attacker's hands, squats and throws a groin strike (2). Petermann then turns under Aul's arm (3), finishes the step-through and intensifies the twist on his attacker's wrist (4). Using the surrounding environment, Petermann uses a window ledge to assist in obtaining a submission (5).