

# GADGET GUIDE: HEAVY WEAPONS

When giant monsters or ram-paging super-villains attack the city, it's time to pull out the big guns. This Guide looks at the heavy weapons used by military forces, from machine guns to missiles and beyond to nuclear weapons and planet-busting bombs.

## HEAVY WEAPON RULES

Heavy weapons operate differently from personal combat weapons in a number of ways, particularly how the weapon is aimed and fired at its targets, and the effect it has on those targets, given that many heavy weapons have a blast radius or wide area of effect.

### TARGETING

The range and radius of most heavy weapons mean they tend to be targeted differently from normal ranged attacks.

**Direct Fire** weapons are targeted like regular ranged attacks, so long as they are capable of a direct hit (see the following). Otherwise, they are area attacks and do not require an attack check, unless the GM wishes to use the optional **Scatter** rules (see the sidebar).

**Multiattack** weapons are direct fire weapons capable of "spreading" their effect over or across an area, or concentrating it on a single target. These weapons use the Multiattack modifier (*Hero's Handbook*, page 143). Per the extra description, a spreading Multiattack suffers a -1 penalty per target in its arc, making a single attack check and comparing the result against all targets. At the GM's discretion, any 30-degree portion of the arc without a



target in it can be considered a "target" for the purposes of the modifier, adding an additional -1 penalty. Some Multiattack weapons have a limited arc of fire while others move freely enough to have a complete 360 degree arc.

**Indirect Fire** weapons fire in long arcs intended to increase their range. They have 1 rank of the Indirect modifier (*Hero's Handbook*, page 141) allowing the effect to "originate" from the height of its arc, measuring line of sight of that point. This allows indirect fire weapons

to overcome cover, such as walls, between the weapon and the target. Targets still benefit from concealment, however, unless a "spotter" is employed to help direct the weapon fire on-target.

### EFFECT

An attack with a heavy weapon with an Area modifier can have one of four possible outcomes:

- **Miss:** The target is outside of the attack's area, and therefore unaffected by it, although collateral damage may have some incidental effect. For example, a miss with an incendiary weapon has no direct effect on the target, but the weapon still ignites fires, which may spread or otherwise affect targets outside the initial area.
- **Near Miss:** The target is inside the attack's area, but succeeds on a Dodge resistance check to reduce the effect's rank (*Hero's Handbook*, page 138). This represents diving for cover, hitting the ground, almost (but not quite) clearing the area, and so forth. Divide the effect in half and round down for that target, with

### SCATTERING AREA ATTACKS

While standard area effects in M&M require no attack check to place them in the chosen area, some area effect weapons suffer from "scatter," particularly when using indirect fire. Gamemasters interested in implementing this in game terms can use the following guidelines.

If a heavy weapon is used with indirect fire and no line of sight, an attack check is required to deliver the attack on-target. For static targets, this is a check against DC 10 (an effective Dodge rank of 0). Moving targets use their normal Dodge defense. With a hit, the attack is centered correctly. On a miss, each point less than the DC results in the center of the attack shifting in a random direction (roll a d20 with 1-5 = North, 6-10 = East, 11-15 = South, and 16-20 = West) a distance rank equal to the area rank, minus 2 (so about 6 feet for Burst Area 1, for example). A sufficient miss (two degrees of failure or more on a standard Burst Area) may leave some targets out of the affected area altogether.

The scattering guidelines can also be used for direct fire attacks, in which case the GM may allow attackers to choose between making a "safe" area attack that requires no attack check, but has a standard effect (and allows a Dodge resistance check) or making an attack check, which allows all the usual attack check modifiers for a direct hit, including things like aiming and power attack, but risking scatter if the attack check misses.



a minimum of 1 rank. The Evasion advantage grants a circumstance bonus to the Dodge resistance check for a near miss.

- **Hit:** The target is inside the attack's area and does not succeed on a Dodge resistance check to avoid some of the effect. The target is subject to the full effect of the attack, but may make any other resistance check(s) the attack allows.
- **Direct Hit:** Additionally, some heavy weapon attacks may have additional ranks defined as a direct hit, targeting only a single target, presumably one at the center of the attack's area. Scoring a direct hit requires a normal ranged attack check against the target, even if the rest of the weapon's effect is area-based.

**Example:** A missile is Ranged Burst Area Damage 8 with Ranged Damage 2 (direct hit). If the missile scores a direct hit, the target resists Damage 10 (the base Damage, plus the direct hit). If the attack check fails, the target resists the missile's Burst Area Damage normally (including rolling a Dodge resistance check to halve the effect).

The direct hit ranks of a weapon cost the same as a single-target version of the weapon's effect (without any area modifiers). Direct hit weapons can have modifiers to their attack bonus (such as Accurate) and can trade-off accuracy for effect, but are limited by power level like normal attacks, and their area modified ranks cannot exceed power level, as usual.

## MACHINE GUNS

Machine guns start out with relatively crude hand-cranked mechanical versions like the 19th Century Gatling gun (and its "steampunk" equivalents): a cluster of rotating barrels which each feed, fire, and eject a round as they turn, fed ammo from a connected drum or bin. Operated properly, such a gun fires with the Multiattack extra on its Damage. Mechanical machine guns must be mounted, at least on a tripod, more often on the deck of a vehicle like a carriage, wagon, or ship. Mechanical machine guns are prone to various complications, particularly jamming or even exploding, and may be considered Unreliable (although these problems were generally not common enough for a flaw, and are better handled as complications or possibly a Quirk).

Modern automatic machine guns are single-barrel weapons using automatic fire for Multiattack. They generally use belt-fed ammo and can fire as long as they have ammo and the weapon's barrel does not overheat (a common complication).

**Light machine guns** (LMGs) fire rifle rounds and are light enough for a single gunner to fire from a bipod or shoulder stock. Their traits are similar to an assault rifle (Ranged Multiattack Damage 5) but with a greater ammo capacity.

**Medium machine guns** (MMGs) use a tripod or permanent swivel mount to provide additional stability, making them

## "ONLY A BURSTING SHELL..."

Heavy weapons rarely have or need the Penetrating modifier, since their sheer Damage rank allows them to overcome all but the highest-ranked Impervious Toughness. Even rank 20 Impervious Toughness does not protect absolutely against artillery or air-to-air missiles (and other modern military weapons), although it may make succeeding on Toughness resistance checks against those weapons relatively easy. For true "invulnerability" to even heavy weapons, take the Immunity effect—particularly Immunity to Toughness effects for 80 ranks. Otherwise, simply add on higher ranks for Toughness to handle the "big guns".

The primary exception to Penetrating Damage heavy weapons is anti-tank weapons, using shaped explosives specifically designed to punch through armor. These weapons often do have Penetrating ranks, allowing them to inflict at least some Damage through even the heaviest armor. This makes them fairly effective weapons against giant armored monsters and invulnerable super-beings as well.

Accurate (and therefore more likely to inflict greater Multi-attack damage).

**Heavy machine guns** (HMGs) use higher-caliber ammo, giving them Damage 6 or even 7. They are otherwise similar to medium machine guns, including the need for a fixed firing mount. Some heavy machine guns use depleted uranium or other types of armor piercing ammo, giving them ranks in Penetrating to overcome vehicular armor.

## ARTILLERY

Artillery begins with cannon, guns with a bore larger than 20 mm, initially firing heavy metal balls using a charge of gunpowder. They're mounted on wheeled carts or other vehicles, including the decks of ships.

Eventually, artillery pieces include mortars, used for indirect fire of explosive rounds, and breechloading weapons with hydraulics to absorb the shock of recoil.

Artillery weapons are nearly always Ranged Burst Area Damage effects, sometimes with extra Ranged Damage ranks for direct hits (see **Direct Hit**, previously). They range in rank from 7 (for the lightest artillery pieces) to 13 (for massive shipboard gun batteries).

The key element of artillery weapons is Indirect fire, launching projectiles in a high ballistic arc to hit targets great distances away. Artillery typically has 5–7 ranks in Extended Range as well: a Damage 9 howitzer has a long range of about 57,000 feet (Extended Range 6).

As described under **Indirect Fire**, unless there is a spotter or forward observer feeding information back to the gunnery crew, targets of artillery benefit from concealment, since the attacker is too far away to see them! Artillery fire can target specific areas or map coordinates, but not highly mobile targets. Still, Dodge resistance checks are required when passing through artillery fire, and taking cover is the best defense against it.

## MISSILES

Missiles are self-propelled weapons, usually chemical rockets, equipped with their own guidance systems to direct them to a target. Indeed, the presence of some type of guidance is the difference between a missile and a rocket (which is also self-propelled, but cannot change course in flight towards its target).

## GUIDANCE

A missile has one of three types of guidance: aiming, remote, or homing.

**Aiming** guidance points the missile at a particular target but, if the initial attack misses, the missile continues following its trajectory until it hits something or it is remotely destroyed. This is essentially the same as a normal ranged attack with a single attack check against the target's Dodge defense.

**Remote** missiles are guided by a "pilot" who controls the missile remotely. This gives the missile the benefit of the pilot's skill in hitting its target, and typically also gives it the Homing extra, since a pilot can have a missile that misses its target change course to pursue or swing around for another attack. The primary drawback of remote missiles is jamming or interference with the remote connection used to guide the missile, which leaves it with no guidance.

**Homing** missiles are self-guided, locking onto the target using some type of sensor, and then tracking to follow the target until the missile hits. This gives the missile the Homing extra based on a particular sense, typically infrared for "heat-seeking" missiles and accurate radio for radar-guided ones.

Targets may be able to "fool" homing missiles by providing a different target or masking the original target from the missile's sensors so it loses the target-lock. Decoys and chaff are used to distract or overwhelm homing missiles.

## WARHEADS

Missiles are equipped with a warhead, a payload of explosive material, chemical incendiary, gas, or other effect that is delivered upon impact. The missile's warhead determines what effect it has. See the tables on page 187 of the *Hero's Handbook* for some additional useful ranks.

**Explosive** warheads are the most common, providing a Burst Area Damage effect, typically rank 8–12, often with additional ranks of Area to increase the radius. Missiles with explosive warheads may have non-Area ranks of Damage for a direct hit effect as well, as described under **Heavy Weapons Rules**.

**Gas** warheads create a Cloud Area of gas or other chemical agents, typically an Affliction effect of some type, although



some poisonous or corrosive gases may simply be Damage as well, perhaps with Resisted by Fortitude, and possibly a Secondary Effect in some cases.

**Incendiary** warheads release a Burst Area of chemical accelerants for fire Damage with a Secondary Effect, as well as setting combustible materials in the area ablaze. Like explosives, they may have extra ranks of Damage for direct hits as well.

**Biological** warheads also release Cloud Areas, similar to gas, but carrying a biological agent like a pathogen. This is typically a Progressive Affliction effect, sometimes Limited to less frequent resistance checks (from an hour to a day or more between checks).

**Nuclear** warheads are the most powerful and dangerous of modern weapons. See **Nuclear Weapons** (following) for details.

## DEFEATING MISSILES

Given their speed, a close range attack with a missile is handled just like a regular ranged attack: if the attack check succeeds, the missile hits, if it fails, it misses. Since missiles often have explosive warheads, they may use the direct hit guidelines from the **Heavy Weapons Rules** section, with the caveat that most missiles do not have a Near Miss degree unless the missile impacts another target (including the ground) near the original target, but still within the radius of the missile's Area of Effect.

**Fooling** a remote or homing missile requires giving the target concealment from the sense(s) the missile uses. This applies the usual effects of concealment: a -2 circumstance penalty for partial concealment, -5 for total concealment and, if a totally concealed target changes location, the missile cannot get a positive "lock" and misses unless the target's location is re-acquired. These modifiers take effect once the concealment is in place, modifying any subsequent checks involving the missile.

**Outrunning** (or at least outmaneuvering) a missile is an option for targets with the right movement effects. Most missiles have speed rank 9 (with actual speeds falling in the range between ranks 9 and 10). Treat outmaneuvering the missile as a challenge with a DC of (10 + missile's speed rank) requiring five degrees of success before three degrees of failure. Appropriate traits for checks include movement ranks, Agility, or skills like Acrobatics or Vehicles. Winning the challenge means the missile attack misses, while losing it means the character takes a direct hit from the missile.

**Diverting** a missile requires successfully grabbing it (see **Grab**, *Hero's Handbook*, page 196) using the missile's speed rank as its Strength for resistance. Once grabbed, the character can make another opposed check (Strength versus Speed rank) to redirect the missile. Of course, remote or homing missiles may be able to adjust their course and get back on-target, unless they're diverted into another target (including the ground) that sets them off. Diverting is difficult and dangerous because the character either has to match the missile's speed to catch up to it and grab

it, or be in *front* of the missile, in which case a failed grab check results in a direct hit against the diverting character!

**Disarming** a missile is a challenge with a DC of 25-30, requiring at least five degrees of success before three of failure. Traits used may include Strength, Damage, or Technology to gain access to the internal mechanisms and Expertise, Technology, or Dexterity to manipulate and disconnect those mechanisms. A degree of failure may cause a complication, like speeding up a timer or breaking an important part, while complete failure on the challenge sets the warhead off. Success disarms the missile so that it has no effect other than its impact. At the GM's option it may also reduce the impact to a negligible amount. The disarming process requires the character to be able to access the missile during the entire time, meaning it must be stationary, the character must be keeping pace under his or her own power, or the disarming character must be riding the missile, providing plenty of incentive to succeed!

## TORPEDOES

Torpedoes are essentially missiles designed to function under water and hit aquatic targets. Apart from this, they work in essentially the same way, and can use the same rules, including means of fooling, outrunning, diverting, and disarming them (substituting aquatic movement for aerial or ground movement).

## NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Nuclear weapons are the ultimate "big guns" in the modern world, and amongst the ultimate weapons in comic book settings as well. They rely on nuclear fission or fusion to release tremendous energy in the form of light, heat, ionizing radiation, and a powerful concussive blast. This means, in M&M game terms, a nuclear blast has four separate effects.

### FLASH

The initial flash of a nuclear explosion releases light bright enough to cause permanent blindness for anyone looking in the direction of the blast without sufficient visual shielding or protection. This is a Visual Range Dazzle Affliction (*Hero's Handbook*, page 103) with the addition of a fourth degree effect, where the Visually Unaware condition becomes permanent unless treated with a power such as Healing or Regeneration. The GM may wish to treat flash-blindness as an Incurable condition as well, requiring Persistent effects to treat it.

### BLAST WAVE

The flash of a nuclear blast is followed (at a comparative snail's pace) by a wave of heat and concussive force. The heat wave can vaporize nearby objects, leaving nothing but charred "nuclear shadows" behind, while the blast wave can blow apart virtually any structure or object in its path. This is a pure Damage effect, with the heat and impact descriptors, and plenty of the Burst Area modifier; even a "tactical" nuclear blast has at least 10 ranks of Burst

Area, giving it a radius of about a mile. More powerful weapons have even more ranks, each doubling the blast radius.

## ELECTROMAGNETIC PULSE

The explosion produces a powerful electromagnetic pulse (EMP), affecting unshielded electronics within a line-of-sight to the blast. This is a Visual Range Weaken Electronics effect with the Broad and Simultaneous modifiers. Electronic equipment affected by the EMP does not regain lost ranks until it is repaired, and some equipment may be permanently damaged or in need of replacement parts.

## RADIATION

Lastly, a nuclear blast releases ionizing or “hard” radiation, a Progressive Affliction effect (Resisted and Overcome by Fortitude; Fatigued, Exhausted, Incapacitated) with Extra Degree (Dead) and the Limit of one resistance check per day. So even managing to survive the blast may only result in slower death by radiation poisoning.

In the case of a groundburst, where part of the blast touches the ground (rather than an airburst), there’s also the matter of radioactive “fallout” where irradiated matter is thrown high into the air to drift on the winds and settle across an area extending downwind from the blast site. This radioactive material has a similar Affliction effect and makes the area near the blast dangerous for quite some time thereafter.

## EFFECT RANK

A “tactical” nuclear blast should be rank 20, with larger nukes up to rank 30. Needless to say, few targets are going to be able to resist effects at this rank without some form of Immunity. The Gamemaster may wish to allow for an “impossible” resistance check: where a natural 20 rolled on the check allows the character to survive. The same may be allowed for a hero point spent for on a re-roll, in which case a natural 10 or 20 allows for survival (doubling the odds).

Surviving—or even being killed by!—a nuclear blast is also an excellent opportunity to redesign a character from the ground up (**Reallocating Power Points**, *Hero’s Handbook*, page 26).

## SUPER-SCIENCE WEAPONS

MUTANTS & MASTERMINDS settings may offer super-science weapons of mass destruction far greater than anything that exists in the real world, from alien planet-busters to mad science doomsday machines.

As these weapons are often far greater in their destructive potential than even fusion bombs, they tend to be best handled as plot devices which have whatever effect they are stated to have—whether that is blowing up a planet or melting the polar ice caps—in the unlikely (and unfortunate) event that the heroes do not manage to stop the weapon from being unleashed!

## PLANET-BUSTING

The truly “heavy weapons” in the comic books can destroy targets as large as entire planets! While it is often easier to simply treat such massively powerful attacks as plot devices, sometimes it’s fun to consider the limits of the game system in terms of modeling them. Case in point: how many ranks of Damage would you need to destroy an Earth-sized planet in **MUTANTS & MASTERMINDS**?

A lot of it depends on how we define “destroy.” For the sake of discussion, let’s stipulate the following:

- The Earth is an “object” in game terms (albeit a big one). So it is subject to the rules for damaging objects.
- While made of a wide variety of materials, we’ll consider the Earth’s base Toughness around rank 8.
- The “thickness” of the Earth is its diameter: 7,901 miles. That’s technically a distance rank of 20, since it’s shy of the 8,000 miles value of rank 21. Since an object’s Toughness equals its base rank + (distance rank + 7), that would make Earth’s Toughness rank 8 + (20 + 7) or 35.
- Let’s say the Earth’s Toughness is also Impervious, so nothing less than Damage 17 even has a chance of damaging the planet as a whole. Anything else might mess up the landscape, but that’s all.

So, the minimum Damage rank (17) has a resistance DC of (17 + 15) or 32, less than the planet’s Toughness value, meaning the resistance check can’t fail. A Damage rank of 21 (DC 36) is needed for there to even be a chance.

Of course, a planet is a pretty large target, so it seems unfair to allow anything less than an area effect to work against it, perhaps a very *large* area effect! That limits the options, since area effects do not require attack checks, and are not subject to modifiers like critical hits or maneuvers like power attack. They’re also subject to power level limits, meaning a planet-buster has to have *serious* power, above PL20. The area may not need to encompass the whole planet, but the radius or range should span at least its mantle, about 10–20 miles on Earth, which is 13–14 ranks of Burst Area.

At Damage 21 (DC 36), the planet only needs to roll a 1 for no significant damage (although targets on the surface of the planet are likely devastated). Even a failed check only means a Toughness reduction. It takes at least Damage 25 before two degrees of failure become possible: the attack blows a hole *through* the crust of the planet! While that wouldn’t shatter the Earth in one strike, it probably means the end of life as we know it, as the planet’s molten core bursts out and floods the surface. At a truly massive Damage 35 (DC 50), the planet needs a die roll of 15 or better to avoid damage altogether. A roll of 10 or less means a hole punched through the mantle, while a roll of 5 or less shatters the entire planet!

Dealing with these weapons may use many of the same guidelines found under **Defeating Missiles**, particularly disarming, although fooling or diverting are also possibilities if the weapon uses guidance or a projectile of some sort or is carried as a warhead onboard a missile.

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