

GADGET GUIDE: ARCHAIC WEAPONS

Even in the modern world of superheroes, archaic weapons like swords, hammers, and bows remain common. Some of these weapons are enhanced by magic or technological gadgetry, while others rely solely on the tremendous skill of their wielders. In either case, old school weapons are primary tools for many heroes and villains.

WEAPON DAMAGE

The basic effect for weapons is Damage (*Hero's Handbook*, page 104), since the primary purpose of weapons is to inflict injury. Archaic weapons are Strength-based as well, unless their damage relies on some property of the weapon rather than how forcefully it is wielded.

DAMAGE TYPES

Archaic weapon damage comes in three descriptors: bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing.

Bludgeoning weapons, like clubs or hammers, rely on sheer force, and the weapon being stronger than the object or person it strikes.

Piercing weapons are pointed and thrust, point first, into their target, like spears or arrows. They're usually designed to focus a great deal of force on a very small point and to penetrate armor.

Slashing weapons are sharp edged and swung, either like a sword, or via a chain or long handle to provide leverage.

A weapon's damage type may affect game traits like Immunity and limited forms of resistance; a foe Immune to Piercing Damage, for example, can still suffer damage from a bludgeoning weapon.

Some weapons have multiple damage descriptors; a sword, for example, can be both a slashing and piercing weapon, depending on how it's wielded. The same for a hammer backed with a pick (both bludgeoning and piercing). This does not have a cost, it's just a quality of the descriptors, unless the breadth reaches the level of the 1-point version of the Variable Descriptor extra (*Hero's Handbook*, page 145).

THE "UNSEEN EDGE"

Although piercing and slashing weapons are designed to be lethal in the real world (bludgeoning weapons, too, when the proper force is applied), comic books often choose to "overlook" the nastier effects of these weapons; targets suffer no more than a few nicks and cosmetic cuts,



and a hero with a sword can defeat a foe without running him through or otherwise causing any lasting—much less lethal—injury. This is the default assumption of *MUTANTS & MASTER-MINDS*, which treats all Damage effects largely the same, and assumes damage is not lethal unless an attacker deliberately chooses to kill an incapacitated target. Likewise, serious injuries resulting from weapons are treated as complications, rather than the specific result of failed Toughness resistance checks (see **Lasting Injuries**, *Hero's Handbook*, page 199).

WEAPON QUALITIES

Weapons may have a variety of different qualities that define them. Some of these qualities are modifiers (extras and flaws) for the weapon's basic Damage effect, while others are Features added on top of the weapon's Damage, or Alternate Effects of its Damage for a weapon with different uses. Weapon qualities that are effectively Enhanced Advantages do not stack with other advantages unless the advantages is normally ranked.

STRENGTH-BASED DAMAGE MODIFIERS

When a Strength-based Damage effect has modifiers that increase its cost to more than 1 point per rank, a special rule applies to the addition of Strength ranks to the effect's Damage rank: divide the wielder's Strength rank by the Damage effect's point cost per rank and round down to determine the total Strength bonus that applies to the weapon.

Example: A compound bow with *Ranged Strength-based damage* (costing 2 points per rank) divides the wielder's Strength rank in half before adding any bonus to the bow's Damage.

Note that this rule does not apply to modified Damage effects with a cost of less than 1 point per rank (the Strength rank is not multiplied for these effects), nor does it apply to flat modifiers that do not change cost per rank. Flat modifiers simply apply their normal rank to the total damage of the effect. Additional modifier ranks can be taken to "widen" the extra to include added Strength ranks (to a point).

Example: A *Strength-based Damage* sword has *Penetrating 3*, the same as its Damage rank. Additional Strength ranks add to the sword's Damage, but are not *Penetrating*. However, the sword could have Damage 3, *Penetrating 8*, allowing up to 5 additional Strength ranks added to it to become *Penetrating* as well.

ACCURATE

Attacks with the weapon gain a +2 bonus to the attack check per rank of this quality. This bonus counts towards power level determinations. *1 point per rank.*

AURA

The striking portion of the weapon is surrounded by an aura of some damaging force or energy (not the same as the Energy Aura power from the *Hero's Handbook*, however). In game terms, this applies an additional descriptor to the weapon's damage. For example, a sword with a flame aura has the "fire" descriptor while a hammer with a lightning aura has the "electrical" descriptor on its damage in addition to bludgeoning. This is primarily just a Damage descriptor but may, like the basic descriptors for damage type, change how the weapon affects some targets, such as a foe vulnerable to fire. The aura may also allow the wielder to perform different stunts with the weapon. *1 point.*

BANE

The weapon is especially effective against a certain type of target. This is typically additional ranks of Damage with a Limited flaw based on how rarely the target appears. Excluding about half the potential targets is worth a –1 flaw.

Since the benefits of Bane are limited by power level, they can make the weapon less effectual overall, so Game-masters may wish to bend the power level limits for Bane weapons, allowing their additional Damage bonus to exceed power level limits by up to 2 ranks. More than this is not recommended. *–1 flaw.*

BINDING

The weapon grants the benefits of the Weapon Bind advantage: if you take a defend action while wielding the weapon, and successfully defend against an armed attack, you can make an immediate disarm attempt against the attacker as a reaction. *1 point.*

BREAKING

The weapon grants the benefits of the Weapon Break advantage: if you take a defend action while wielding the weapon, and successfully defend against an armed attack, you can make an immediate smash attack against the attacker's weapon as a reaction. *1 point.*

CARRIER

The weapon's attack and damage serve as a carrier for another Linked effect, such as Affliction or Weaken. The descriptor may be anything from a powerful electrical shock to a toxin or even a magical effect. The Linked effect may have its own modifiers to further define it. *Linked effect cost.*

CHOKING

The weapon provides the benefits of the Chokehold advantage: After successful attack and grab checks, the target suffocates for as long as you maintain the hold. *1 point.*

CONCEALABLE

The weapon is either small and easy to conceal or can fold or collapse down into a concealable form. This is similar to the Subtle modifier, and provides a +10 circumstance bonus to Sleight of Hand checks to conceal the weapon (base DC 20 to find it when it is concealed as a routine check). *1 point.*

DANGEROUS

Dangerous weapons are more likely to inflict critical hits: each rank of this quality increases the weapon's critical threat range by 1, to a maximum of 16–20 with 4 ranks. *1 point per rank.*

DEFENSIVE

Like the Improved Defense advantage, when you take the defend action while wielding the weapon, you gain a +2 circumstance bonus to your active defense checks. *1 point.*

DOUBLE

A double weapon has two striking ends or sides and can be used to strike twice, splitting the weapon's damage (the Split modifier, *Hero's Handbook*, page 144). *1 point.*

DISARMING

A disarming weapon is more effective in knocking things out of a target's grasp, allowing disarm attempts to be made with no circumstance penalty (*Hero's Handbook*, page 195). *1 point.*

ENTANGLING

Grab attacks made with the weapon are particularly difficult to escape from and grabbed targets suffer a –2 circumstance penalty to checks to escape. *1 point.*

GRABBING

The weapon provides the benefits of the Fast Grab advantage: After a hit with the weapon, make an immediate grab check against the target as a free action, using the weapon's Damage rank as its effective Strength rank. The weapon attack inflicts its normal damage and counts as the initial attack check to grab the target. *1 point. No cost if the weapon attack has no effect other than the grab.*

IMPRESSIVE

The design or function of the weapon is sufficiently impressive to grant the wielder a +2 circumstance bonus to interaction checks involving it, usually Intimidation checks when using the weapon to threaten someone. *1 point.*

INDESTRUCTIBLE

The weapon's physical form cannot be damaged. It is immune to smash attacks and, while it can be taken away from the wielder, it cannot be destroyed. *1 point.*

PENETRATING

The weapon's Damage has the Penetrating modifier, allowing it to overcome Impervious Toughness, typically due to extreme sharpness or other "armor piercing" capability. *1 point per rank.*

PERSONAL

The weapon is "keyed" to the wielder in some fashion (biometric signature, aura reading, magical link, etc.) such that only the wielder may use it. The weapon simply doesn't function for anyone else. *1 point.*

RANGED

Ranged use of archaic weapons is handled in one of three ways:

- The weapon is generally used at range and has the Ranged modifier on its Damage. It may or may not be Strength-based, and ammunition is handled as a complication if it becomes one (*Hero's Handbook*, page 161). This suits weapons like bows and slings as well as things like hammers or shields that return to the wielder's hand when thrown. *+1 point per rank.*
- The weapon is used at range, but has a very finite number of uses (5 or less). It has the Ranged modifier on its Damage, but is Unreliable. This suits things like a brace of throwing knives or shuriken that run out quickly. *+0 points per rank.*
- Lastly, the weapon can be used at range (typically thrown) but doing so deprives the wielder of the weapon until it can be retrieved, such as throwing a hammer, spear, or similar weapon. This is best treated as a combination of a stunt (allowing the weapon to attack at range) and a complication (depriving the wielder of the weapon) when it happens, with no change in the weapon's point cost and no fatigue or hero point cost for the stunt; in essence, the complication "pays" for the one-time extra. *0 points.*

REACH

The weapon's length or design provides the wielder with additional reach in attacking nearby targets (*Hero's Handbook*, page 143). *1 point per +5 feet of reach.*

SMASHING

The weapon is especially effective at smashing held objects, you suffer no attack check penalty for making a smash attack against an object held by another character. *1 point.*

TRIPPING

The weapon is effective in making trip attacks (*Hero's Handbook*, page 196), providing the benefits of the Improved Trip advantage: no penalty to the attack check to trip, no opposing trip attack, and a choice of which trait your target uses to defend (Acrobatics or Athletics). *1 point.*



SAMPLE WEAPONS

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

BLADES

Blades range from short, easily concealed knives and daggers to heavy two-handed swords or axes.

Dagger: A short blade, less than 12 inches. Daggers may be single or double edged slashing weapons and are also often pointed piercing weapons as well. A dagger is typically a Dangerous weapon and small or folding blades, like a switchblade or butterfly knife, may be Concealable.

Sword: Longer blades, over a foot in length, up to four feet or more. Like daggers, swords may be single or double-edged slashing weapons as well as pointed piercing weapons. Particular sword designs have different qualities, including Binding, Breaking, Dangerous, and Defensive. Enchanted or high-tech swords may have additional qualities or powers of their own.

Axe: A chopping (slashing) blade attached to a handle, axes range from small hand axes (which can also be thrown) to heavy, wide-bladed battleaxes wielded by fantasy ogres and alien gladiators. An axe is a Dangerous Breaking weapon.

BLUDGEONS

A bludgeon may be as simple as a heavy length of wood used as a club or as sophisticated as a metal warhammer or mace.

Club: The simplest bludgeoning weapon, possibly even a makeshift weapon, although clubs and cudgels (like the Irish *shillelagh*) suit some character concepts.

Hammer: A heavy warhammer with a broad striking head, or possible a blacksmith's tool turned into a weapon. Hammers are excellent Smashing weapons.

Mace: Similar to a hammer, but with a rounded, flanged, or spiked head. Maces are often also badges of office or associated with priestly or ceremonial functions. A morningstar is typically a heavier, spiked mace with a longer handle.

Flail: A handle connected to a heavy (often spiked) weight by a chain, allowing the weapon's head to swing or spin. A flail grants the benefit of additional Reach.

POLEARMS

Sharp or bladed polearms inflict piercing or slashing damage. Blunt polearms (or the haft of a polearm used as a striking weapon) do bludgeoning damage. Dangerous, Double, Reach, and Tripping are common polearm qualities.

Staff: A five- to seven-foot length of hardened wood or (occasionally) metal.

Javelin: A thin, light spear about three feet long, primarily designed for throwing.

Spear: A haft or handle three to six feet long or more, ending in a sharp point. The simplest spears are sharpened sticks (the points often fire hardened). More common are spears with metal heads, often with sharpened edges as well as points, allowing the spear to be swung as a slashing weapon. Spears can also be thrown, although doing so deprives the wielder of the weapon.

Trident: A spear with three tines or points, also a piercing weapon. Since the trident is associated with the Greek and Roman sea gods, it is a common weapon and emblem for aquatic characters. Like a spear, a trident can be thrown.

ENTANGLING

While some entangling weapons (like the whip) can inflict damage, their primary purpose is to trip up or grab targets and restrain them.

Bolos: A set of three or four weights connected by cords to a central hub, a bolo is thrown in such a way as to make the weights spin around the center point, allowing the cords to wrap around the target and restrain it. Like other thrown weapons, bolos use one of the three options listed for **Ranged** on page 3 of this Guide.

Net: A mesh of strong cord or even metal, thrown or cast over a target to entangle it.

Whip: A long, flexible strand, often braided leather, a whip can be cracked so the tip strikes with considerable force, used as a goad for animals (or even sentient slaves or prisoners). A whip can also wrap around a limb or limbs to restrain a target.

RANGED

The following archaic weapons use the first option for ranged weapons given earlier in this Guide. Many of the previous weapons—particularly some blades and polearms—can also be thrown using the second or third options for ranged weapons.

Bow: Whether an archaic weapon of wood (often reinforced with horn or similar materials) or a modern bow made of metal or composites. Fires bladed or pointed arrows by default, although a wide range of “trick” arrows are common (see the Trick Arrows section, following).

Crossbow: Like a bow, but with a pistol-like trigger and stock, and generally easier to load and draw. A modern crossbow might even be semi-automatic, self-loading with each pull of the trigger.

Sling: A small pouch able to hold a stone or “bullet” of metal, typically spun from cords, one of which is released to sling the stone at the target. Staff slings place the pouch at the end of a long handle, which is swung or snapped to fire the sling bullet.

ARCHAIC WEAPONS

WEAPON	EFFECT	CRITICAL	COST
BLADES			
Dagger	Strength-based Damage 1 (piercing), Dangerous	19–20	2
Sword	Strength-based Damage 3 (slashing)	20	3
Axe	Strength-based Damage 3 (slashing), Breaking, Dangerous	19–20	5
BLUDGEONS			
Club	Strength-based Damage 2 (bludgeoning)	20	2
Hammer	Strength-based Damage 3 (bludgeoning), Smashing	20	4
Mace	Strength-based Damage 2 (bludgeoning), Dangerous	19–20	3
Flail	Strength-based Damage 2, Dangerous, Disarming, Reach	19–20	5
POLEARMS			
Staff	Strength-based Damage 2, Double	20	3
Javelin	Damage 1 (Ranged), Dangerous	19–20	3
Spear	Strength-based Damage 2, Dangerous, Reach	19–20	4
Trident	Strength-based Damage 3, Dangerous, Disarming, Reach	19–20	5
ENTANGLING			
Bolos	Ranged, Grabbing 3 (no damage)	20	6
Net	Grabbing 2, Entangling	20	3
Whip	Damage 1, Disarming, Grabbing, Reach 2	20	5
RANGED			
Bow	Ranged Damage 3	20	6
Crossbow	Ranged Damage 3	20	6
Sling	Ranged Damage 1	20	2

TRICK ARROWS

Costumed archers rarely limit themselves to traditional arrows. Instead, they carry quivers full of arrows equipped with various gadgets, giving them a wide range of effects.

These trick arrows are an array (*Hero's Handbook*, pages 136 and 161), usable one at a time, with the potential complication of running out of arrows (or crossbow bolts).

Potential trick arrows include the following:

- **Bolas:** As the weapon described in the **Entangling** section.
- **Boomerang:** A Homing modifier, allowing the arrow to catch missed targets by surprise on a return arc.
- **Cable:** A grappling arrow trailing a cable useful for Swinging.
- **Capture:** The arrowhead bursts to release a fast-expanding capture foam that instantly hardens to trap the target (a Snare Affliction, *Hero's Handbook*, page 131).
- **Cold:** A spray of intensely cold chemicals, useful for putting out fires, targeting foes with cold weaknesses, or perhaps working like a capture arrow (previously), trapping the target in ice.
- **Explosive:** The arrowhead is actually a tiny grenade that goes off on impact or following a short timed delay for a Burst Area Damage effect.
- **Flash:** A visual Dazzle Affliction (*Hero's Handbook*, page 103).
- **Gas:** A Cloud Area Affliction resisted by Fortitude.
- **Net:** As the weapon described in the **Entangling** section.
- **Smoke:** A cloud area Visual Concealment Attack.
- **Screamer:** An ultrasonic arrowhead that creates an Auditory Area Affliction, likely either dazed and stunned or impaired and disabled.
- **Taser:** Contact electrodes and a powerful battery releasing an electrical charge on contact for a Ranged Affliction attack (resisted by Fortitude).
- **Tracer:** The arrow itself does no damage and may be taken as a glancing or failed attack, but it does leave behind a mini-tracer stuck to the target (see *Hero's Handbook*, page 163).

The basic concept for trick arrows can also apply to crossbow bolts or even sling bullets, and even when deprived of their primary weapon, characters may find ways to throw or wield trick ammunition.

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