

GADGET GUIDE: ENERGY WEAPONS

Since the days of pulp heroes armed with “ray guns,” various types of directed energy weapons have been part of the superhero genre. Heroes and villains are frequently armed with them, and minions from uniformed agents to robots wield them.

ENERGY WEAPON DESCRIPTORS

Since the effects of most energy weapons are either Damage or some form of Affliction, the weapon’s descriptor has a significant effect on what kind of weapon it is, how it works, and what modifiers may be appropriate for it.

The following are common energy weapon descriptors. In addition to the material here, Gamemasters may find the corresponding **Power Profile** useful for more about the effects of that type of energy, and different ways it can be applied. For example, for more on electricity, see the **Electrical Powers** profile.

COLD

Cold-based weapons may involve some type of “cryo-energy” that slows molecular motion, thereby reducing temperature. They tend to have one of two effects: either freezing targets directly or producing large amounts of ice, usually by condensing and freezing atmospheric moisture.

Freezing: Intense cold may be Fortitude-resisted Damage (bypassing Toughness) or a Fortitude-resisted Affliction, causing fatigue or impairment. Severe cold that incapacitates a target can cause frostbite-related complications, although in the comics characters can be frozen and thawed out without any long-lasting effects.



Suspended Animation: A potential power stunt or alternate effect of a cold weapon may be to put targets into a state of suspended animation, a form of Immunity that suspends the target’s normal life functions, including aging, breathing, and eating, and suspending the effects of disease and poison, at the cost of leaving the subject helpless and incapacitated. Consider this a –2 flaw, lowering the cost of the necessary 6 ranks of Immunity to 2 points.

Ice: Cold weapons able to generate large amounts of ice may produce binding Affliction effects (trapping targets in bonds or blocks of ice) as well as Permanent Create effects, with the weapon’s beam “shaping” the ice as it forms into different objects, which later melt with the prevailing temperature.

Chemical Cold: Some cold weapons are not “energy” weapons at all but sprayers for super-cooled chemicals. These weapons can have either freezing or ice effects, and differ primarily in terms of descriptor and things that might interact with or block their spray. They rely upon tanks or containers of chemicals rather than batteries or some other power source.

ELECTRICITY

Electrical weapons range from tasers and stun-guns to powerful electrolasers or EMP (electromagnetic pulse) weapons designed to take out other electronics.

Electrolaser: An electrolaser uses a laser beam (see **Lasers**, following) to create an ionized path through the air, along which a powerful electrical charge can be directed with some precision to the target. Electrolasers are sometimes known as “zap guns” and typically inflict electrical Damage on the target, although some may be tunable to function

ENERGY WEAPONS AS EQUIPMENT

The *Hero’s Handbook* describes equipment as “relatively mundane technology” and “technology commonly available in the setting” and yet lists blasters in the ranged weapon equipment table. What gives? As the *Hero’s Handbook* further states on page 162: The GM decides what is “commonly available.” In many, if not most, superhero settings, some type of energy weapon is “standard issue,” if not for the police or military, for para-military security organizations like AEGIS in the *Freedom City* setting. That makes some energy weapons suitable as equipment, if the GM chooses.

Of course, such weapons are still subject to the usual restrictions on equipment: Their availability and ownership may be limited (probably to the aforementioned government organizations and similarly influential groups) and they are more subject to damage and loss than devices that are a part of the character’s powers. Additionally, “off the rack” energy weapons are subject to whatever other technological limits the GM chooses to impose, including a ceiling on effect rank and modifiers. For example, while blaster weapons may be available, the GM can rule they are limited to Damage 8 at most, and cannot be Subtle without illegal (and expensive) modifications to the weapon.

as electro-stunners as well (see following); the weapon is an array with multiple settings as Alternate Effects. Like regular laser-based weapons, an electrolaser might be able to use its path-creating beam as a laser targeting sight as well, adding a rank of Accurate to the weapon.

Electro-stunner: A powerful electrical charge can overload and stun the nervous system of most creatures or the electrical system of a piece of technology. Whether in the form of a close-range weapon (stun gun or cattle prod) or a longer range “beam,” an electro-stunner is typically an Affliction (Resisted and Overcome by Fortitude; Dazed, Stunned, Incapacitated). Some may be Cumulative as well.

Electro-blaster: An electro-blaster or “lightning gun” fires a powerful charge of electricity, like an artificial bolt of lightning, at its target. This causes a surface blast and intense Damage. Powerful lightning guns may be rifle or even cannon-sized, mounted on vehicles or installations.

Electromagnetic Pulse: Rather than damaging electrical current, an electromagnetic pulse can overload and damage electrical circuitry in the affected area, making it a useful weapon against modern installations and individuals dependent on electrical equipment. As detailed in the **Electrical Powers** profile, an EMP is a Broad, Simultaneous Weaken Electronics effect, typically with the Burst Area modifier, although a directed EMP weapon might have a Cone or Line area instead, allowing for finer targeting.

KINETIC

Kinetic weapons use the energy of force or movement to produce powerful impacts or even to literally tear targets apart. They include the classic comic book “blaster” weapons as well as weapons using shaped or projected force fields.

Force: The same principle used to create solid barriers of force can also create equally forceful beams, projectiles, or striking surfaces for weapons. In addition to being far tougher than most weapons made out of matter, force weapons dissipate into harmless energy particles when broken or scattered, limiting collateral damage. Shaped force weapons can have edges or points far sharper than almost any material object, giving them the Penetrating extra.

Gravity: Gravity-beam weapons harness gravitons or gravity waves to produce pounding force beams capable of inflicting Damage. Unless a side effect of the beam emitter produces visible light, gravity weapons are most likely Subtle in nature, visible only by the damage that they cause. Some gravity weapons may have effects other than Damage, such as a Move Object effect for “tractor” beams able to push, pull, and manipulate objects, or even an Affliction effect for gravity weapons that alter the effects of local gravity on the target, such as imposing the hindered and immobile conditions by making the target heavier (possibly adding conditions like impaired/disabled or dazed/stunned as well).

Particle Beams: Some kinetic weapons use beams of accelerated subatomic particles to produce a surface impact

when the beam strikes its target. “Blaster” weapons tend to be particle beams, unless specified otherwise. The beams produce considerable force and impact, but no appreciable thermal or electrical shock.

FIRE/HEAT

Fire- and heat-based weapons inflict burning Damage and are particularly effective against vulnerable targets, such as flammable constructs, or those with ice or cold powers, for example.

Most modern technological fire weapons rely on burning fuel sprayed at a target. This typically makes them Cone or Line Area attacks. A fire weapon’s fuel tank may be vulnerable to complications which puncture or set off the fuel, creating an explosion (inflicting the weapon’s damage in a Burst Area around the tank, including the wielder).

Flame: A flame attack has the potential to continue burning the target; the GM may wish to consider the Secondary Effect modifier (*Hero’s Handbook*, page 144) for flame attacks. To represent chemical accelerants like napalm, which continue burning the target for some time, consider increasing the value of the Secondary Effect to a +2 extra for two additional rounds of effect and a +3 extra for an effect that continues until it is countered or the target is incapacitated (see **Countering Effects**, *Hero’s Handbook*, pages 95–96).

Plasma: A high-energy ionized state of matter, similar to a gas, plasma burns extremely hot. A plasma weapon fires a “packet” or discharge of the super-heated material, perhaps contained or channeled by a magnetic field or an ionized path similar to an electrolaser (previously). Plasma inflicts burning Damage and its high temperature gives it the Penetrating extra, allowing it to overcome even the most hardened defenses. Plasma can also set lasting fires like flame weapons, so the GM may wish to consider the Secondary Effect modifier for it as well.

LIGHT

A light weapon may project nothing more than a bright light, capable of temporarily blinding and/or stunning a target, allowing for different Affliction effects. Such light attacks are typically resisted by Dodge or Fortitude and overcome by Fortitude as the target’s system shakes off the effect (also meaning they’re useless against nonliving targets and others Immune to Fortitude Effects). Such light weapons are non-lethal, making them a popular option for heroes, with the additional benefit of limiting collateral damage, since a “miss” with the weapon has little effect on anything else.

Lasers: Damaging light weapons are typically lasers. The term was initially an acronym for *Light Amplification through Stimulated Emission of Radiation*, but now stands on its own. Lasers are coherent light beams, tightly focused enough to inflict heat damage and burn or melt through materials. The “laser” acronym has been adopted for many other types of energy beams (see **Radiation**, following).



Laser Sight: A laser may use a low-level form of its own beam as a laser sight, projecting a small, glowing dot at its targeting point. This adds the Accurate modifier. See the Laser Sight in **Gadget Guide: Guns** for details.

Blue-Green Lasers: Most laser weapons use the red portion of the spectrum, but it is possible to use the shorter blue-green wavelengths. A blue-green laser uses more power, but is capable of firing through water (which tends to scatter the longer wavelengths) and at greater range. A character might be able to modify a more conventional laser to fire a blue-green beam as a power stunt, as the GM's discretion.

RADIATION

Light is not the only form of radiation turned into a weapon. Principles similar to the creation of visible-light lasers are also used in the creation of different types of focused radiation beams.

Precisely because these weapons use non-visible wavelengths of the spectrum, they may well have the Subtle modifier, unseen except to sensors able to detect their radiation. Of course, in the comics, a "gamma ray blast" or similar attack may be quite visible as a glowing beam, so Subtle isn't required. Feel free to decide that these weapons shed some visible light, or excite air molecules to create a glowing "beam" when fired, or the like, if you wish.

Grasers: Short for "gamma ray laser" a graser can be considered a Subtle, Penetrating form of laser, able to more easily pass through armor and similar countermeasures. Grasers primarily inflict heat damage and targets protected against heat or radiation may be able to resist or ignore their effects.

Masers: A maser is a concentrated microwave beam, which inflicts heat damage, literally boiling targets from the inside out. Like ordinary microwaves, masers can be blunted by intervening materials, particularly large amounts of water or metal. Like grasers, they are generally Subtle Penetrating Damage attacks.

Microwave Area Denial (MAD): This weapon is designed for crowd control, producing a low-level, wide microwave beam that causes a terrible burning sensation all over the targets' body, searing pain with minimal damage. It is a Subtle Cone Area Progressive Affliction, Resisted and Overcome by Will, causing targets to become Impaired, Disabled, and Incapacitated by the pain. The effect lasts as long as a target is in the area of the beam and it is tuned on, but it has Instant Recovery for when a target leaves the area or the beam is shut down.

Microwave Disruptors: A disruptor fires a microwave beam tuned to disrupt electronics, like a targeted electromagnetic pulse (see **Electricity**, previously). Like an EMP, this is a Broad, Simultaneous Weaken Electronics effect, but Ranged and lacking the Area modifier.

X-ray lasers: An X-ray laser is a stepped-up version of the graser, but essentially the same in game terms apart from the different descriptor. X-ray lasers are Subtle Penetrating Ranged Damage effects.

SONIC

Like light, sonic weapons may employ nothing more than extremely loud sound to deafen or stun targets, or focus sound into extremely destructive beams or blasts of sonic force.

Sonic weapons require a medium through which to travel, usually air; they don't function in a vacuum, and may function differently under water. Single target sonic weapons may become Area effects due to the greater conductivity of the water, or need adjusting to function normally.

Sonics and Subtlety: Note that sonic attacks are not normally considered Subtle, even if they are not visible, since they usually involve loud noise and vibration, along with visible distortions in the air. An ultrasonic weapon, which uses sound wavelengths beyond the human range of hearing, would be considered Subtle, since only those with Ultrahearing could notice it.

Disruptors: Sonic disruptors fire blasts of intensely focused vibration that strike with considerable force and tear targets apart with a Damage effect.

Screamers: These weapons employ extremely loud (and often high-frequency) sound to deafen targets. Screamers may be single target beam weapons or Cone or Burst Area attacks. They have an Affliction effect: Resisted and Overcome by Fortitude, with the Impaired, Disabled, and Unaware conditions, Limited to hearing. Screamers may incorporate the Extra Condition modifier, essentially adding the stunner or vertigo attacks (following) to their main effect.

Stunners: A sonic stunner uses sound frequencies to shock the target, an Affliction effect Resisted and Overcome by Fortitude or Will (choose one) with the Dazed,

Stunned, and Incapacitated conditions. Some stunners also have the Cumulative and/or Concentration modifiers.

Vertigo: This weapon uses sonic projection to upset the inner ear, causing extreme disorientation. It is also an Affliction effect: Resisted and Overcome by Will, with the Impaired, Prone, and Incapacitated conditions. Some versions may have Limited Degree (getting no worse than prone) while others have Extra Condition, layering on Hindered and Immobilized.

OTHER ENERGY DESCRIPTORS

The previous list covers just the most common descriptors for energy weapons. The only limit is the player's imagination and what the GM will reasonably permit. For example, an energy weapon might have a "cosmic" energy descriptor, perhaps drawing upon some universal force permeating all reality. Likewise, it might have a "psionic" descriptor, reflecting a type of energy linked to some mental powers. Supernatural energy weapons can even have divine or magical descriptors for things like an angel's flaming sword or a thunder god's lightning powered weapon, although such things are more likely to be considered devices than equipment (see **Energy Weapons as Equipment**).

Some "energy weapons" with particularly unusual descriptors or effects fall more under the category of powers and are covered in the **Power Gadgets** Guide.

SAMPLE ENERGY WEAPONS

WEAPON	EFFECT	CRITICAL	COST
RANGED			
Blaster pistol	Ranged Damage 5 (force)	20	10
Blaster rifle	Ranged Damage 8 (force)	20	16
Flamethrower	Line Area Damage 6 (fire), Secondary Effect	20	18
Ice gun	Ranged Affliction 8 (ice; Resisted by Dodge, Overcome by Damage; Hindered and Vulnerable, Defenseless and Immobilized)	20	16
Laser pistol	Ranged Damage 5 (light), Accurate	20	11
Microwave disruptor	Ranged Weaken Electronics 6, Broad, Simultaneous, Accurate	20	25
Plasma burst	Cone Area Damage 8 (fire), Secondary Effect	20	24
Sonic stunner	Ranged Affliction 6 (sonic; Resisted and Overcome by Fortitude; Dazed, Stunned, Incapacitated)	20	12
X-ray laser sniper rifle	Subtle Ranged Damage 8 (radiation), Penetrating 5, Accurate, Dangerous, Extended Range	19–20	25
CLOSE			
Electro-whip	Damage 3 (electricity), Concentration, Disarming, Grabbing	20	8
Grav gauntlet	Strength-based Damage 6	20	6
Laser sword	Damage 6, Penetrating	20	12
Shock baton	Cumulative Affliction 5 (Resisted and Overcome by Fortitude; Dazed, Stunned, Incapacitated)	20	10
Sonic knife	Strength-based Damage 2 (slashing, sonic), Dangerous	19–20	3

ENERGY WEAPON CONFIGURATIONS

An energy weapon's configuration is how it applies the energy from its descriptor (previously) and how much of that energy it delivers to its target. Essentially, configuration determines the weapon's effect rank, whether or not it is ranged, and other range modifiers like Reach or Increased Range.

RANGED WEAPON

The usual configuration for a ranged energy weapon is a gun with a barrel and grip with a trigger, easy to hold and aim, and clearly recognizable as a weapon. The size (and therefore the capacity of the power source and space for focusing and generating elements) determines the weapon's overall effect rank.

Holdout: A holdout is a small weapon, designed to fit into the palm of the hand and be easily concealed. This generally means it has limited ammunition or energy capacity, and may be Unreliable (having 5 or fewer shots). A holdout energy weapon is typically between rank 2 and 4.

Pistol: A pistol roughly the size of a modern handgun, although pistol energy weapons may vary in shape and appearance. Rank is generally between 4 and 6.

Rifle: An energy rifle has a larger stock and longer barrel, allowing it to have a larger battery or ammo magazine. Rifle ranks are typically between 8 and 10, possibly higher for especially powerful energy weapons. A skilled marksman armed with an energy rifle can easily reach between power level 8 and 10 (or more) in offensive capabilities.

Thrown: A thrown energy weapon converts a fairly conventional type of throwing weapon into an energized version. Examples include shuriken with "blades" of lasers or force fields, or a spear with a "sonic blade" at its tip. Any of the thrown weapons from the **Archaic Weapons Guide** or the **Asian Weapons Guide** could be converted into energized versions, simply by changing their Damage descriptor and possibly adding an extra rank or two of effect.

MELEE WEAPON

Although they are most commonly used at range, energy weapons may also be configured for use in close combat.

Although most melee weapons are Strength-based damage, their energy versions may or may not be, depending on their descriptors. A "kinetic gauntlet" that magnifies the wearer's punches is still Strength-based, but a "laser sword" with a blade made of pure energy is not.

Baton: A "baton" refers to any short, simple handheld weapon that produces an energy effect by touch. Examples include electrical "shock prods" or heated "branding rods" as well as a "gravity mace" or "kinetic amplifier".

Blade: An energy blade typically has a handle or hilt that emits a "blade" of pure energy out to a specific length, al-

lowing it to be wielded like a sword. If the energy is invisible to the naked eye, the blade may have the Subtle modifier, since targets will find it more difficult to detect and dodge.

A blade weapon can be like a conventional sword, or shorter, like a dagger. It might have a long handle and a short blade, like spear, or even two blades, one emerging from either end of the handle, making it a double weapon able to use the Split extra (*Hero's Handbook*, page 144) to attack twice with the weapon, splitting its damage between the two attacks. If the combination of hilt and blade are particularly long, the weapon may grant ranks in the Reach extra as well.

Gauntlet: The weapon is built into a glove or gauntlet, able to emit energy from its surface. This may produce a close range attack where the wielder must touch the target, or add to the wearer's Strength-based Damage (with the addition of a different Damage descriptor). A gauntlet attack could be ranged, however, such as an energy blaster built into the palm or fingers, or set in the back of the hand to fire above the knuckles of a closed fist. Gauntlet weapons may have their own internal power source or connect up to another source, such as part of a suit of armor.

Lash: Similar to a blade, a lash weapon is a hilt or handle that projects a beam of energy, except its "beam" forms a flexible tendril (possibly running along the length of a monofilament wire or other conductor), allowing the wielder to use the weapon like a whip. A lash provides at least a rank or two of Reach, and may offer some of the other benefits of wielding an actual whip (from the **Archaic Weapons Guide**) including Improved Disarm and Improved Grab.

MODIFICATIONS AND ACCESSORIES

Some of the accessories from **Gadget Guide: Guns** may also apply to energy weapons, essentially any not specifically concerned with the kind of ammo the weapon uses. Additionally, energy weapons may have one or more of the following.

Concealed: Although most energy weapons look like weapons, some may be built into otherwise innocuous items: canes, wristwatches, eyeglasses, pens, cell phones, and so forth, keeping the weapon concealed until it is used. This is 1 rank of the Feature effect, 2 ranks if the weapon is also concealed for most sensor scans other than just visual inspection.

Multi-Modal: The weapon can function in different configurations, switching from one to another, such as a blade also able to function as a whip, or a gauntlet also able to fire a ranged blast. The weapon's additional modes are Alternate Effects of the primary mode (with the highest point cost).

Spectrum Weapon: The weapon is capable of emitting or using multiple types of energy, such as having different "settings" for cold, heat, and radiation, for example. Apply the Variable Descriptor modifier, if the energies have the same effect. Otherwise, the weapon has an array of Alternate Effects.

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