

WELCOME TO

STARK CITY

CAMPAIGN SETTING & CITY BUILDING TOOLSET

BOOTLEG EDITION



ICONS
SUPERPOWERED ROLEPLAYING



STARK CITY

Contents

Foreword	2
Life in Stark City	3
Sidebar: The Catacombs	3
Notable Restaurants, Bars and Entertainment Venues	4
Museums, Cultural and recreational venues	5
Sports	6
Media	7
Sidebar: Locale: Stryker Federal Penitentiary	7
Known Active Threats	8
Law Enforcement and Other Government Agencies	9
Non Human Life in Stark City	10
Sidebar: Locale: P.A.T.R.I.O.T. Orbital Space Station (aka the Coop)	10
Stark City History	11
Founding	11
Sidebar: Secret Origin of the Sentinel	11
Important Dates	12
Sidebar: The Teslacracy	14
Sidebar: Locale: Mascouten Island Station	15
Sidebar: The Gloriana Invasion	17
Sidebar: Black Friday	18
Relocating Stark City	19
ICONIC Settings Rules	20
Setting Traits	20
Theme	20
Places	21
Sidebar: Is the Theme an Aspect?	21
Sidebar: Personal Places	22
People	23
Scale	24
Sidebar: Scale and the Scale	25
Place Aspects	26
Place Creation Example: Sherwood Park	26
License	28

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Foreword

Cities are as much “characters” in superhero stories as the actual heroes and villains themselves. After all, where would Batman be without the brooding and festering darkness and looming architecture of Gotham City? What place could suit Superman “leaping tall buildings in a single bound” better than the soaring art deco skyscrapers of Metropolis? How much of the style and character of the Marvel Universe is defined by the fact that the majority of its characters live and work in a New York City so very like the one in our own world, rather than some wholly fictional place?

One of the first questions I got asked when *Icons* was announced, in fact, was “where will it be set?” Setting provides context, which is all-important when you’re looking to tell stories, even four-color comic book ones ... especially four-color comic book stories.

As it happened, I didn’t want *ICONS* to have “a” setting. My goal for the game was a callback to the golden age of tabletop RPGs, when “settings” were broadly implied by the game’s genre and its adventures. Games like *Champions* and *Villains & Vigilantes* didn’t have settings as such. They had adventures like *Island of Doctor Destroyer* and *Crisis at Crusader Citadel*. Similarly, *ICONS* didn’t have a setting, either; it had *The Sidereal Schemes of Dr. Zodiac* and *The Skeleton Key*, among many other adventure stories for players to enjoy, and the assumption that if it existed in the comics it could exist in *ICONS*. Like those earlier games, you could potentially put the adventures together and infer a setting from them (that’s how the original “Champions Universe” came about) but a setting wasn’t laid out for you.

So, why Stark City, then? Well, like I said, *ICONS* wasn’t intened to have just one setting, officially sanctioned. It’s a game meant to encompass a wide range of superhero settings, and Stark City is just such a setting. It is both a source of inspiration and a home for all of those diverse *ICONS* adventures to comfortably take place, a framework to tie them together, and a springboard for your imagination. From the streets of the downtown Silver District to the ultra-modern Telsa Industrial Park, from the wealthy Platinum Coast to the seedy dives of Geartown, you’ll find endless opportunities for taking the ideas found in this book and transforming them into stories of your own, because Stark City is ultimately about your heroes and their stories, an additional player to add to the ensemble cast of your *ICONS* game.

The creative minds at *Fainting Goat Games*, like the founders of Stark City, have built up a remarkable place for heroes to live, work, and adventure. I’m pleased to have had a chance to visit and I sincerely hope that you enjoy your own visit to Stark City, and that some of you will choose to call it home for a time. It’s a place worth protecting, and Stark City needs heroes. So what are you waiting for? Turn the page and step onto the streets where superheroes fly overhead! Stark City awaits!

— Steve Kenson

Life in Stark City

Stark City has been known as the “*Second City*” of the United States since the late 1800s. It may not actually be second in population any more, but in theater, finance, technology, and politics it maintains its station in the nation. Since it is also the place most train and plane trips stop to transfer cargo and passengers, it is generally the second city travelers stop at in the course of their journeys. Investors and entrepreneurs have been drawn to its central location, large work force, and technological base. There is just one fly in this ointment of attraction to Stark City’s charms.

For crime, Stark City is first in the nation. An unusual number of costumed and exotic criminals have concentrated themselves in Stark City, taking advantage of its easy access and Canadian connections. The unique availability of the Catacombs for hidden activity is also a draw. Unlike the more subtle and secretive criminals of some other cities, Stark City’s criminal population is blatant and attention-grabbing. “Never embezzle when you can smash and grab” seems to be the rule with many of the city’s enterprising criminal citizens. More subtle organizations shake their heads and try to hold back their more overreaching compatriots, but it does little good.

For this reason, and others having to do with regional competition and jealousy, Stark City has acquired several nicknames that cause its citizens either to exult or grit their teeth. Mayor O’Hara’s unfortunate reaction to job stress has imprinted the name “*Starkers City*” on the national consciousness. Labor problems in the ’60s and ’70s coined the title “*Struck City*.” The Knightley administration in the late ’90s and early ’00s that presided over urban flight and decaying population and infrastructure earned the name “*Stuck City*.” The financial headquarters here have also provided the appellation “*Shekel City*.”

There are others. For example, because the old name of the city is “*Mascouten*,” Stark City residents are often referred to by outsiders as “*mosquitoes*.” At one time, this was taken as a point of pride by Stark City residents, who even gave the name to the

The Catacombs

Beneath the streets of Stark City lies an extensive underground neighborhood inhabited by some of the most notorious and dangerous criminals the city has ever known. Reclaiming these abandoned and forgotten subterranean areas of the city, seedy types such as supervillains, Mafia crews, street gangs, apocalyptic cults, and super-science terrorist cells have fashioned them into their own criminal underground, both literally and figuratively. Known collectively as the Catacombs, this neighborhood goes unrecognized as such by the authorities, but provides villainous lairs, Mafia safe houses, black markets, and other meeting places for the criminally-intentioned far away from the watchful eyes of law enforcement on the surface.

At the center of the Catacombs lies an abandoned tunnel network left over from a 1930s subway system project that the city began but never completed. This labyrinth allows for secret passage beneath the streets of Stark City and is favored by several criminal groups wishing to remain unseen by the watchful eyes of the Stark City Police Department above. More of a thoroughfare than a residential area, the abandoned tunnels and subway infrastructure nevertheless contain a few lairs established by secretive individuals.

city’s second baseball team. However, modern researchers unearthed historical documents showing that the early colonists used the term in a derogatory way toward the local Native Americans, and after years of protest and a couple of lawsuits, the team changed its name to the Stallions. This did not help the team’s image—especially after a couple of sexual abuse scandals—and the name was changed again to the team’s current moniker, the very safe White Tails (named after the official state mammal of Illinois, the white-tailed deer).

The Chamber of Commerce wants to popularize the term “Starkan” for Stark City residents. This is rarely seen outside of tourist brochures and guidebooks, however.

Notable Restaurants, Bars and Entertainment Venues

Crepes of Wrath: A mid-scale pancake house chain owned by a reformed supervillain (the Wrathmaster) who trades on his infamy. A persistent urban legend maintains that some of the freeze rays, robotic servants, mind-control devices, and various other supervillain mementos that decorate the walls of these restaurants still work. This has had the unusual effect of making the restaurants even more popular with high school and college students. It has also made the restaurant a target for small-time criminals trying to break into the big leagues. Crepes of Wrath will often hire off-duty police officers or up-and-coming vigilantes to provide security on overnight shifts.

Crescent Moon Diner: A ubiquitous greasy spoon chain in Stark City, open 24 hours. It’s a favorite of both cops and drunks trying to sober up. Kids eat free on Tuesdays.

No Regrets: The classiest restaurant in Stark City. Coat and tie are required and reservations are recommended. Located in the high-rent Silver District, it’s named after the plane of Chip Carrington, a favorite son of Stark City who disappeared in the 1930s. The restaurant is located atop the Siren Building, and is graced with an amazing view from the 86th floor. It features jazz music several nights of the week and a four-star menu.

Sammy the Squid’s: A chain of video arcade/fried fish restaurants that cater to the “family with kids” demographic. Every Sammy the Squid’s restaurant has a band of animatronic robot sea creatures (led by the eponymous Sammy) that performs a short set of Top 40 hits every 45 minutes. Unbeknownst to anyone, the Sammy’s

chain is owned by Randall Thorton, leader of the terrorist group MAKO. Thorton maintains a cover identity as Paul Flaherty, respectable businessman. Thorton uses the restaurants to provide a supplement income stream for his organization and also as safe houses for his agents (who sometimes pose as managers and cooks).

Club Nowhere: An all-ages live music venue in Little Sicily that specializes in industrial, techno, hard rock, and (occasionally) hip-hop acts.

De Funkee Feesh: A music hall near Stark City University. It specializes in “retro” acts. Grunge, nu metal, and ska acts are particularly popular there. This provides credence to critics who claim that Stark City is an unhip Midwestern city. Some have described Stark City as “the city where the ‘90s never died.”

Crusaders: The most popular gay bar in Stark City, located in the heart of the club scene in Platinum Coast. It features a rooftop beer garden (open only during the summer) and three energetic dance floors that cater to a wide range of tastes. Although the club leans heavily towards dubstep, techno, and trance, on certain nights of the week Crusaders highlights other styles. For example, Monday is Motown Monday, Tuesdays feature ‘80s dance music, and on Wednesdays, Crusaders hosts a country and Western line-dancing night.

Hollarin’ Bob’s: A legendary restaurant that’s been operating in the Morgan Park neighborhood since the early 1970s. (It’s named after a famous Stark City bluesman, “Hollarin” Bob Byrd.) It actually opened on the same day as the Gloriana invasion, and framed copies of the weeks’ worth of newspapers that covered that historical event decorate its walls. Tuesdays are 25-cent-rib nights; the affordable prices have turned Tuesdays at Hollarin’ Bob’s into a sort of unofficial get-together for the (usually poorly paid) henchmen of the city’s various criminal and supervillain operations. Henchmen from across the city gather at Bob’s on Tuesdays (in civilian garb, naturally, and under the aegis of an unspoken truce) to commiserate and share their stories with fellow henchmen. A cagey

hero might be able to blend in with the Tuesday-night crowd and glean some valuable information.

Player One: An arcade, bar and restaurant in the Tesla Park neighborhood that caters to the geek crowd. It features more than thirty vintage arcade games, all from 1985 and earlier. Player One has two lanes of Skee-Ball, eight pinball machines, and a display case full of vintage home-game consoles. It's a favorite hangout for scientists from the various Tesla Park firms and students from Stark City university.

The Midnite Supper Club: The premier comedy club in Stark City. It features professional stand-up three nights of the week, with an open mic night on Tuesdays and improv on Wednesdays. The club was closed for several weeks after it was raided by the Anarch gang (an attack that resulted in one performer's death). It has now reopened with a rotating schedule of off-duty police and costumed vigilantes as security.

The Crouch and Rush: A famous dive bar in Gerrisburg (aka Geartown), often called simply "the C&R." Owner Dominic Nocenti's great-grandfather opened the C&R establishment in 1887 to cater to longshoremen and seamen; the name is a tribute to then-heavyweight-champion John L. Sullivan's boxing style. Since then, the bar has become a famous Stark City landmark and is emblematic of Geartown's plight. Once a solid working-class bar, the C&R is now a down-at-the-heels dive bar that hosts an illegal numbers game in the basement and periodically serves as a resupply point for the DeSouza mob's drug operations in Geartown.

Gerrisburg Shipyards: The abandoned shipyards witness periodic underground raves hosted by a street gang called the Geartown Grinders. These raves are an open secret, and are rarely disturbed by the authorities (as the cops who patrol Geartown are notoriously susceptible to bribes). These raves draw in large crowds from across the city, and are a particular favorite of slumming Platinum Coast socialites who are eager to see how the other side lives.

The Ring-A-Ding: A riverboat casino that leaves on four-hour cruises nightly from the Gerrisburg Piers. Customers must be 21 to board the riverboat and can't use cash to gamble. Chips and tokens are used in all games of chance. The Ring-A-Ding offers baccarat, craps, poker, roulette, and blackjack, and always sports a Mardi Gras theme. (Clowns in jester attire are also a common motif on the boat.) This, combined with the very low drink prices, helps create a permanent party atmosphere on board. The prominent clown motif in the decorations has given rise to a rumor that the Auguste Anarch might somehow be associated with the casino. One version of this rumor even casts the Anarch as Francesco Marinelli, the oldest son of Dominic Marinelli, who was thought killed when the DeSouza family seized power. While this urban legend would explain the Anarch's beef with the DeSouza mob, there has been no corroborating evidence.

Museums, Cultural and Recreation Venues

The Hanse and Margaret Diedrickson Museum of Fine Art: One of the oldest museums in Stark City, boasting an internationally-acclaimed fine arts collection. It includes iconic images from Georgia O'Keefe, James McNeill Whistler, and Frederic Remington.

The Stark City Museum of Science and Natural History: The city's most famous museum, located in the Platinum Coast area. It was founded by the Malone family in the latter half of the 19th century. Its collection runs the gamut: dinosaur bones, archeological artifacts from ancient civilizations, a captured German U-boat, an Apollo space capsule, and more. The Tesla Technology Center is a late-20th-century addition to the original Gothic Revival building. Although the museum is probably best known for its displays of prehistoric remains, it contains more than 20 million objects from around the world related to science and human history. This collection grew from holdings received after the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893.

The Colter Museum of Modern Art: Founded in the mid-20th century and located on the border of the Silver District and Tesla Park, the Colter features an extensive collection of the glass sculptures of Dale Chihuly, including a massive, multi-colored, floor-to-ceiling chandelier hanging in the lobby.

The Chip Carrington Memorial Sports Museum: Founded in the late 1960s, this museum features the history of Stark City sports, with particular focus on the Frontiersmen baseball team. This museum is attached to Frontiersman Stadium in the Silver District.

Alliance for Justice Memorial Museum: This museum highlights the history of costumed adventurers in Stark City. It features trophies from great battles and a Hall of Costumes showcasing costumes from the early days of capes and cowls to modern-day spandex. It displays at least one article of clothing worn by nearly every hero ever to call Stark City home. It is located in Tesla Park.

Stark City Fire Service Museum: Established in the 1970s, this museum recalls the history of Stark City's fire-and-rescue services, with a special interactive exhibit explaining the Great Gerrisburg Fire of 1872. It is located in the Lakeview neighborhood, just south of the Silver District.

Stark City History Museum: This museum is maintained by the city government, and its primary mission is to educate the public about the founding and history of Stark City. It features an assortment of Thomas Abelard Stark's personal effects as well as a wide-ranging collection artifacts of from native cultures indigenous to the Stark Lake region. It is located in Morgan Park.

Blaine Cosmopolitan Square ("the Cosmo"): A courtyard theater complex in Morgan Park, home to Stark City's ballet and opera companies, philharmonic orchestra, and jazz ensemble.

Stark City Blues Museum: Located in Morgan Park, this museum celebrates Stark City's contribution to the development and popularization

of the blues in the 20th Century. It hosts the world-renowned Stark City Blues Festival every summer.

Stark Lake Beach Park Network: The Stark City Parks Department maintains an extensive network of waterfront recreational areas along the coast of Stark Lake and the banks of the Mascouten and Wyandotte rivers. The parks provide opportunities for swimming, boating, fishing, and other activities. The largest park in the network is the Lakeshore Drive Beach Park in the Platinum Coast area.

Sports

Baseball: Stark City Frontiersmen. Much beloved by their long-suffering fans, the Frontiersmen regularly sell out home games, but haven't had much luck in the postseason since Chip Carrington disappeared in the 1930s. They play at Frontiersman Stadium in the Silver District.

Stark City's second baseball team, the **Stark City White Tails**, are much more successful than the Frontiersmen. They went to the World Series twice in the last 15 years. However, they are best known for their scandals and their frequent name changes. Their home stadium is Valkyrie International Field in the Mercy Hill neighborhood.

Football: Stark City Legends, previously known as the **Stark City Bootleggers**. Their name was changed when it was decided that a bootlegger is not a suitable role model. Unfortunately, the team (which has been struggling with attendance in the past decade) didn't have a sufficient budget to update their jerseys and their marketing materials, so they still use a cartoonish bootlegger as their official mascot. They play in Phoenix Energy Park in the Lincoln neighborhood.

Basketball: Stark City Sparks. The crown jewel of Stark City sports, the Sparks have won the North American Basketball League Championship three out of the last five years. Their all-star roster is getting long in the tooth, and many Sparks fans despair that their glory years might be coming to an end. There are persistent rumors (mainly in cities whose teams haven't won three championships in the last five years) that the Stark City Mafia has used

their influence to “persuade” the referees to give the Sparks favorable calls during playoff games. They play in Centennial Field (named for its sponsor, the Centennial Hotel and Casino), which is located just north of Geartown in Lakeview.

Hockey: Stark City has a minor league hockey team called the *Stark City Stockyarders*, a reference to the city’s still-thriving meat-processing industry.

Media

Television

WSKC: Stark City local TV Station. Runs syndicated reality shows and sitcoms during the day and news coverage and network shows in primetime. Has a weekly feature during the nightly news called “Fighting the Good Fight” that highlights the city’s superheroes.

WKBR: Competitor TV station to WSKC. Similar content to WSKC, but lags behind them in ratings. WKBR tries to differentiate itself by being “edgier.” Has a segment on the nightly news called “POW!” that features viewer-submitted footage of superhumans in action. WKBR pays handsomely for exciting footage of superhumans in combat. This has created a small cadre of super-paparazzi, who can become a nuisance to heroes.

Radio

WSPK, “The Spark”: AM station that provides sports coverage and sports talk radio. Official radio station of the Frontiersmen and the White Tails.

Newspapers

The Siren: Stark City’s most respected newspaper, the Siren, is known for top-notch journalism. Its star reporter, Carmen Burana, is well known for exposing the corruption of Mayor Knightley’s administration.

The Scout: The primary rival to the Stark City Siren, the Scout is a sensationalistic tabloid founded about twenty years ago by the eccentric astronomer Barnard Ogilvy.

Illegal Outlets

Voice of Liberation: Pirate radio station that broadcasts the propaganda of the MAKO terrorist group on the FM band (see below) from various

Locale: Stryker Federal Penitentiary

Aspects

Supervillain Prison
Covered by Force Field
Power-Dampening Field
Overcrowded and Understaffed

Stryker is the closest supervillain prison to Stark City. It’s 100 miles south (due to political pressure to keep a meta-human prison away from populated areas). It houses super-criminals and other criminals deemed to be at “very high risk of escape,” such as high-level Mafia bosses or mercenaries.

It’s surrounded by a domed force field (Damage Resistance 8) powered by multiple redundant internal and external power systems. The dome also emits a power-dampening field (effectively Power Nullification 9). Stryker is managed by the Bureau of Metahuman Affairs, and prison personnel have the same US Army surplus power armor that BMA field agents utilize. The ranks of prison guards are augmented by a small army of Warden-bots (use the Robot stock character from ICONS for these). Stryker also has a magnetic data storage array used to house criminal artificial intelligences.

Due to a spiking crime rate and budget cuts, Stryker is dangerously overcrowded and has weathered two riots in the recent past caused by overcrowding.

Contact: Warden Ambrose Jefferson Pierce

Aspects

By the Book
Believes in Rehabilitation Through Education

A transplanted Bostoner, Pierce is every inch an old-money New Englander. Holding multiple PhDs, he believes passionately in rehabilitating prisoners through education and self-expression. He requires his inmates to write essays on various topics for extra privileges. Stryker had the lowest recidivism rate of any federal super-prison before the latest round of budget cuts let to the current abysmal surge in the prison’s population—subsequently undercutting most of Pierce’s rehabilitation measures.

migratory transmitters in and around Stark City. Regularly monitored by authorities and vigilantes for cryptic hints about upcoming attacks.

The Midnight Angel: Low-power pirate radio station that appears intermittently between 90.1 and 92.3 on the FM dial. The velvet-voiced DJ (who refers to herself only as “the Midnight Angel”) plays ’70s funk and ’80s hard rock intermixed with information about the operations and schemes of various supervillains and criminal operations in Stark City. Sometimes her tips are sketchy and hard to decipher. However, other times they are alarmingly detailed and very specific. Attempts to triangulate her signal (by both authorities and criminals) have failed, as have numerous efforts to track her down. Competing urban legends have it that the Midnight Angel is either a retired costumed vigilante who carries on the fight in her golden years or that she is the daughter of a supervillain who is trying to atone for her father’s evil deeds.

Known Active Threats

Dr. Judas: The last in the Sentinel lineage, Dr. Judas is a supervillain who turned his back on his heritage. He is considered one of the most dangerous metahumans on the planet. He has long been absent from the public eye, which has led to speculation regarding whether or not he’s still alive, or whether he’s been plotting a massive operation requiring years of preparation.

MAKO: A highly-organized terrorist organization with a radical anarchist agenda, MAKO (which stands for “Make Anarchy/Kill Oppression”) has an environmental rationale for their terrorist activities. Since the governments that rule the world have neglected the environment to the point of collapse, all governments must be destroyed so the planet can survive. MAKO mounts attacks against government, military, and industrial targets worldwide. However, their attacks are most concentrated in North America, with the highest number of incidents in and around Stark City. MAKO funds its operations by selling advanced weaponry to anyone who can afford their prices, from street gangs and organized crime families to Third World dictators.

Marinelli Mafia Family: The Marinelli crime family has been living in the shadowy underground of the Catacombs. They long for a return to prominence and might make a move soon. The leader of the family, Dominic Marinelli, is a wizard of no small power; they should never be counted out.

DeSouza Mafia Family: The rising Mafia operation in Stark City, the DeSouzas control organized crime in Stark City and practically run large swaths of Geartown outright. They are the leading suspect in the Black Friday attack on the Stacy City PD.

Serial Killer Rumors: There has been an unusually high number of missing-person reports over the last 30 years in Stark City. Oddly, the reports have occurred in every section of town except for the Silver District, suggesting the sort of twisted pathology associated with serial killers. This issue has not received much media coverage or consistent police attention, although occasional investigations are conducted. Unbeknownst to just about everyone, the real culprit in this decades-long crime spree is the Bluerocket Investment Group, which is actually a cover for a cabal of werewolves who have been preying on Stark City since the 1980s from the safety of their Silver District skyscrapers. The vigilante Sable Lynx seems to be the only one aware of the lycanthropic threat.

Anarchs: A Geartown-based gang of thugs led by the supervillain Auguste Anarch. The Anarchs are on a single-minded quest for vengeance against the DeSouza Mafia family (for some unknown offense). The Anarchs boldly contest the Mafia’s territory by mugging the mob’s drug dealers, mounting hit-and-run robbery attacks on Mafia gambling dens, and at least one assassination attempt on the head of the Stark City mob. The burgeoning street war between the DeSouza mob and the Anarchs has involved several daylight drive-bys and shootouts on the streets. It’s only a matter of time until civilians are harmed in the crossfire.

The Astrologer: Called the “Phantom Godfather” by some, the Astrologer is a fable of the Stark City underground. He’s reputed to be a devious

puppetmaster who quietly runs a far-reaching criminal empire through subtlety and manipulation. Both the Stark City Police and Mafia insist he's merely a fairy tale.

The Reclaimer: A crazed, super-powered vigilante, the Reclaimer attacks criminals, cops, and other vigilantes. The self-proclaimed "Protector of Stark City," the Reclaimer targets anyone whom he deems a threat to "his city," whether they be a Mafia hitman, a politician embroiled in a bribery scandal, or just another vigilante who was unable to capture a violent criminal. Attempts to locate and capture the Reclaimer have been unsuccessful.

Law Enforcement and Other Government Agencies

Stark City Police Department: Still reeling from the devastating Black Friday attack, the Stark City Police Department has embraced a policy of cooperation with vigilantes to an unprecedented degree while it rebuilds. The SCPD has a handful of deputized metahumans it can call in when needed, and it's always looking to add more allies from the local metahuman population.

P.A.T.R.I.O.T. (Primary Anti-Terrorist Regional and International Operations Task Force): is a nongovernmental organization created during the 1950s to combat metathreats that no one nation could face. It is funded by wealthy individuals the world over, but primarily in the USA, Europe, and Russia. Stark City's PATRIOT field office is run by Vitaly Karasev, a Russian expatriate and a former colonel in the KGB. The unassuming and nondescript field office is located in the Little Russia neighborhood. It is little more than a single meeting room containing a teleport pad that transports visitors to the PATRIOT orbital HQ (known as "the Coop"), where most of the real business is conducted. PATRIOT frequently recruits costumed vigilantes for missions and may reach out to the PCs in this capacity. Patriot has a large roster of metahumans it can bring to bear on any situation.

BMA (Bureau of Metahuman Affairs): A federal law enforcement organization within the Department of Homeland Security. Its responsibilities include the investigation and prevention of federal offenses or activities that would endanger the security of the US involving the use of metahuman powers. (Its jurisdiction has been interpreted to also involve illegal activities involving magic or super-science technology such as power armor or advanced robotics.) The Agent in Charge of the Stark City office is John Gerald O'Brien, a former director in the Travel Safety Agency. His primary task is investigating the high number of MAKO attacks in Stark City and finding their origin point. O'Brien could be a useful resource for heroes investigating MAKO, or could be an adversary if they don't agree with his hard-nosed, by-the-book attitude. The BMA has only a handful of metahumans on its staff. None of those are posted in Stark City. Instead, the Stark City BMA office relies on a squad of trained agents with US military surplus battle armor in the event of a conflict with metahuman suspects.

FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation): A governmental agency belonging to the United States Department of Justice that serves as both a federal criminal investigative body and an internal intelligence agency. The Agent in Charge of the Stark City office is Henry Doorbinder. His primary mission is investigating the various crime families in Stark City. He's also been tasked with investigating John Gerald O'Brien, the head of the BMA in Stark City. Civilian informants have reported to the Department of Justice that O'Brien is accepting bribes from MAKO, and the FBI is following up on these rumors. The Stark City FBI office has no metahumans on staff, and usually relies on the Stark City PD or the local BMA for muscle in the even of encounters with hostile metahumans. Doorbinder has been pleading with Washington to remedy this situation. So far, he has had no luck. He may turn to recruiting agents from Stark City's burgeoning population of metahuman vigilantes soon, provided he can find a suitable candidate.

Locale: P.A.T.R.I.O.T. Orbital Space Station (aka the Coop)

Aspects

Fortified and Heavily Guarded
Space Station with Artificial Gravity
High-Security Supervillain Prison
Global Command and Control for P.A.T.R.I.O.T.
Teleporter Access to Anywhere on Earth
Targeted by Villain Groups and Rogue Nations

Description: P.A.T.R.I.O.T.'s satellite HQ serves dual functions as the super-agency's command and control center and also as a holding facility for criminals that P.A.T.R.I.O.T. deems too dangerous to confine in planetside prisons. Heroes who are performing missions for P.A.T.R.I.O.T. will often be teleported to the station, where they are briefed before being teleported to the mission zone.

The station is nicknamed "the Coop" as a reference to its official name—the P.A.T.R.I.O.T. International Cooperative Base for Security—and as an allusion to its function as a super-prison.

Contacts: Vitaly Karasev, P.A.T.R.I.O.T. liaison officer for Stark City

Aspects

Spymaster
Shadowy Past
Very Persuasive
Knows Everyone Has a Price

Karasev is the P.A.T.R.I.O.T. agent who contacts Stark City vigilantes for P.A.T.R.I.O.T. missions. He conducts most of his meetings on the Coop, as his office in the Little Russia neighborhood is bugged by the BMA and the FBI. A career officer with the KGB before the fall of the USSR, Karasev is an old hand at espionage and commando missions. He uses this experience to select and recruit vigilantes uniquely suited for each mission. He's a charismatic and well-informed negotiator (like most P.A.T.R.I.O.T. field office directors) and has a knack for knowing what will entice any vigilantes who might be reluctant to sign on for one of his missions.

Non-Human Life in the World of Stark City

(These are only guidelines. Feel free to change them as it suits your players and campaign.)

Atlanteans: The world is largely ignorant of the existence of undersea humans. However, the US Navy has recently made contact with Atlantis, and has a top-secret limited diplomatic exchange program (overseen by the State Department). The Atlanteans have reported to the Navy that a rogue breakaway colony of Atlantean criminals has reportedly formed on the floor of Great Stark Lake. An Atlantean contingent is (secretly) stationed at the Stark Lake Naval Station and is cooperating with attempts to locate the colony. So far, they have been unsuccessful.

Alien Life: Although conspiracy theories abound about Area 51 and UFO sightings, there has been no widespread known contact with alien cultures. Beyond a few alien heroes, Earth has had little contact with any civilized spacefaring races.

Subterranean Life: The various mole-man and rock-man nations have thriving civilizations, and have scrupulously kept their distance from the surface dwellers for centuries. Knowledge of their existence has been lost to history.

Stark City's History

Founding

General Thomas Abelard Stark distinguished himself during the Revolutionary War by capturing several British strongholds in what eventually became the Northwest Territory. He made extensive use of irregular tactics (especially the use of snipers armed with Pennsylvania Long Rifles), and maintained friendly contacts with local Native American tribes theoretically allied with the British. In taking Fort Dill, he is said to have defeated the commander personally in a tomahawk vs. saber fight that ranged all over the burning fort.

After the war, in 1778, Stark moved to a small fur trading settlement on the banks of a swamp where the Mascouten and Wyandotte rivers merge before flowing into a large lake. The settlement, lake, and major river feeding the lake from the north were all called "Mascouten" after a local Native American tribe.

Stark used his Native American contacts to establish a thriving trading post business. After a few years, he branched out into a few other business ventures: he ran a fishing operation, a timber business, and a blacksmith's workshop. All of these activities attracted more settlers.

In the early 1800s, when the US was looking to erect a fort in the area, Stark was the logical choice to help them secure the needed materials and labor. Fort Sam Adams was the first US military post in the area.

Stark continued to dominate the area's commerce. Mascouten was often colloquially referred to as "Stark City" because of his influence in the settlement. When he died in 1828, the town and the lake were both renamed in his honor, despite the fact that a later settlement, Gerrisburg, had sprung up between Stark City and the lake. Because the Mascouten river originated in Canada, it retained its original name.

It was on the streets of the newly-renamed Stark City that the Sentinel first made his appearance,

Secret Origin of the Sentinel

(Shhh! It's a Secret!)

In the late 1820s, a meteor crashed near the Rocky Mountains. Curious mountain man John Colter, who had originally come West with the Lewis and Clark expedition, investigated the crash and found the ruins of a strange vessel and its pilot. Colter brought the man back to health. The man had a strange story. He claimed to come from the stars, and to be a prince of the Sirian Principality, now exiled by his family for political reasons. His name came strangely to the tongue, but he asked for and gained Colter's permission to use the mountain man's family name. After a couple of years trapping and hunting with Colter, Jonas Colter headed for civilization.

Jonas had been exiled for his heretical concepts of serving and protecting the population of his native Principality. He found Earth to be the ideal arena to practice his concepts. Using his unspectacular psionic abilities, he initially acted in secret to help citizens without drawing any attention to himself. But when the house of the family of Amelia Blaine (a young woman he was courting according to the customs of the time) burst into flame, he abandoned subterfuge to use his abilities to save the family. Once they were safe, he used those same abilities to rescue several other Stark City residents. He disappeared before any officials could question him, but the Blaine family knew who their savior was. They became the start of what eventually became the Sentinel network.

After the fire, Jonas became less careful about hiding his good deeds, taking only the precaution of wearing his buckskins and floppy brimmed hat (which no one ever saw Jonas Colter wearing) when he purposely set out to serve and protect. Sometimes he also wore the hazard suit that was part of his ship's equipment. Besides saving people from natural disasters, he helped people

threatened by outlaws, rogue Indians, and the occasional corrupt official. When his psionic abilities were not enough (and he was careful to keep them mysterious), he would use Sirian technology he had scavenged from the wreckage of his ship.

Like all members of his family, Jonas was long-lived, but he had actually spent a century or so among the stars before coming to Earth. He grew older. He raised children, including a son who inherited some of his abilities and was actually stronger in some of them than his father. In 1861, Ralph Colter took the colors and went off to fight in the Civil War. When he returned home, he took up the mantle of the Sentinel.

And so it continued for four more generations, with successors depending on alien technology and powers that changed with each generation, until David Colter, the Sentinel of the 1970s, disappeared with the other heroes of Stark City during the Glorianna Invasion.

David left behind a wife and young son who were not ready to absorb all the duties and obligations of the Sentinel. The Sentinel Network attempted to raise the youngster into the traditions of the Sentinel, but he was willful, and they were already disrupted by the loss of their leader. He eventually left to pursue his own indulgences, leaving the bodies of many of the most important members of the Network in the ruins of their headquarters behind him.

Now, with the young man they were supposed to mentor turned to a life of criminal indulgence as Doc Judas, the remains of the very secret Sentinel Network has become the very public Sentinel Foundation—dedicated to creating a team of heroes to meet the challenges of a new century, so the guardianship of Stark City need not rest on just one set of shoulders.

saving a family caught in a house fire. It was noted at the time that the mystery man concentrated entirely on saving the Blaine family until all of them were safe before assisting any of the other families caught in the block-wide fire. Newspaper accounts (which created the name “Sentinel” after a few more appearances) remarked on the mysterious rescuer’s “Frontiersman-like appearance” and apparent immunity to the effects of smoke.

Important Dates

1829: First appearance of the Sentinel.

1833: Stark City became an incorporated municipality after receiving an official charter from the state.

1872: The Great Gerrisburg Fire. Gerrisburg (now colloquially called “Geartown”) was gutted by a massive fire which also destroyed the shipyards and the docks before being contained by firefighters from Stark City and Gerrisburg working in tandem. Legend has it that the fire was set by Civil War hero Colonel Jeremiah Blackstone.

1889: The Gerrisburg-Stark City “War.” Stark City’s “Stockyard King” Thaddeus Malone collaborated with the Vanderbilt railroad empire in an effort to take advantage of Gerrisburg’s slow recovery from the Great Fire, attempting to hijack Gerrisburg’s monopoly on Stark Lake traffic from Canada and New England. This would have been an interesting series of articles in the business pages, except that Malone imported a cadre of Wild West gunfighters to physically force the shippers of Gerrisburg to capitulate. Colonel Hanse Diedrickson, the Great Captain of the Lake Shippers, retaliated by recruiting a mercenary force of Civil War and Indian fighter veterans and open warfare threatened to break out.

The Sentinel (actually the second Sentinel) stepped into the fray, apparently making alliances with both sides and then disrupting their plans. The body count was amazingly light, with many of the hired guns driven out of the conflict in shame by the bystanders’ laughter. Only a few of the mercenaries died, and that mostly because of their own stubbornness and bloody-mindedness. Finally,

frustrated beyond caution, Malone and Diedrickson arranged to meet on the border between the two towns. The Sentinel stood by, acting only to stop other members of the factions from interfering. Malone died on the street; Diedrickson died of his wounds two days later. Their seconds-in-command agreed to a cease-fire truce, and Mayor Herman Blaine of Stark City negotiated an agreement to merge the two cities, putting the treasury of Stark City to work helping rebuild what had now become the Gerrisburg district of Stark City.

1893–1894: The World Columbian Exposition, celebrating the expanded Stark City's recovery from the fire. The actions of the Sentinel to keep the villainous Master of the Fair from holding the entire city for ransom brought the masked guardian of Stark City to national, even international, attention. The Exposition site was mostly the old Mascouten swamp, filled in and reinforced to provide an extensive fairground. To keep the area swamp-free, the Mascouten and Wyandotte rivers were rerouted to feed into Stark Lake independently. Draining the swamp and redirecting the rivers took so much money (at least some of which was skimmed off in fine Gilded Age fashion) that critics of the project said, "The streets must be paved with silver." Thus the Silver District got its name.

1918–1933: Prohibition. Because of its optimal location on two rivers, close to the Canadian border and close to a major lake, Stark City gained notoriety as a hotbed for bootlegging. Stark City's first costumed vigilantes emerged to battle the moonshiners and gangsters, and the Sentinel adopted the fashion of wearing a costume. The bulky one-piece garment was apparently bulletproof, and his face was hidden behind a gas mask of advanced design.

1923: Attracted by the forward-looking spirit of Stark City and a handsome financial investment from philanthropist Adrian Colter, Nikolai Tesla establishes an invention park on the outskirts of Stark City and starts to make some of his dreams come true.

1933–1934: The Century of Progress World's Fair celebrated Stark City's centennial. The plot by the Master of the Fair (thought to have died in 1894) to kidnap Tesla was foiled by the Cowl and Swashbuckler, two new costumed heroes who stepped up to the challenge after the Sentinel was diverted away from the city by the Master's subterfuges.

The fair was originally scheduled for 1928, the 100th anniversary of Stark City's naming, but some political shenanigans (largely designed to avoid breaking ground at the original site, which would have exposed some of the Catacombs already present) and then the Great Depression almost canceled the entire project. Financing from some of the first families of the city allowed the project to continue, and the fair opened on the 100th anniversary of the city's formal incorporation.

1933: Stark City began construction on an ambitious underground subway mass transit system as part of the New Deal.

1934: Easton Street in a low-lying area of Stark City was condemned and covered over along a two-mile stretch to form a tunnel for the subway system project. It remained forgotten for decades until it was rediscovered in the Catacombs.

1935: Workers constructing a subway uncovered an ancient portal to other dimensions. The underground subway system project was abruptly abandoned, and an above-ground elevated train line designed by Tesla was implemented instead. First public appearance of Dynamo Dan and Redhawk, two powered heroes who fought alongside Sentinel, the Cowl, and Swashbuckler to stop the interdimensional monsters released from the portal until the aperture was sealed by the mysterious Doctor Fortune.

1936: The Stark City Frontiersmen, led by rookie shortstop Chip Carrington, won their first World Series championship. Carrington was named MVP.

The Teslacracy

In 1928, Nikolai Tesla was contacted at his invention park on the outskirts of Stark City by a group of other Teslas from various alternate dimensions. Calling themselves the Teslacracy, this group had pooled their resources and knowledge to explore the mysteries of the multiverse. With their massive combined intellects, they had unlocked the secrets of traveling between dimensions, engineered vehicles capable of deep space travel, and even invented biochemical processes that provided near-immortality.

Impressed with the massive (even by their standards) intellect of “our” Earth’s Tesla, the Teslacracy invited him to join as a probationary member.

Fascinated by the possibilities (and excited to finally be among a group of men who were his equal in intellect), Tesla went on several multiverse-hopping adventures with the Teslacracy. The group accepted our Tesla and, eventually, offered him full membership in the group.

However, the price for membership was dire: Tesla would have to help the Teslacracy conquer his Earth so the resources and labor of our planet could be used to support their massive multidimensional empire (as the empire required immense quantities of energy and a massive multiworld slave labor force). While our Tesla was a dedicated pacifist and humanitarian, the members of the Teslacracy were not bound by any such morality. They served only their egos and intellectual curiosity.

When Tesla refused their offer, they attempted to kill him (under the reasoning that they had to cleanse the multiverse of cowards unworthy of the name “Tesla”), and prepared to invade our world anyway. Tesla survived their attack and, with the help of that era’s Sentinel, just barely defeated the vanguard of the Teslacracy’s invasion. Using a massive wireless electricity generator, Tesla charged the multiversal ether around our planet, creating an energy shield that he hoped would protect our Earth from the Teslacracy for decades.

The Teslacracy is a favorite subject of conspiracy theorists. Some of the more colorful theories include the idea that the Teslacracy has found a way to tunnel through the charged ether shield and had provided weapons to help repel the Gloriana invasion. A more recent rumor holds that agents of the Teslacracy have recently infiltrated our world and taken over super-crime organizations in a renewed bid to conquer the planet.

The Sentinel Foundation takes these rumors very seriously and investigates any of the more credible reports.

1939: Chip Carrington and his plane No Regrets went missing while on an archaeological expedition to the Yucatan Peninsula.

1939–1945: World War 2. The Tesla Invention Park became the Tesla Industrial Park in Stark City, the site of many laboratories focused on advanced technology aiding the war effort. A new generation of heroes helped defend America’s scientific genius from spies and saboteurs. Several of the science heroes from this time, notably Streamliner, Doc Bronze, and Captain Bakelite, worked with Nikolai

Tesla to use their talents to enhance and improve the city around them, building Stark City into a “Town of Tomorrow.” The Sentinel disappeared from the streets of Stark City for most of the war (even before America’s entry into the war), but appeared in both Europe and the Pacific at important junctions of events. He was credited with blunting several Japanese “banzai charges” on Guadalcanal and with slowing down the German advance during the Battle of the Bulge. Interestingly, some reports of his activities placed him in both the Pacific and Europe in on a schedule that no known

conveyance could have enabled.

At the end of the war, Col. Matthew Colter, USMC, returned to the city. His brother, Capt. Mark Colter, USAAF, was lost in the skies over Germany. His body was never recovered.

1947: Death of Nikolai Tesla mourned by city. Support of Colter Foundation (later to become the framework of the Sentinel Foundation) was credited with extending his life “at least five years.”

1954: Mayor Joseph O’Hara ran through a meeting of the aldermen stark naked. He later claimed that he had been mind controlled by “evil forces.” This statement was met by general derision, but the Sentinel found the culprit, Jake “the Mouthpiece” Murietta, and the mayor was vindicated. He decided that it was time to retire anyway.

1955: Start of first term of Mayor Geoffrey Knightley, Democrat. Knightley was mayor until 1976, when he died in office.

1958: First known case of the Alliance for Justice, a formal association of Stark City’s costumed mystery men. It included wartime heroes like Streamliner and newcomers like Miss Victory. Rather than ganging up on bank robbers and purse snatchers, the Alliance acted as a central directory and information clearing station for the various heroes, increasing the efficiency and speed of individual heroes’ responses. They mostly gathered when powered criminals posed a dire threat or special events required a heroic presence to improve civic pride.

1960: Stark City saw a rise in mob violence unequalled since Prohibition, as the Gargano crime family consolidated its power by eliminating rival Mafia families.

1969: A major division split the Alliance for Justice as heroes differed, mostly along generational lines, about the legitimacy of the Vietnam War. Thanks to the Sentinel’s mediation, the group did not dissolve, but protocols were created to make sure certain heroes did not have to cooperate too closely. In one much-discussed case, American Fist could not be at

Locale:

Mascouten Island Station

Aspects

Nerve Center for SCPD Tactical Response Teams
Power-Sapping Holding Cells in Hardened Basement
Helicopters and Speedboats on Standby

Description: Located on an island where the Mascouten River flows into Stark Lake, Mascouten Island Station is a joint command base for the Stark City Police Department and the Coast Guard.

Speedboats and helicopters are available to respond to emergencies on the land or water. Stark City SWAT always has a squad on standby 24/7 at this location, as it is a convenient location from which to insert teams into almost any part of the city.

The 100-year-old mansion that serves as the main command center on Mascouten Island has been refurbished and outfitted with modern wiring, a small clinic, and—in the former basement—a hardened bunker with power-sapping technology (effectively Power Nullification 5) for the temporary housing of metahuman suspects.

Contact: Lieutenant Joseph Washington

Aspects

Ambitious Glory Hound
Reluctantly Works with Vigilantes
Alcoholic

Washington is the Stark City Police Officer-in-Charge for Mascouten Island. He’s a hard-charging careerist who bristles at (but grudgingly complies with) the Stark City PD’s directive to integrate civilian metahumans into operations. The stress of Washington’s work has led him to drink heavily (occasionally even on the job). So far, he manages to hide this fact from all but the most careful observer.

the same event or investigation as Independent Spirit.

1972: The Gloriana invasion. A sudden rupture in the dimensional barriers over Tesla Park forced a war-weary America in the midst of a divisive election to suddenly confront a hole in space. A police helicopter fell through the hole when it suddenly expanded. Miss Victory flew through the hole and was never seen again. Suddenly, giant airships punched their way through the hole from the other side. Each was emblazoned with the now-familiar decal of a Japanese-style Rising Sun done up in Union Jack colors.

The airships disgorged battalions of clockwork soldiers who quickly established a beachhead in Tesla Park. Within a single day the city was fully occupied by clockwork soldiers, giant steam-powered battlesuits that apparently held the controllers for the clockwork soldiers, and airships both big and small. Speakers on the airships and battlesuits announced that the world was now being magnanimously included in the Glorious Eternal Empire of the Sun Goddess Gloriana, Empress of the Empire of Greater Albion-Nippon.

By the time the military could react, the city was infested and the population effectively held hostage to ensure the USA's good behavior. Massive retaliation was not an option, particularly when Imperial forces demonstrated a few tricks that effectively shut down the jet fighters that tried to fly over the town. It was up to the heroes of Stark City and the world at large to deal with the invaders—including the superpowered Lances of the Empire. Earth's heroes did so, but at a steep price.

Almost all of Stark City's heroes—including the Sentinel, several reactivated science heroes (who had protected and nurtured the city during the WW2 years), and the membership of the Alliance for Justice—vanished in the fight that repulsed the invaders. The details are still murky, and there's some debate over what happened. What is clear is that the heroes sacrificed themselves in a scheme that sent the invaders back to their own world and sealed the portal. There are many conspiracy theories about exactly what happened.

'70s, '80s, and '90s: Although the shadow of the celebrated science heroes of WW2 and the Alliance for Justice loomed large, through the '70s, '80s, and '90s, Stark City was best known for its street-level vigilantes. A handful of costumed loners attempted to keep the mob's creeping influence at bay—with only moderate success. Several of these vigilantes attempted to take up the mantle of the Sentinel. All were either killed early in their careers by criminal forces or otherwise persuaded to stop using the Sentinel's name. Grim vigilantes like the Black Cowl, Edge, and Lady Fury were alternately praised and reviled by the local tabloids.

1985: Dominic Marinelli became the wealthiest and most powerful gangster in Stark City after eliminating the rival Gargano crime family in a quick but bloody takeover. Shortly afterward, he called a truce with the DeSouza crime family to keep the Feds off all their backs.

1991: Dominic Marinelli was tried and convicted of murder, based on evidence provided by one of his lieutenants, Frankie Brunello. The federal prosecutor was Harrison Ullman, who would later go on to become mayor of Stark City. Marinelli escaped en route to Striker Federal Penitentiary, and managed to disappear completely.

1992: With the Marinelli family in tatters after Dominic Marinelli's disappearance, the DeSouza crime family violently took over most of the Marinelli rackets. Several Marinelli lieutenants were killed during this takeover, including Francesco Marinelli, Dominic's oldest son. The Ring-a-Ding riverboat casino in Geartown was the last remaining bastion of Marinelli influence in Stark City.

1994: Arthur Knightley was elected Mayor of Stark City, establishing the "Knightley dynasty" of Stark City mayors. Attaining office through exploitation of his father's political contacts, Mayor Knightley led the city through several daring and largely unsuccessful economic reforms that mostly lined the pockets of his political cronies and himself. Connections between Knightley and the DeSouza mob were alleged by the Stark City Siren's star reporter, Carmen Burana, in her multi-article exposé on the mayor's administration.

The Gloriana Invasion

On another Earth, things were different. Queen Victoria's prestigious reign spread further across the globe than any other empire on Earth. A great many countries fell under her rule, including most of Western Europe, Africa, and North America. A change of fate meant that instead of eight children, just one was born to Queen Victoria: the princess Beatrice Mary Victoria who, after Victoria's death in 1901, became Queen.

In 1926, after a minor diplomatic incident with Japan, it was arranged that Queen Beatrice's daughter and sole child, Victoria Eugenie, would marry the newly-appointed 124th Emperor of Nippon, Hirohito. The unified empire of Albion-Nippon, with its vast resources and great minds, was able to achieve feats not seen in our world. They unlocked the secrets of both science and magic. They built marvels such as advanced robots, devastating energy weapons, and massive lighter-than-air battleships that rules the skies and traversed the void between planets. As Victoria Eugenie assumed the throne, the empire of Albion-Nippon cemented its rule of Earth and then reached for the stars.

Not everyone appreciated the enlightened rule of Victoria Eugenie. The Greater German Confederation (allied with several nations in the Americas and Europe) launched a revolt in 1939 that took nearly 5 years to quell. After putting down the uprising, Victoria Eugenie renamed herself Gloriana, the Sun Goddess, Eternal Empress of Greater Albion-Nippon.

In 1946, the Empress gave birth to her daughter Aika, and at last an heir had arrived—easing Gloriana's worries slightly over the future of the Empire.

In 1970, after the construction of the Sun Palace on the site of the former Buckingham Palace, the southern counties of Albion were devastated by a massive extradimensional energy wave.

The Empress ordered her best scientists and mages to construct an arcane machine that could trace the origin of the disturbance. They discovered that an event sometime in the past in an alternate dimension had caused ripples across the whole of space time, and Gloriana's Earth was now feeling the effects. They were able to trace the destructive energy wave back to its origin point: a dimensional nexus that opened in 1935 on a parallel world in a place called Stark City.

Believing that it was some form of pre-emptive strike from this alternate dimension, Gloriana began to prepare for war. She had defended her empire from attack on her Earth, and was not about to lose it to another Earth.

It took her two years to amass her army, and for her scientists to build a Dimensional Portal. On May 24, 1972 (the 153rd birthday of her grandmother, Queen Victoria), she personally led the invasion force into Stark City.

Since being repulsed at the hands of the Stark City heroes, Gloriana has brooded on her defeat. Her failure was humiliating politically. She's had to put down half a dozen more uprisings from vassal nations who were emboldened when her army was driven out of Stark City. It also cost her dearly on a personal level as her own daughter, Aika, was never seen again after the invasion.

Gloriana has determined that she must return to our world to expunge this blot upon her reign and to avenge her daughter. While all portals to our world have been blocked (due the sacrifice of the heroes of Stark City), the Empress has her staff of Royal Scientists, Mages and Artificers looking for a way to open a gate back into Stark City. One day, she is certain, she'll find her way back

2002: Arthur Knightley was beaten in a closely fought election. The new mayor, Harrison Ullman, promised reforms, but was confronted by a looted city treasury. In a desperate attempt to increase public safety, the new mayor launched an initiative to bring heroes to Stark City. That initiative failed.

Modern Day: While Stark City continues to struggle with crime and corruption, decades of financial stagnation have given way to prosperity. Tesla Park has been reinvigorated with investment capital and the rest of the city is thriving, thanks to Tesla Park's success. Some of the heirs of the science heroes from the war years have even returned to reopen their parents' labs and carry on their family legacy.

Black Friday

Stark City is wrestling with one of its greatest tragedies in recent history.

On Friday, October 12, 2012, the Stark City Police Department Annual Awards Gala at the Platinum Coast Events Center was engulfed in a series of crimson fireballs. The explosions were centered on the raised dais where the SCPD's senior leaders were dining.

No one seated at the table survived.

Over a third of the city's police force was in the room when it exploded. Most of them didn't make it out.

Months later, no arrests have been made in the Black Friday attack (as it was dubbed by the local media), but the investigation continues. Stark City PD is struggling to rebuild under the leadership of Jesus Ramirez, the new Chief of Police. The FBI has assigned a task force (under the leadership of Special Agent in Charge Henry Doorbinder), but they've had no more luck than the SCPD. The two organizations are officially cooperating on this issue—but unofficially, communications have broken down and each organization is pursuing separate lines of investigation.

There are multiple theories and a few rumors:

- It could have been the DeSouza Mafia family in Geartown. With the decline of the Marinelli family (and with little meaningful opposition from costumed vigilantes), James DeSouza's operation was ascendant until the Stark City PD opened a vigorous investigation (led by frustratingly unbribeable detectives) into narcotics trafficking in Geartown. DeSouza decided to send them a message about who really controls Stark City. A squad of DeSouza's enforcers staged the attack using black-market military-grade battlesuits that were smuggled into Stark City via the Geartown docks. These same battlesuits are stashed in a basement of the Centennial Hotel in Geartown (because you don't just throw away that kind of hardware, even if it is incriminating).
- It could have been the Bluerocket Investment Group, who were getting heat from the white-collar crime bureau of the Stark City PD. This calculated move kills the investigation, as all official resources are focused on the presumptive perpetrators, the DeSouza family, leaving BIG in the clear.
- It could have been one of the various factions of Gloriana invasion refugees, possibly the first in a planned series of attacks meant to weaken Stark City for a new impending invasion.
- It could have been carried out by an agent of Dr. Judas in preparation for a possible return.

- It could have been carried out by the Atlantean criminal Krachla in order to weaken the police presence in Stark City and to cause problems for his strongest rival for the Geartown drug trade, the DeSouza family.
- It could be a criminal reviving the legacy of the Master of the Fair (or another reincarnation of the death-defying villain himself). In 2013, Stark City will hold Starkfest!, a massive fair commemorating the 185th anniversary of the renaming of Mascouten to Stark City, with exhibits designed to celebrate Stark City's past and emphasize its bright future. This would be just the sort of event the Master of the Fair would love to ruin, and throwing the police department into disarray beforehand would be a good first step.

This bold attack on Stark City's finest was an impetus for the Sentinel Foundation to revive Mayor Ullman's old initiative to bring heroes back to Stark City. With the brazen, unsolved attack on the city's police, the increasing power of the Mafia, the rising crime rate in Stark City (particularly metahuman crime), and rumors about the Teslacracy and the Gloriana Empire sending agents into our world, the Sentinel Foundation realized that they needed to carry on in the footsteps of the Sentinel lineage more directly and protect Stark City. This leads the Foundation to reach out to the PCs, hoping to recruit them as Stark City's new superteam.

Whether or not the GM wants to use the Black Friday plot is up to her. Finding and punishing those responsible for the attack could be a driving motivation for the new heroes of Stark City. There are many other threats and motivations that could fill in just as well.

(In the spirit of giving the GM options and avoiding the evils of heavy-handed meta-plot, we leave it up to the Game Master to decide which of the several possible options outlined above is credible.)

Relocating Stark City

Superficially, it's fairly easy to relocate Stark City to anywhere in North America that's close to a large body of water. Simply rename Stark Lake to the Atlantic or Pacific Ocean or a local lake, modify some of the names of the sports teams (Whitetails, for example, should change to something equally innocuous). Add in a few museums and businesses that reflect some local flavor and you're good to go.

However, this kind of conversion can be more rewarding with a bit of additional thought.

Much of what we did for Stark was based on the idea that it is "our Chicago," and that colored decisions about locales and contacts in many ways. GMs can absolutely change that, but they might want to take the opportunity to change a lot of the little details as well to reflect the innate flavor of the "new" Stark City they're creating. For example, Stark has an elevated train instead of a subway. Why? Because Chicago has an elevated train. That led us

to ask what would be going on below ground. That line of thought gave us the Catacombs, along with the NPCs and their connections associated with it.

So if you are moving Stark someplace else, you might change the El train to something more appropriate to wherever you are moving it. You might get a new underground subway system instead of the El. Or a bus system. Or trolleys or cable cars, as in New Orleans or San Francisco. Perhaps the Catacombs still exist, but they developed from a subterranean Chinatown (like the one uncovered in Oklahoma City in the late 1960s) rather than old bootlegger tunnels and abandoned subway tubes.

The thing for GMs to do is to make the move mean something, so it is more than just cosmetic. Figure out what is important to your region and make that important in Stark. The setting rules and the collaborative process they outline can be a great tool for doing this.

ICONIC Settings Rules

Iconic Settings

An often-important “character” in superhero comic books is the city itself. Superheroes are urban by nature; since the very beginning of the genre, they have lived in (and protected) major cities, and there’s a strong tradition of creating thinly-veiled fictional versions of real-world cities as homes for various heroes. There is an equally strong tradition of contrasting the colorful fiction of superheroes with the backdrops of real world cities and locales.

These guidelines look at making the city and setting of your **ICONS** game a more important element of the series as a whole, as well as fleshing out the setting with the help of your players, further involving them and their characters in its creation

Setting Traits

Just like characters, settings have traits which help define them. The primary setting traits are places, people, and scale, along with the different aspects associated with them and the setting as a whole.

When players go through the process of creating their heroes, the Game Master can also ask them to take part in the process of creating the setting by contributing some of these traits. This is similar to the process of villain creation outlined in the Villainomicon, but rather than players creating villains for each other, they create setting elements for the shared world their heroes inhabit.

Settings have four traits, which are all descriptive, rather than measured on the 1–10 scale (although the **Scale** trait itself may have things to say about that). The four traits are **Theme**, **Places**, **People**, and **Scale**.

Theme describes what the setting is about, from a “City of Tomorrow Protected by the Heroes of Today” to a “Corrupt and Festering Wound, Crying Out for a Surgeon to Cut Out the Rot So It May Heal.” You can think of the theme as sort of the “master” aspect of the setting and the series, from which players can draw inspiration when contributing the setting’s other traits.

- **Theme** describes what the setting is about, from “a city of tomorrow protected by the heroes of today” to “a corrupt and festering wound, crying out for a surgeon to cut out the rot so it may heal.” You can think of theme as sort of the “master” aspect of the setting and the series, from which players can draw inspiration when contributing the setting’s other traits.

- **Places** are the different set-pieces of the setting, the individual parts the players contribute. They can range from local hangouts to criminal enterprises, landmarks, businesses, and more ... all the kinds of places you find in the world inhabited by superheroes.

- **People** are the characters inhabiting the places of the setting, the ones heroes meet and interact with when they visit those places, and the driving forces behind the places, making them more useful as hooks for interesting stories.

- **Scale** is the overall size of the setting, and therefore the size and prominence of its other traits. It can range from a specific neighborhood to a city, nation, world, or even beyond to an interstellar setting consisting of many worlds, or even many universes!

Theme

A setting’s theme can be thought of as the aspect or phrase that sums up what it—and therefore the series—is all about. Generally, the whole group should agree on the overall nature of the theme, with the Game Master offering both input and approval.

Setting themes can be anything, from “Truth, Justice, and Freedom” to “Protecting a World that Hates and Fears Them” or “Saving the World... One Neighborhood at a Time.” The theme helps to set the tone of the series, and chances are that the group has a halfway decent idea of what it is before even getting to the setting creation phase.

The Status Quo

One key piece of information the theme can provide is the nature of the status quo in the setting and whether the heroes are looking to protect it or change it.

For example, a *“World’s Greatest Heroes”* theme suggests the heroes are primarily charged with keeping the world safe and preserving things largely as they already are. The world may have its problems but, for the most part, the goal is to preserve the status quo. On the other hand, a theme of *“Struggle Against the Dying of the Light”* suggests the heroes are fighting what may seem like a hopeless battle to overturn a terrible status quo, such as a world sliding into darkness due to the totalitarian rule of a supervillain. The same can be said of themes like *“Rebellion Against an Alien Army”* or *“Turning Back the Doomsday Clock”*—efforts to change the status quo.

Settings where the heroes are protecting the status quo rely on a steady stream of threats, with the players naturally suspicious of anything that seems likely to significantly alter the world, since chances are it’s not a good thing. Settings focused on changing the status quo need to offer opportunities to do so, or else the players may become frustrated with the lack of progress towards their ultimate goals. Actually achieving those goals can be a capstone to finish off the series (the heroes evict the invaders, overthrow the dictator, etc.) or a major turning point towards the creation of a new theme. Now that the status quo has changed, what direction will the heroes take things in?

Places

Each player provides at least one significant place, along with that place’s concept, connection to the overall theme of the setting, and one or two tagable qualities, which can be used in play. Players are free to suggest ideas for any kind of place they want, but should keep the following guidelines in mind:

Places are **“community property.”**

The places players create as part of the larger setting are “community property”—they don’t belong to just that player, they belong to the group

Is the Theme an Aspect?

Generally, it’s best to not consider a setting’s theme as an aspect, like the aspects that characters and places have, simply because theme is all-pervasive, and therefore it may be tempting to tag it all the time. On the other hand, Game Masters looking to really emphasize a setting’s theme can allow it as an aspect, encouraging players to always be on the lookout for opportunities to take actions in accordance with the theme so they can tag it for Determination use.

For example, if the theme is *“Helping Keep the World a Strange Place”* making it a tagable aspect requires careful management so players don’t use it as an opportunity to do strange things all the time, but focus on actions that truly support the theme. Other themes, like *“Earth Will Be Free!”* or *“Being a Hero Means Making Hard Choices”* are a bit easier to make into aspects, because they focus on a particular kind of actions.

Consult with your GM about whether or not the series theme is also an aspect and, when in doubt, ask! Even if the theme is not normally an aspect, there’s no harm in asking if it can be for an important action you feel strongly supports (and is supported by) the theme.

(and the series) as a whole. Once the place is created, the player does not “control” that place any longer or have any special influence over it. Players should certainly try to create the kinds of places they want to see in the series, but they have to be willing to let go of them once they’re created, placing them into the hands of the Game Master and the group as a whole.

Places should be useful.

The main reason for players to create places is to use them as “set pieces” in the series. Therefore, each place should have some specific use or purpose, something that allows it to fit into the series and offer something. This can range from a local hangout or workplace environment to a potential battleground or target for villainous schemes.

Creating places allows the players and Game Master to collaborate. The players offer suggestions of the kinds of places they want to see in the series, and the Game Master looks at them with an eye towards their usefulness, offering suggestions and approving (or vetoing) places based on how well they'll fit in.

Places need hooks.

Along with their usefulness, places need "hooks"—things about them to make the place memorable and interesting. People (see the following sections) are a part of this, but hooks can be other things as well. They tie into the place's aspects, and may offer some ideas on that front. They also give a place character, helping players to connect with and remember it, making the place more than just a generic set piece.

One good hook to consider for places is their history: Where did the place come from? Why is it there? Who lived or worked there in the past? Are there any famous or infamous incidents involving that place? How did it get its name? The answers to these and many more questions can flesh out a place and weave its thread into the overall fabric of the setting.

Places need aspects.

Lastly, places need aspects, which work for them much like they do for characters. A place can have as many aspects as the Game Master allows, but no more than five, and a minimum of two, is a good guideline. Also, as with characters, place aspects can be qualities or challenges

Other Ground Rules

The Game Master can set other ground rules for creating places as needed for the group and the series. The biggest unwritten ground rule is that places need to fit into the overall setting, and the GM has the final say as to whether they do or not. The Game Master functions as organizer and editor for place creation, offering suggestions and helping players fit their various places into a larger context.

Widening the Circle

The creation of places can stop with the players who create them, or it can continue beyond that point, if

Personal Places

If the Game Master wishes, players can define "personal places" for their characters. This takes place at the same time as setting design, but personal places are not added to the "community property" of the group. They remain the primary province of the hero whose player created them.

Examples of personal places include individual headquarters, businesses, or other iconic locales associated with a hero. A personal place may be an aspect, such as "*Stately Old Manor*" or "*Sanctum Sanctorum*," or associated with an aspect like "*Old Money*" or "*Owns Half the City*," but in either case the place should have some connection to the hero's aspects.

Unless it's a constant burden, the place is likely a quality (or tied to one), meaning it can be both tagged to spend Determination and compelled to earn the hero Determination; a high-tech hero's state-of-the-art downtown office building might provide labs and research facilities, for example, but also makes a tempting target for business rivals and terrorists alike.

the players want to implement the following option.

Pass all of the newly-created places to the right (or otherwise ensure that all of the players trade with each other). Now each player should describe the circumstances of their hero's first visit to that place. It might have been a solo adventure or team-up with the hero of the place's creator, or a far more sedate encounter, from meeting a friend for coffee to a first day on the job or as a newcomer to the area.

This first visit may suggest additional ideas for aspects and people associated with the place, in which case the players can modify the place's aspects and may want to create additional people. Perhaps each player has the opportunity to create a new person associated with the place.

For additional depth and interaction, shift the places around the table one more time and have a second

set of players describe their heroes' first visit to the place and have the opportunity to suggest aspects or people for that place. Generally, doing this more than twice can overburden places with too much detail and rob them of their newness as backdrops for the series, so do not overuse the option.

People

Each place has to have at least one character associated with it. If it's the Police Precinct it might be the desk sergeant or a detective. If it's the local coffeehouse it might be a barista with an ear for gossip, and so forth. The idea is for the people of a place to also provide hooks and to serve as both opportunities for tagging the place and potentially providing challenges for the heroes.

Like the places themselves, most of the people associated with a place are "communal characters." They are not the heroes' personal connections or relationships, although people associated with their personal aspects may also be connected to a place. For example, Police Headquarters may be a place one of the players details, her hero being the daughter of a homicide detective nearing retirement. She details the Police Chief as a person associated with the place, alongside her hero's own personal connections with her father (who doesn't know about the nocturnal activities his "little girl" is involved in) and her father's new rookie partner (a potential love interest for the hero).

Concept

Start with a concept, from "Veteran Police Detective" to "Ambitious Mayor" or even "Good-Humored Food Cart Vendor." You can play around with clichés, but be careful of relying on them too heavily, since they can make your people—and therefore setting—seem flat and lifeless. Add in some twists or new takes on old concepts, but stay focused on people you can sum up and describe quickly, giving players a snapshot of who they are.

In particular, what role does the person serve in relationship to a place? Some might be people who work at a place, from an office building to a fire station, while others are people who frequent a place, like a regular at a local watering hole or a

dedicated fan at a sports venue. They may even live there, if the place is residential, like an apartment building or condo complex. If your concept is "Nosy Next-Door Neighbor," then it doesn't matter much what that person does for a living, except that it's probably something that feeds into a tendency to poke around in other people's business.

Motive

What motivates this person? Is it dedication and civic duty? Ambition or greed? In what ways are the person's motives congruent with the heroes' motives? In what ways do they come into conflict? All of these things provide opportunities to create stories involving the person (and therefore the place). They also help to give the Game Master an idea of how that person will react when things happen in the course of an adventure. A rookie police officer (or reporter, or whoever) whose motive is "Wants to be a big damn hero" is going to react quite differently to dangerous circumstance compared to a person whose motive is "Survive at all costs" or "Get revenge on the person who wronged me."

Relationships

Just as heroes have relationships with other characters as qualities and challenges, the people they encounter have their own relationships. The newsstand owner and operator on the corner near the heroes' downtown headquarters may have a family at home, or a brother-in-law working construction, while the scientist at the high-tech lab the heroes frequent could have just gone through a difficult break-up or a death in the family.

You don't have to define all the details of the relationships of every person at every place, but consider some of these relationships along with motivations when you're coming up with aspects for them.

Aspects

The primary thing each person at a place needs is at least one aspect, probably two or three. For simplicity's sake, you can use concept, motivation, and relationships to quickly come up with the aspects, or you can put some additional thought

into it, choosing any aspect that suits the person and makes him or her a more interesting element of the place and the setting.

Aspects for people are the same as those for heroes, in concept. They're less likely to have things like epithets and catchphrases (although they might have either) and more likely to have some quick, distinctive, and descriptive handles.

Widening the Circle

As with creating places, groups have the option of expanding this stage of the process by allowing additional players to create people associated with places. When a place moves to a different player, that player has the option of creating a new person for that locale. Once again, this is a communal character, although there's nothing that says two or more heroes' personal connections cannot frequent the same place, particularly if they have things in common.

Scale

An important element for a superhero game like **ICONS** is **scale**. The default assumption is that the group is creating a city together, but they could just as easily scale things up so they're creating a country or world and each of the places are individual cities (like superheroes in the DC Universe rather than Marvel Manhattan) or even individual *planets* (like the Legion of Super-Heroes) in a star-spanning setting. Likewise, you can scale down and create a neighborhood, town, or district rather than a city.

Neighborhood

At the neighborhood scale, places are fairly intimate, since no two of them are likely to be more than a few blocks away. The people at these places probably represent a fairly tight-knit community, one the heroes will be seeing quite often.

A setting at this scale does not have to be a neighborhood of a larger city or community, of course. It can just as easily be a small town where everybody knows everyone else, or a similarly close community like a school campus, frontier settlement, or "planned" community (planned with

or without superheroes in mind).

City

The city scale is the default for the guidelines in this chapter. Superheroes tend to be urban types, since cities are where you find the most people and therefore both the most innocent lives and the most criminals preying upon them.

Places at the city scale tend to be specific buildings: places of business, homes, government buildings, and the like, or else particular contained locations like parks, malls, plazas, or monuments. They tend to show a greater diversity than the neighborhood scale, and it's generally a good idea to have a representative place (or two) from each major neighborhood or district of the city to showcase its character

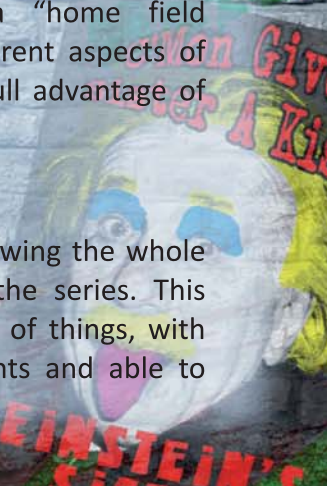
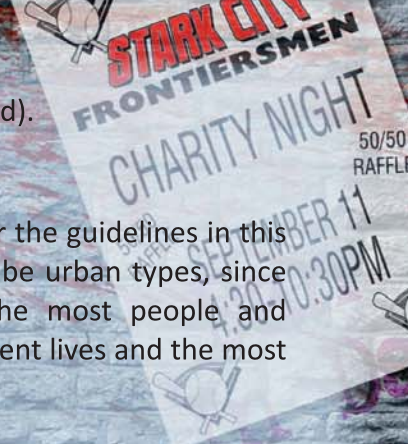
Nation

The nation scale is "big picture" for most heroes, looking at the whole of a country or continent as the regular "setting" of the series. This usually means the heroes can expect to go all over the map dealing with different threats, even if they call a particular city their home base. Other teams at this scale may avoid being "tied down" to a particular city, having a mobile headquarters of some sort, like a floating sky-island or large vehicle.

At the nation scale, "personal places" for the heroes may include their whole home city. For example, a team of heroes gathered from across the nation could each call a particular city or region home, with the hero's player defining it as a place, complete with a supporting cast of people, some of whom may be relationship challenges for the hero. The cities could be real-world places or entirely fictional (like Stark City), each with their own character and flavor. The "local" hero gets a "home field advantage" from knowing the different aspects of the place and being able to take full advantage of them

World

A step above the nation scale is viewing the whole world as the primary setting for the series. This means taking an international view of things, with heroes active on different continents and able to



operate in different countries (perhaps whether their governments want the heroes there or not).

Places on a world scale can be anything from specific locales found at the city scale to cities or even small nations. For example, a hero could be the crown princess and heir to a tiny Eastern European or Central Asian country, which her player defines as a personal place and part of the character's background. Obviously, the princess has a responsibility challenge where her homeland is concerned, but knows its qualities and challenges well.

Heroes operating on the world scale may have a suitable base of operations where they can get the "big picture," such as an orbiting satellite, moon base, or inter-dimensional realm (strongly linked to Earth). More terrestrial bases are likely located in neutral territory like international waters or Antarctica, or are accorded special status like embassies, allowing them to exist inside other nations' territories.

Space

The space scale is common for far-future and cosmic-level games where the heroes are expected to regularly travel the stars and visit different planets. At this scale, each place is potentially a different planet or similar interstellar location like a space station.

The general rule of thumb is that any place that exists on the city or nation scale should be a "(Place Name) Planet" or "(Place Name) Station" at this scale, such as a "Prison Planet," "Hospital Station," or "Capital World." Planetary places are painted with a broad brush, and aspects like "Desert World," "Ice Planet," and "Water World" are common.

Unless the heroes are all from the same world, each player should be responsible for creating his or her hero's home planet. All of the world's inhabitants might have powers like the hero's (particularly for Birthright and Unearthly origins), or they might not. Players can also create additional places (worlds) for use in the series.

Scale and the Scale

The scale of the setting can influence the scale used to measure abilities as well (*ICONS*, p. 5).

The default scale for *ICONS* sets human average at level 3 and human "maximum" at level 6, with levels 7 through 10 for truly superhuman abilities. However, a grander, more "cosmic" scale may shift things, perhaps putting the average human capability down to level 1, or even dropping it off the scale entirely, allowing for more room for superhuman levels up at the top, creating a setting where mere human levels of capability are almost irrelevant.

Conversely, a neighborhood or "street-level" scale could shift things in the other direction, perhaps bumping the human "average" up to level 4, making the maximum level 7 and allowing for a greater gradation of "normal" levels before hitting superhuman.

The Game Master should, of course, notify players of this shift in the scale when setting up the series before the players create their heroes, so they are aware of what the different relative levels mean in terms of their heroes' capabilities.

At the space scale, heroes need some means of getting around very quickly, from a fleet of hyperspace ships to some type of interstellar teleportation. They're also likely to have a headquarters at least as lofty as the world scale, perhaps even a planetoid, space station, or deep space vessel of their own.

Dimensional

Lastly, the most vast scale spans not just one universe, but multiple universes or dimensions, including—but not limited to—parallel worlds, mystic dimensions, alternate realities, weird realms like antimatter or sub-atomic universes, and much more. The dimensional scale can also include time travel and other time periods, for heroes with that capability (whether they control it or not).

Places at the dimensional scale can be virtually anything, from a particular drinking establishment

the heroes frequent (which may or may not exist in multiple times and dimensions itself) to an entire universe. As with the space scale, players may choose to create whole dimensions as places (personal or otherwise). The crown princess from a small nation at the world scale could now be the heir to the throne of an entire dimensional realm, with similar responsibilities, although perhaps different aspects associated with her home.

Place Aspects

The primary thing about places in ICONS play is their aspects, offering players opportunities to tap into the character of the place using Determination and giving Game Masters something to compel to create challenges for the heroes when they are at or dealing with that place.

Tagging Places

Place aspects can be tagged just like any others: the player simply spends Determination and describes how the aspect is relevant to the test in question. For example, if a place has the aspect *“Repository of Knowledge,”* a player might tag that aspect for determined effort on a knowledge-related test. Similarly, a place with the aspect *“Symbol of Justice”* could be tagged for efforts to enforce or call upon justice, ranging from legal jurisprudence to bringing an infamous criminal to answer for his crimes.

Game Masters can inform players up front about a place’s different aspects, giving him or her clear access to tag them in play, or can allow the players to infer those aspects from descriptions of the place. Since many (if not most) of the initial places in the setting will be created collaboratively, it’s safe to simply tell the players the aspects and go from there. You might even want to have note cards for each place with a list of the place’s aspects written on them for easy reference during play

Place Challenges

Place challenges can likewise be compelled by Game Masters, with proposed compels by players, for the heroes to earn Determination through challenges.

For example, if an old building has the challenge *“Tinderbox,”* the GM might compel it by saying that

a stray power blast or shower of sparks starts a fire. A player might likewise suggest this challenge in order to garner some needed Determination for a hero. Likewise, if a museum or similar place has the challenge *“Priceless Art and Artifacts,”* the GM could compel it to challenge heroes with saving and protecting the place’s contents while also dealing with fighting villains or overcoming other challenges.

Place challenges, like all challenges in ICONS, are situational; not all challenges are suitable for all characters or all scenes at that place. Game Masters may also allow players to spend Determination to compel certain place challenges to create problems for the villains and other non-player characters. For example, if an old warehouse has the place challenge of *“Rickety,”* then a hero could potentially spend Determination for a retcon so that the part of the floor the villain is standing on is about to collapse, for example. The GM should approve these compels, and is encouraged to allow the players to exercise their creativity.

Place Creation Example: Sherwood Park

Steve’s group is sitting down to create places for their *ICONS* setting. As Game Master, Steve has specified a default city scale, so all the places coexist in a single city.

Sean’s character, the Black Bowman, is a vigilante who fights street crime in the city. Sean decides that one of Black Bowman’s goals is cleaning up Sherwood Park, a once-pleasant area now infamous as a haven for criminals. He looks down the checklist for places, deciding that Sherwood is not a personal place, but shared for the setting. Steve agrees that it’s a useful locale, and asks Sean to come up with aspects and at least one character associated with it.

Thinking it over, Sean picks the aspects *“Urban Wilderness”* and *“Dangerous at Night.”* No other aspects immediately occur to him, so he stops there. For a person, he suggests John Little, an employee of the city’s Parks Department, who does

what he can to help clean up Sherwood Park and keep it safe, including cooperating with the Bowman from time to time on the sly. He gets the quick aspects of "Cleaning Up Sherwood" and "Big Guy."

Steve likes what Sean has so far, but wants to widen the circle, so he asks each player to pass his or her place to the right and get input from the player sitting there. Sean passes Sherwood Park to Lyle, whose character happens to be a high-tech magnate in his secret identity (Lyle's passed the industrial complex he came up with to the next player). Looking at Sherwood Park, Lyle sees it as a political football and a place his character has tried to improve by attending gala fundraisers and such, but not a lot is getting done. He offers the additional aspect "No Easy Solutions" to flesh out the park's problems, and the additional person of Karl Ravage, a "local businessman" who is actually a mob boss controlling the territory that includes Sherwood Park. He's given the aspects "Prominent Businessman" and "Secret Crime Boss," and Sean

immediately suggests he may be an Enemy challenge for Black Bowman, once Ravage realizes Bowman is operating on "his" turf. Steve nods approvingly, and asks Lyle if Ravage might also be a business rival of his character, perhaps creating a possible connection between his and Sean's heroes when they approach dealing with the crime boss's activities from different angles. They agree and talk about the possibilities of how their two heroes might have met in the park.

Looking things over, Steve thinks Sherwood Park is pretty well set, but makes a note to add a "Family Man" aspect to John Little, seeing the potential conflict in John balancing work and family responsibilities, and a future scenario where Ravage kidnaps John's wife or child to use as leverage.

With one round of places done, Steve can get on with planning the first game, or can ask the players to do another round detailing even more places for the setting before launching the story itself.

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