



# Shooting to Live

## Non-Lethal Weapons for *Fading Suns*

by Lloyd Brown III

Characters in roleplaying games are notorious for their propensity for heavy firepower. Given the choice between food and guns, players seem to prefer guns, apparently on the assumption that they can kill their food, or at least kill somebody else and take their food.

Perhaps a part of the problem is the equipment list. Looking over the list of available weapons, the player can readily see that non-violent options are few and often inferior to deadly force. The Gamemaster is in a similar situation; in order to threaten player characters properly, he has to rely on bigger, better guns. Each enemy the characters defeat leaves them more heavily armed.

A potential solution to the arms race is a wider variety of non-lethal weapons. Non-lethal weapons offer many advantages to both players and GMs. First, the person using them has the option of capturing his opponent, allowing for the roleplaying opportunities after the inevitable fight as well as before. Secondly, player characters don't need to worry as much about legal prosecution if they capture instead of kill their opponent. In fact, not only will the law appreciate such consideration, their enemies will, too. The villain whose brother was let go with nothing more than a headache and a bloody nose after the characters defeat him feels no driving need to humiliate, torture, and kill the heroes. Finally, players need not fear for their character's lives all day and all night. The standard adventuring party tactic of leaving standing watches in all situations and places can be abandoned if it is known that the potential villains don't have any guns. The player characters can stop behaving with military caution and start acting like real people.

The Church approves of these devices as permissible technology, except for the man o'war slugs, which they officially ban to back the Emperor's restriction (although they rarely enforce this ban unless it furthers their own goals), and the drone. The Church considers the drone an insidious pagan weapon as evil as extreme cybernetics.

**Buzz Stick (TL4):** The buzz stick operates as a normal club most of the time, inflicting 4 dice of bludgeoning damage on a successful hit. When the buzzer is activated, the stick delivers an additional electrical jolt designed to stun the opponent by shorting out his nervous system. The person struck must succeed in an Endurance + Vigor roll or let go of anything held in his hands, which usually results in dropping a weapon, but might also result in letting go of a ship's controls, releasing a held hostage, or falling off a ladder.

A single charge lasts for 10 uses. Cost: 50 firebirds.

**Man O' War Slugs (TL 5):** These projectiles are shotgun slugs filled with a gel that carries the stinging venom of deadly jellyfish. The amazing gel keeps the stinging properties of the venom fresh almost indefinitely, allowing it to be stored in the slugs until fired at a target. The shooter makes a normal attack to hit a target, and the gel splashes onto the victim, delivering stinging material across a wide surface area.

For each wound a person suffers from the man o' war slug, he must succeed in a Strength + Vigor roll or suffer two more wounds from intense pain. If the pain reduces the victim to 0 wounds, his

system shuts down entirely from the pain and he falls unconscious. Impact wounds are normal and might kill a target regardless of the additional pain.

The Emperor has outlawed these weapons across the Known Worlds, although the Vau continue to smuggle them into Cadiz. Man o' war slugs cost 2 firebirds each.

**Heavy Stunner** (TL 6): The heavy stunner is a rifle-sized version of the hand stunner. Amaltheans and others who don't wish to kill in self-defense carry the weapon when they expect threats from elite troops, aliens, and others that might shrug off the effects of a hand stunner.

The best heavy stunners are made by Argobast, who hope to please the church with this technology and thereby earn approval to indulge in other research. Their Dreamlands model is the industry's standard model.

Targets hit by a stunner must roll Endurance + Vigor with -2 on the goal. Failure indicates that the target is stunned for the rest of that turn and the next entire turn, as with a hand stunner. If the damage taken equals or exceeds the character's Endurance, she rolls as above but failure means she is rendered unconscious. Like a hand stunner, heavy stunner damage is healed entirely after one span, but additional damage from other sources can result in fatal wounds. Cost: 500 firebirds.

**Cough Gun** (TL 5): The cough gun takes its name from the sound it makes as it fires a burst of compressed air. This blast has a miserably short range and a slow rate of fire, but it has the advantage of unlimited ammunition. Whereas energy weapons use replaceable fusion cells, the cough gun has a single internal cell that lasts for years.

Some criminals favor the cough gun because it leaves no telltale bullet casings or other traces that can link them to the damage it causes. Unlike other non-lethal weapons, this one can kill, but it kills so slowly and ineffectively that murders attributed to it are rare. Several storehouses on Stigmata maintain cases of these weapons in case the garrison is ever besieged and must rely on them for backup weapons.

The cough gun does 3 dice of damage and knocks down any opponent who fails to make a Strength + Vigor roll each time he is hit. On top of its other drawbacks, the cough gun is heavy and makes a shrill whining noise between shots as it compresses air for its next blast. The Gathman Tornado is the premier model, being found from Leagueheim to Bannockburn. It costs a paltry 100 firebirds.

**Suythe Poison:** Suythe is a rare toxin taken from a venomous lizard on Gwynneth. The Van Gelders alone buy enough to keep its harvesters in business. When the notorious assassins need less than usual, a few dozen vials find their way to the open market on Criticorum, from where they appear all over the Known Worlds.

The poison works almost instantly upon introduction to the bloodstream, spreading numbness through the body as it moves through the victim's arteries and veins. The victim must make a Passion + Stoic Body roll or the area struck becomes numb and useless immediately. On a critical failure, the target collapses into an immobile heap, able to do nothing but watch and listen. Numbness begins to wear off after 10 minutes, at which point the victim can move (painfully) but suffers -2 to all goal rolls Strength, Dexterity or Endurance. After another 10 minutes, the target has recovered enough to function normally. Cost: 500 firebirds per dose.

**Dart Rifle** (TL 4): A dart rifle, also called a Piercer, is a single-shot rifle with a large bore designed to fire a special hypodermic that delivers its contents on delivery. Generally the contents are drugs or poisons (such as suythe) designed to disable a target for capture. The weapon has no magazine and must be loaded one projectile at a time. The Mercy model is widely used in the capture of wild animals on Holy Terra, but Inquisitors sometimes use it to bring heretics to an involuntary confession. Cost: 200 firebirds. The special needles cost 1 crest each.

**Drone** (TL 6): The drone produces subsonic, rhythmic tones that dull the senses and leave the victim feeling confused and disoriented. Its main drawback is that it takes time to work its effect. Even more so than the lightning strobe, drones tend to affect everyone nearby. Hence, the drone is a principle defense against intruders rather than a mobile offensive unit.

Typically, the drone is a system of speakers spread throughout an area of 2,000 square feet or more. For each 30 minutes spent within its area, characters must roll below Endurance on d20 or temporarily lose 1 point of Wits. The Wits loss lasts as long as the characters are in the drone's area. Wits is restored at one point every ten minutes once the character leaves the area. The operating center, once found, can be disabled by a successful Tech + Mech Redemption roll, although it could well be booby-trapped against such interference.

Nulna of Leminkainen is the only known manufacturer of drones. Their main customers are Vuldrok pirates who install them in their ships as defense while they are away raiding. The raiders sometimes return to find a cabin full of happily drooling invaders slumped against the hull walls. Cost: 1,000 firebirds per 2,000 square feet they are designed to protect.

**Lightning Strobe** (TL 7): A strobe pattern of certain frequency invokes instinctive reactions in the human nervous system that can cause it to effectively shut down.

Any flashlight of tech level 7 or higher can be set to strobe on this function if the person adjusting the setting rolls 5 successes with Tech + Mech Redemption. The person aiming the flashlight rolls Dx + Vigor to point it at the target's eyes, with each success subtracting one from the target's Dx + Dodge roll to avoid the effects. If the target does not dodge or rolls no successes, he is either stunned and unable to act (failure) or knocked unconscious (no resistance or a fumble on the attempt). An energy shield offers no defense against a lightning strobe.

House Shelit has constructed a type of flashlight dedicated to this specialized use. The Shelit Blinder has a pistol grip, allowing its user to use his Dx + Shoot instead of Dx + Vigor when aiming at his target and carry it in a holster as well. Blinders don't function on any alien races, only humans.

Because of the difficulty in aiming a flashlight at a person's eyes and keeping it on them long enough to have an effect, a more common use of this technique is to use it to trap forbidden places where an open bulb can emit its light waves omnidirectionally. Avoiding such an open strobe requires a successful Dx + Dodge roll and at least three victory points. The Shelit Blinder and others like it cost 200 firebirds. The stationary version costs 100 firebirds per unit, and most companies prefer to sell a minimum of four units in order to ensure a customer's maximum security (and their own maximum profit).

**Stream Gun** (TL5): A stream gun has a thick barrel which attaches to either a small canister underneath the barrel or a larger container carried on the back, much like a flamethrower. The stream that it fires is a sticky tube that adheres to anything it touches. A person struck will find his arms attached to his body, his legs stuck together, and his body sticking to walls, floors, or other nearby objects.

The attacker rolls victory dice as normal for a successful hit. Instead of damage, however, he's rolling for completeness of coverage of his target. Each victory point means the target is bound and unable to move for one round. The person struck must make a Strength + Dodge roll to break free. Each victory point reduces the time bound by one round. Breaking free of the adhesive is tiring and temporarily reduces the victim's Strength score by one each round spent trying to escape. The victim can prevent this loss by waiting for the adhesive to wear off, which takes about 30 minutes. After that time, the victim can tear the stuff off with little difficulty. Lost Strength is restored at the rate of one point per hour spent resting.

The self-contained version of the gun has only enough adhesive for one attack, and so is used

against specific targets in abductions or kidnappings. It also sees some use in law enforcement. The Harastan Ogre's Hand is the favored model, preferred by Brothers Battle for bringing in heretics whose low-scale activities don't earn a visit from the Avestites. Harastan's larger Titan Grip is the preferred backpack-style weapon. It contains enough adhesive to bind a dozen man-sized targets. The Ogre's Hand costs 250 firebirds, but each use requires replacing the canister for 25 firebirds, although multiple canisters can be carried. The Titan Grip costs 600 firebirds. Refilling its backpack apparatus costs 200 firebirds.

**Eleras Gas:** Eleras gas exists in thin quantities underneath the polar regions of Pandemonium. It affects human muscles and tendons, resulting in reduced coordination, weakness, and fatigue. Early signs include sweating, blurred vision, and slight fever. In concentrated form, eleras can weaken a person to immediate exhaustion, turning his muscles to water and bringing him to his knees.

Eleras gas generally appears in a canister and is delivered by expulsion from both ends within a few seconds. The canister has a short fuse of up to three seconds (like a standard grenade) and emits its contents in an area of 3 meters. A grenade-launcher version is also available.

Anyone within the area of effect must make an immediate Strength + Vigor check or her Strength is temporarily reduced by 4 points. Characters carrying heavy loads might crash to the ground, while characters whose Strength is reduced to 0 (Strength does not go below 0) fall helpless, unable to move.

The effects last for two full turns automatically. Every second turn thereafter, the character may make a Strength + Vigor check (using the reduced Strength score) to restore one point of Strength. An eleras grenade costs 100 firebirds in its thrown form or 150 firebirds for a grenade-launcher form.

**Shrieker** (TL6): "Shrieker" is Scraver jargon for any device that generates sound waves too high for the human ear to bear. The device could take any form, but the Burnur Shatterer dominates the market for this type of item. It is a simple box that fits comfortably in the hand, about 8" long, 3" wide and less than an inch in thickness. At the press of a button, the shrieker emits a piercing whistle that climbs the scale from a low bass into inaudibility in under a second. Anyone without protection must roll Endurance + Stoic Body or be deafened for a span. Anyone who rolls a critical failure passes out from pain and stays unconscious for 10 full minutes. On waking, the character must make an Endurance + Stoic Body or suffer permanent hearing damage (as the curse Bad Hearing). The Amalthean rite Healing Hand of Saint Amalthea automatically cures the deafness, as will Restoration if the caster rolls 6 victory points or more. For each meter from the device, characters add 1 to their goal roll.

Besides its effects on living things, the shrieker shatters glass and ceramic objects in a 3-meter radius. The operator and his allies typically wear hearing protection before activating it. Standard hearing protection adds +5 to the goal roll for resisting the deafness and prevents the character from being knocked out. Characters not equipped with proper protection who have their hands over their ears add +2 to their goal. The shrieker costs 250 firebirds.

**Clamshell trap** (TL6): The clamshell trap is a large, bulky device used in a defensive measure to capture an intruder or enemy and hold him until somebody can arrive to transport him to a more permanent secure location. The trap lies either on the floor, ceiling, or wall and comes with no camouflage of its own. It consists of a five-pointed starfish-shaped piece of canvas that seems to have wires or ribs inside its otherwise flat surface. Once 5 pounds or more is placed in its center, the arms wrap shut, binding the target and entwining tightly around loose limbs.

It takes five minutes to set the clamshell trap, and the person setting it may attach the outside to a rope so that the prey caught inside may not simply run away, taking the trap with him (this technique is usually used if the trap is placed on a wall instead of the more usual floor). Once the

trap has sprung, it holds the target as a wrestling character with a Strength 4 and Vigor 5. The device is constructed so that once closed, it does not continue to damage its victim. A person might be reduced to vital wounds, but it will not die. When closed, the trap looks like an elongated mollusk. A clamshell trap costs 200 firebirds.

## Non-Lethal Weapons

Weapon	Roll	Init	Goal	DMG	STR	RNG	Rate	SIZ	Cost
Buzz stick	Dx + Melee			4	2	-	-	M	50
Heavy stunner	Dx + Shoot	+1	5 (S)	-	10/20	1		XL	500
Cough gun	Dx + Shoot	-1	-1	3	-	5/10	1	M	100
Dart Rifle	Dx + Shoot	-1	+2	1	-	10/20	1	XL	200
Lightning strobe	Dx + Vigor or Dx + Shoot	+1	0	-	20/30	2		S	200
Stream gun									
Handheld	Dx + Shoot	+1	-	-	5/10	1		L	250
Backpack	Dx + Shoot	+2	-	-	10	1		XL	600

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