

# GADGET GUIDE: TRAPS

"I HAVE YOU FIRMLY  
IN MY CLUTCHES NOW,  
HEROES! BWA HA HA HA  
HA HA HA HA HA HA!"

- EVERY VILLAIN EVER

They are a part of every well-prepared villain's bag of tricks, ranging from the fiendishly complex to the seemingly simple—traps.

Some are meant just to capture, others are meant to interrogate, torture, or kill. All of them are potential challenges for heroes in your **MUTANTS & MASTERMINDS** games.

## TYPES OF TRAPS

The **MUTANTS & MASTERMINDS Gamemaster's Guide** discusses traps in some depth in **Chapter 5**, focusing on traps as challenges for heroes to overcome.

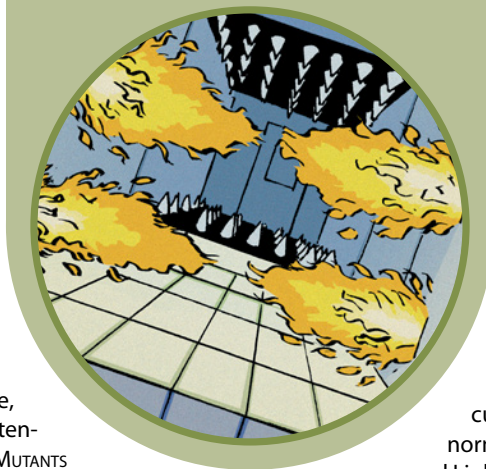
This Guide divides traps into four main types, including the two from the *Gamemaster's Guide*. They are:

- **Action traps**, meant to be used during action time to capture or incapacitate opponents, function much like other gadgets.
- **Capture traps**, intended to restrain or contain subjects, but generally leave them unharmed (although such traps can still be quite dangerous).
- **Stress traps**, used for interrogation or torture of captured subjects, but still intended not to kill, although they may cause lasting harm or even death unintentionally.
- **Deathtraps**, designed as slow (and often torturous) forms of execution for their victims.

By their very nature stress traps and deathtraps tend to be limited to villains, although some vigilante heroes may use stress traps of a sort, or even find that "deathtraps" seem to spring up when they're around (see the **Poetic Justice** sidebar under **Deathtraps**).

## TRAPS & INSTALLATIONS

Other than action traps (which are often portable), traps are usually found as features of installations (see **Gadget Guide: Installations** and **Chapter 7** of the *Hero's Handbook*) using the Defense System, Deathtrap, Effect, or Holding Cells features or some combination thereof. For ease, each trap can be considered an Effect feature, regardless of its intended purpose.



## TRIGGERS

The Triggered extra (see **Chapter 6** of the *Hero's Handbook*) is a common element of trap effects, allowing the trap to lie in wait until a target comes into range, or does something to set it off.

As the extra specifies, a trigger must have a particular circumstance that activates it, and the circumstance must be detectable to a normal sense, or a Senses effect Limited and Linked to the Trigger. Note that there is a difference between a trigger limited to a particular target or class of targets and an effect that is Selective or Limited. For example, a Burst Area Damage effect Resisted by Will might be Triggered by a Detect Mental Powers Sense but, once triggered, affects all targets in its area unless the Damage effect is also Selective or Limited to Targets With Mental Powers (or the like).

## DETECTING TRIGGERS

A set Triggered effect has a degree of subtlety (it is not noticed automatically) but may be detected with a successful Perception check (DC 10 + effect rank).

**Subtle:** The addition of a rank of the Subtle extra makes the set effect only noticeable to certain unusual senses, while Subtle 2 means the set effect is undetectable until it is triggered. These are separate from the effect itself, which can also be Subtle or Insidious, making it difficult to detect even after it is triggered. *1 point per rank.*

**Example:** A magical exploding glyph is Triggered by anyone walking across or touching it, but the glyph is also only visible to those able to perceive magical forces, giving it a rank of Subtle. If the glyph were invisible to everyone, it would have Subtle 2.

## DISARMING & BYPASSING TRIGGERS

Once detected, a set Triggered effect can be potentially disarmed or bypassed with a suitable skill or power check (DC 10 + effect rank). The Gamemaster should choose reasonable checks to disarm or bypass the trigger, based on its descriptors.

A *disarmed* effect is no longer set and will not activate. A *bypassed* effect remains set, and may activate if the requirements of its trigger are met again, but does not activate in that particular instance. Whether the effect is disarmed or bypassed depends on the trigger's descriptors and possibly the choice of the character making the check. The GM can choose to make one option more dif-

## “(GASP!) MY ONE WEAKNESS!”

A common element of traps for superheroes is targeting their specific weaknesses and vulnerabilities. If a hero is amphibious, for example, then a trap may rely on dehydrating him, while an ice-using hero is surrounded by intense heat or fire, and so forth. Sometimes this is the villain guessing at fairly obvious weaknesses while in other cases the trapper exploits a known and useful weakness, such as a rare element or a hero whose secretly Faerie-derived powers are taken away by chains of cold iron.

Sometimes the “weakness” exploited by a trap is not even a Power Loss or Weakness complication *per se*, but more of an instance of one effect countering another (see **Countering Effects** in **Chapter 6** of the *Hero’s Handbook*). It’s fairly common-sense for a villain looking to trap a fire-using hero to use fire-retardant materials, for example. Whether the GM chooses to consider this a complication is largely based on whether or not the hero gets an effect rank check to resist versus simply suffering the power loss. Indeed, Gamemasters can even leave it up to the player: choose to resist normally or accept a complication and lose out on the resistance check altogether.

difficult than the other, adding a major circumstance penalty to the former (+5 DC). The two options may require different traits for the check as well.

**Examples:** *A technological trap may be bypassed or disarmed with a Technology skill check, but some traps may be harder to bypass rather than disarm, adding +5 to the check DC. The trap could also be bypassed using physical means—such as an Acrobatics check—for that character only, without the increase to DC. A magical trap might be disarmed with a successful Nullify check, or bypassed with an Expertise: Magic skill check. An “intelligent” trap could even be disarmed or bypassed using an interaction skill check!*

**Complex:** The triggered effect is especially difficult to bypass or disarm. Each additional rank of the Triggered extra devoted to this modifier increases the DC to do so by +5. *1 point per rank*

**Layered:** At the GM’s option, each additional rank of the Triggered extra devoted to this modifier adds an additional check (at the trigger’s base DC) needed in order to disarm or bypass it, taking the normal time required for that check. So a laser beam detection system with Layered 2, for example, requires three successful checks to bypass or disarm. *1 point per rank*

**Unusual:** Requiring a rare or unusual trait to disarm or bypass a trigger may call for a rank of the Subtle modifier to reflect the added benefit this grants the user of the effect. *1 point*

## SAMPLE TRIGGERS

The following are just a few potential Triggered extras a trap might have. All of them include the Triggered extra for 1 point (unless 1 rank is added for a Variable Trigger)

and all Senses effects are both Limited and Linked to Trigger (a –1 point per rank flaw).

- **Infrared or Laser Beam:** A subject crossing the beam triggers the effect (infravision), Senses 1 (Infravision), Subtle • 3 points
- **Light Sensitive:** Triggers the effect when the surrounding light level changes in a specific way (vision) • 1 point
- **Mind Detector:** Triggers the effect when a subject is detected, Senses 2 (Detect Minds, Ranged, mental). Add Acute for detecting specific minds. • 2 points
- **Motion Sensitive:** Triggers the effect when the device is moved (touch) • 1 point
- **Pattern Recognition:** Triggers the effect when the device detects a particular image (face, logo, etc.; visual) • 1 point
- **Timer:** Triggers the effect after a set amount of time elapses. Senses 1 (Time Sense) may be required for truly split-second timing • 1 point
- **Tripwire:** Triggers the effect when the subject touches or crosses a line (touch). A related trigger is a pressure sensitive floor or other trigger that responds to touch. • 1 point
- **Voice Activated:** Triggers the effect when the device detects a specific voice or voices (hearing). A related trigger is someone speaking a key word or phrase • 1 point

## REPEATED TRIGGERS

Once activated, a Triggered effect is expended and does not activate again until it is reset. For an effect that activates over and over in response to a particular trigger, apply the Reaction modifier to the effect instead. This follows the same guidelines for a Triggered effect, except the number of activations is unlimited and the effect remains set until it is specifically disarmed or deactivated.

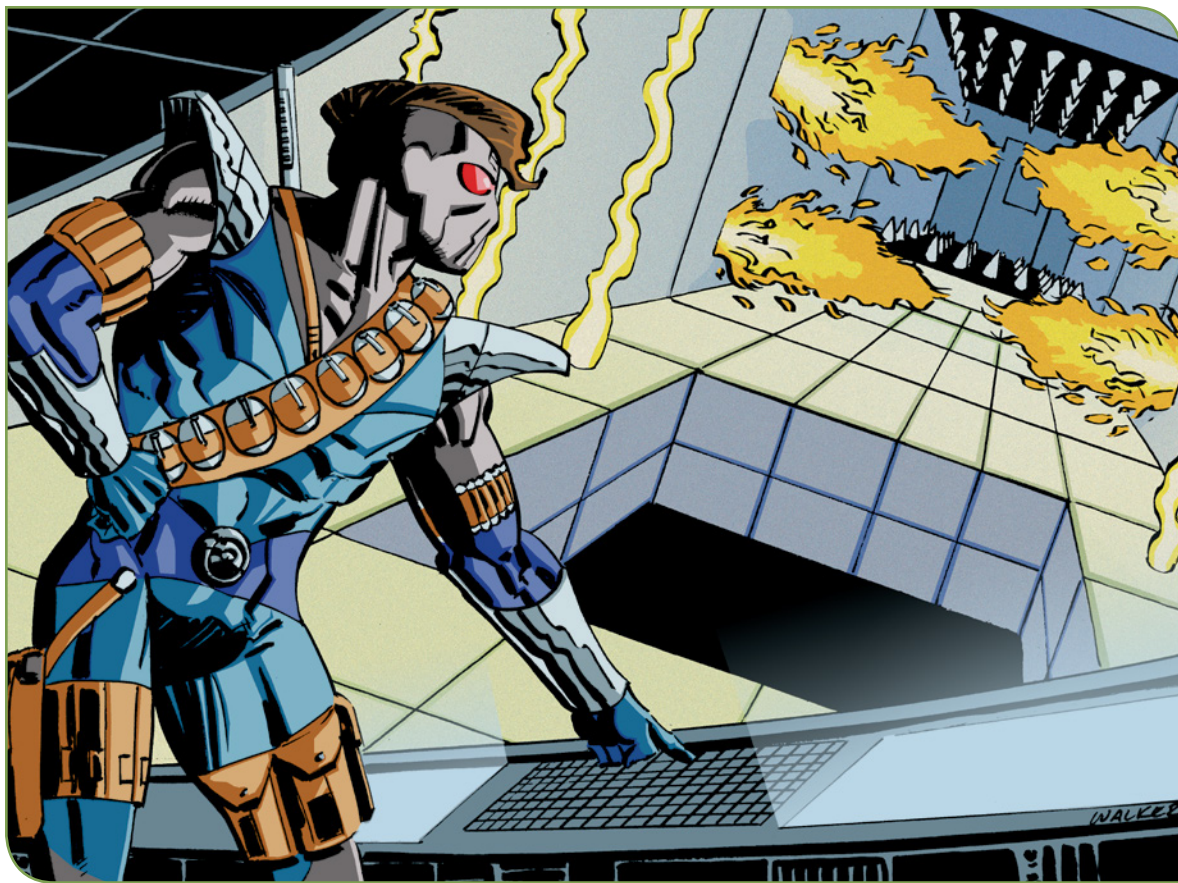
**Repeating:** At the GM’s option, an intermediate stage between Triggered and Reaction is to allow additional ranks of the Triggered extra to extend the number of activations; each additional rank allows the Triggered effect to activate an additional time before it is expended and must be reset. *1 point per rank*

## TRIGGERS & EXTRA EFFORT

As many characters—particularly heroes—are unlikely to take many regular power effects with the Triggered extra, but will occasionally wish to create traps employing it (and some of their other effects), Gamemasters may wish to employ the following guidelines.

Treat the creation of a trap as a use of extra effort (**Chapter 1** of the *Hero’s Handbook*), essentially a power stunt of sorts. Rather than immediately taking effect, the hero is setting up the stunt, Triggered for later use. Although it slightly bends the Alternate Effect guidelines, given the





single use nature of the Triggered modifier, it works reasonably well. Since this option may permit heroes the time to recover from the fatigue of extra effort, the GM may wish to require a hero point for this type of extra effort (treating it like a Heroic Feat).

**Example:** Giving Deathtrap a taste of his own medicine, the Rook lays a trap for his foe, a simple tripwire intended to give him an edge in the confrontation with Deathtrap to come. He uses materials from his gadgets and makes it a power stunt of his arsenal array:

**Tripwire:** Affliction 9 (Resisted by Dodge, Overcome by Fortitude; Hindered and Vulnerable, Defenseless and Prone), Extra Condition, Triggered, Limited Degree

The GM asks the Rook's player to spend a hero point on setting up the trap, noting that it has a DC of 19 (10 + rank 9) to notice and to disarm. When Deathtrap rushes to his control panel, thinking he has the advantage, he's in for a surprise!

## RETROACTIVE TRAPS

Players may even be able to use the Edit Scene capability of spending a hero point (**Chapter 1** of the *Hero's Handbook*) to retroactively insert a trap into the scene! This should be in addition to any requirements for creating the trap in the first place, and the player should have a

plausible explanation or opportunity for how the trap got there; otherwise, this is best handled as a regular power stunt instead of a retroactive Triggered effect.

**Example:** Extending the prior example, the Rook, having infiltrated and scouted Deathtrap's lair after escaping from his latest trap (and also blacking out his sensors), confronts the villain, who rushes to his control room.

"I want to spend a hero point to have planted a tripwire trap across the door of the room," the Rook's player says, outlining its effect. The GM nods, requesting an additional hero point for the power stunt of the trap itself. She then rolls the dice, saying:

"Deathtrap glances back over his shoulder as he rushes towards his console, failing to see the nearly invisible wire. He tumbles into the room and sprawls across the floor!"

## TRAPS & COMPLICATIONS

Used as Gamemaster tools, traps often rely on complications (see **Chapter 2** of the *Hero's Handbook* and **Chapter 5** of the *Gamemaster's Guide*). While power effects, challenges, and environments have a great deal to do with defining traps, complications are sometimes useful (or even necessary) in making them function. Trap complications tend to break down into two main types: catching the heroes unprepared or unawares (springing the trap) and

making it more difficult for heroes to overcome or escape the trap, or making the trap more effective against its particular targets.

In the first case, the occurrence of the trap itself—setting it off or falling into it—is treated as a complication. Rather than giving the heroes Perception checks or other opportunities to avoid the trap, the GM simply springs it on them without warning, perhaps even editing things a bit behind the scenes to make the trap fit into the overall story, as if the villain planned it that way. Generally, when the players are hit with an unavoidable situation that does not result from their choices, it's a complication. This means many traps start out with the heroes earning a hero point just for being put into the trap.

In the second case, Gamemasters can make traps more challenging by limiting the heroes in various ways. This might be a direct use of a Power Loss or Weakness complication (see the sidebar, previously, for more on this) or adding innocent civilians or loved ones into the mix, giving the heroes people other than themselves to take care of, who may be more at risk. Traps can also step on a hero's psychological quirks and complications, intentionally or accidentally, such as a claustrophobe being trapped in a room where the walls are closing in, or an arachnophobe confronted with a pit of deadly spiders.

## ACTION TRAPS

Traps used during action time tend to fall into two categories: weapons that immobilize or incapacitate targets rather than damaging them outright, and stand-alone gadgets that are Triggered (see **Triggers**, previously, and the other types of traps following).

### BINDING BLASTER

A binding blaster is a straightforward ranged weapon designed to restrain a target using netting, cables, webbing, fast-hardening glue, or similar materials. Some binding blasters feature materials that can be layered to enhance their effect; apply the Cumulative extra to reflect this. For things like capture materials that replicate and “grow” on their own once they have stuck to the target, apply the Progressive modifier instead. For a net gun or similar area weapon, apply the Burst Area modifier (or another Area modifier like Cone or Cloud).

**Binding Blaster:** Ranged Affliction (Resisted by Dodge, Overcome by Damage; Hindered and Vulnerable, Defenseless and Immobilized), Alternate Resistance (Dodge), Extra Condition, Limited Degree • 2 points per rank

### GAS GUN

This weapon fires a cloud of knockout gas intended to incapacitate targets. Gas guns with greater range may fire gas *grenades* that burst on target, adding the Ranged extra. A gas gun might also have the Cone or Line Area extras in place of the Cloud Area, but lack the secondary effect Cloud Area has on targets.

**Gas Gun:** Cloud Area Affliction (Resisted and Overcome by Fortitude; Impaired, Disabled, Incapacitated), Cumulative • 3 points per rank

## HYPNOTIC INDUCER

The hypnotic inducer places its target into a trance, allowing for easy capture. Other versions of the device may induce states like fear, ecstasy, or even agony to incapacitate the target, rather than a passive trance state, but all of them incapacitate, regardless of the descriptor. An inducer that relies on a visible beam or display may be Vision Dependent, having no effect on those unable to see it.

**Hypnotic Inducer:** Ranged Affliction (Resisted and Overcome by Will; Entranced, Stunned, Incapacitated), Cumulative • 3 points per rank

## SPEED BUMP

The “speed bump” is a trap for high-mobility targets, typically involving things like scattering marbles or ball bearings, or creating slicks of oil or other low-friction materials, causing quick-moving targets to slip and fall. The Cone Area is a typical spread from the user, but you can substitute other Area modifiers for different dispersal patterns (or make the different patterns and modifiers Alternate Effects in an array).

**Speed Bump:** Cone Area Affliction (Resisted by Perception, Overcome by Fortitude; Hindered and Vulnerable, Defenseless and Prone), Alternate Resistance (Perception), Extra Condition, Limited Degree • 3 points per rank

## CAPTURE TRAPS

Capture traps are often fixed versions of action traps (previously) installed as defense systems in structures (see **Gadget Guide: Installations** and **Chapter 7** of the *Hero's Handbook*). They are designed to restrain or incapacitate intruders without any lasting harm. Capture traps even show up in villainous lairs as a means of capturing foes alive in order to subject them to the torture of stress traps or to eliminate them in proper deathtraps (see the following).

### DROP CAGE

The drop cage is simplest of capture traps: when triggered, a cage or enclosure drops into place around the target, trapping them. The cage is typically barred, but could be composed of a solid material, even airtight once it is closed, to entrap targets mere bars cannot contain. The cage has Toughness equal to its rank.

**Drop Cage:** Create Cage, Continuous, Triggered, Limited to Cages, Limited to Trapping • 1 point + 1 point per rank

## GRAPPLERS

Grapplers consist of artificial tendrils, tentacles, hands, or similar grabbing devices that seize and immobilize targets in their area.

## POETIC JUSTICE

While heroes don't plan fiendish deathtraps for their foes, they are still known to happen from time to time. Usually, they're "tragic accidents" or cases of villains hoisted on their own petards—such as falling into a trap set for the heroes, either too suddenly for the good guys to do anything about it, or too stubborn to let them. ("Take my hand!" – "Never!") Such fates usually occur "off-panel" enough to leave the villain's ultimate fate in doubt, at least ensuring there's no body to recover. This sets villains up for a sudden and mysterious return next time, along with an explanation of how they avoided certain death.

**Grapplers:** Burst Area Affliction (Resisted by Dodge, Overcome by Damage; Hindered and Vulnerable, Defenseless and Immobilized), Extra Condition, Triggered, Limited Degree • 1 point + 2 points per rank

## TAR PIT

A tar pit trap drops the victims into a sticky or viscous substance (which may or may not be actual tar). If it is possible for the victims to sink deep enough to suffocate, a tar pit may also eventually be a deathtrap.

**Tar Pit:** Burst Area Affliction (Resisted by Dodge, Overcome by Strength; Hindered and Vulnerable, Defenseless and Immobilized), Extra Condition, Progressive, Triggered, Limited Degree • 1 point + 4 points per rank

## TELEPORTER

A teleporter trap suddenly transports targets into another trap, ranging from a prison cell to one of the traps described in this Guide. This type of capture trap is often applied as a complication, waiving the resistance check and awarding a hero point for the automatic capture.

**Teleporter:** Burst Area Teleport Attack, Triggered • 3 points per rank

## STRESS TRAPS

The degree to which Gamemasters and players want to play out the effects of stress traps in the game depends on how comfortable they are with the idea of even fictional torture. Generally, more four color stress traps inflict pain in a bloodless fashion, with the focus more on a struggle of wills between the interrogator and the victim, while darker settings might have more realistic interrogation techniques and effects.

Afflictions associated with stress traps often have the Instant Recovery flaw; once the victim is free of the trap, all of its effects end immediately.

## AGONY BEAM

This trap has a neural stimulator or similar effect that causes the victim searing pain.

**Agony Beam:** Affliction (Resisted and Overcome by Will; Dazed and Impaired, Defenseless and Stunned), Cumulative, Extra Condition, Limited Degree • 2 points per rank

## BRAINWASHING

Rather than torment, a brainwashing trap attempts to break the victim's will, "reprogramming" them to suit the captor's wishes. Victims often exhaust themselves using extra effort to attempt to resist the effect.

**Brainwashing:** Affliction (Resisted and Overcome by Will; Entranced, Compelled, Controlled), Cumulative • 2 points per rank

## MIND PROBE

A mind probe delves deep into the target's thoughts and memories to extract information.

**Mind Probe:** Mind Reading, Cumulative, Close • 1 point per rank

## DEATHTRAPS

Although designed to be lethal, the ultimate purpose of all deathtraps is to *prolong* the victims' struggles, to allow them the opportunity to fight against their fate, knowing they are doomed, before it is finally sealed. After all, if a villain truly wanted to eliminate captured heroes, there are far more brutal and efficient means than a deathtrap. The key is that the villain wants the heroes to suffer, and needs for them to be awake and aware of their impending doom, which also allows them the opportunity for escape.

**Chapter 5** of the *M&M Gamemaster's Guide* details a number of different types of deathtraps, including the idea of combination traps using two or more of the basic types at the same time. As described in that chapter, deathtraps are best handled as challenges rather than power effects, although they may include power effects, particularly for instances where the heroes accumulate degrees of failure on their challenge checks.

As described in the *Gamemaster's Guide*, the base DC for a deathtrap check is the series power level, with the base number of degrees of success required equal to half that number (so DC 10 and 5 degrees of success for a base PL10 trap). The heroes must accumulate enough success before three total degrees of failure to escape the trap.

If you are using the Deathtrap feature for installations, base the DC on the installation's power level and the success threshold on half that number. Each additional Feature rank increases either the DC or threshold by +1.



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