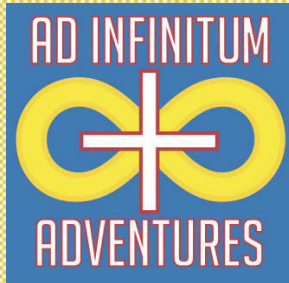


ICONS A TO Z

A Sourcebook for Icons Superpowered Roleplaying



Illustrated by
Dan Houser

Designed by
Steve Kenson

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"A" IS FOR "ALIENS"



Strange visitors from other planets have been a staple of the comic books from the very beginning, including various heroes Not of This Earth. Certainly, superheroes have faced off against alien foes from rampaging monsters to invading armies or the heralds of cosmic catastrophe.

ALIEN ORIGINS

"Alien" is a fairly common origin for comic book heroes, usually falling under the Unearthly origin in **ICONS**. For players and Game Masters looking for a little more when it comes to creating alien heroes, consider the following.

If you decide a hero's Unearthly origin means the character is from another planet (and, presumably, another species) then the hero's traits may tell you something about the species as well as the hero. The abilities you

choose to increase are generally higher for that species and one or more of the hero's powers may be innate species abilities. This is not a hard-and-fast rule, but a guideline for thinking about where the hero comes from.

If you use the Villain Creation option from **ICONS**, a villain associated with an alien hero might be a member of the same species, or an alien from a different (rival or opposed) species, and could share some abilities in common with the hero.

Most of the other origins in **ICONS** can also represent alien characters. A Birthright, for example, can be someone born from an alien heritage (either on Earth or away from it) while an Artificial character might have been constructed by aliens, perhaps as an emissary to humanity or a probe to study other worlds like Earth. The Trained and Gimmick origins assume the character has traits similar to humans, but that could be a case of a humanoid alien very like Earthly life or the application of suitable alien qualities.

RANDOM ALIENS

If you need a random alien for your game, roll on this table and follow the directions given, or just choose an alien type from the table and go from there.

2d6 roll	Type
2	Psychic Life
3-4	Alternate Life
5-6	Biped
7-9	Humanoid
10-11	Protean Life
12	Machine Life

Humanoids look very much like humans. They may have some minor cosmetic differences. Roll 1d6: 1 = unusual skin color or texture, 2 = unusual ear or brow shape, 3 = unusual eye color or shape, 4 = Extra Body Parts (roll type and level normally), 5 = roll twice, ignoring results of 5-6, 6 = virtually identical looking to humans.

Bipeds are humanoid, in that they have two arms, two legs, and at least one head and stand upright on their legs. Choose a creature type from the

Creatures section in **ICONS** and raise one of its below average abilities to 3. You can then also roll for cosmetic differences as humanoids, previously, if you wish, with a 6 meaning there are none.

Example: The GM randomly picks a hippo, making it a humanoid and increasing its Weak (1) Intellect to Average (3), for a hippo-like race of alien bipeds. The GM then decides to roll for a cosmetic difference, getting a 3, and choosing to give the race compound eyes like an insect's.

Alternate Life forms have the Alternate Form power from **ICONS**. Roll randomly or choose one; this is the alien's "natural" form. So, for example, there might be alien energy beings, gaseous beings, and so forth.

Psychic Life forms are Astral Projections (as the power) with a randomly determined level except they have no physical body. A psychic life form also has 0-4 (1d6-2) Mental Powers, rolled randomly or chosen by the GM.

Protean Life forms have the Fluid Form power (from Alternate Form) at a random level as well as the Transformation power at a random level and 0-2 Transformation extras (1d6: 1-2 = 0, 3-4 = 1, 5-6 = 2).

Machine Life forms are Artificial in origin and created just like other Artificial characters in **ICONS**.

ALIEN QUALITIES

"Alien" can be a quality for otherworldly characters, possibly refined with reference to a particular planet, species, or type of alien, such as "Alien Gladiator" or "Amorphous Alien" (or even "Amorphous Alien Gladiator"...).

Advantages associated with an alien quality may include access to superior technology or scientific knowledge, connections with the greater universe beyond Earth, and unusual alien traits or physiology for stunts ("My species does not require as much oxygen as yours," etc.).

Trouble can include a lack of familiarity with Earth culture and customs, troublesome ties with the alien's home world, unusual biology causing problems with medical treatment, or differences in customs causing social problems ("I don't understand the human obsession with wearing clothing all of the time...").

ALIEN INVASIONS

"Aliens invade" is a classic comic book plot and a suitable threat for a team of heroes. Using the random plot element tables from the **Assembled Edition** of **ICONS**, things like Attack, Control, Infiltrate, Seize, Conquer,

Possess, Eliminate, and Capture could all indicate alien activity, with almost any of the elements on **Table 2** as subjects, particularly Country, City, World, Head of State, and Resource.

STAGE 1: EARLY WARNING SIGNS

The invaders scout out whether or not Earth is suitable for invasion. They might be looking for some particular resource, or studying Earth's technology and defenses to see if a conquest will be easy. Scouting may include long-range observation (from high orbit or even further out, if the aliens have sophisticated sensors) or close observation by probes or alien scouts.

Naturally, the aliens take precautions not to be discovered during this stage. They may have advanced masking or cloaking technology or shapeshifting powers to conceal their presence. Still, heroes may encounter alien scouts in the pursuit of their mission: perhaps a series of unexplained crimes is the result of alien scouts going after samples of technology or resources, or abducting people for study and experimentation.

How the heroes confront the invaders during this stage may influence the progress of the invasion, or whether it even happens at all. On the one hand, a quick and decisive response by the heroes may convince the invaders Earth is too well-defended. Perhaps they can even feed false information back to the invaders via their scouts or probes, encouraging them to give up on their plans.

On the other hand, interference from Earthlings may convince the aliens they *need* to invade, especially if their initial overture was to determine whether or not Earth constitutes a threat—if the heroes prove the answer is a definite “yes” then the invaders have no choice but to respond!

STAGE 2: INVASION!

When the actual invasion begins, it may come as a complete surprise. Unless the aliens are completely confident in their invulnerability to Earth's defenses, they are likely to at least try the element of surprise, hoping to knock out as many of those defenses as possible before humanity can attempt to fight back. If heroes discovered the invasion plan in Stage 1, the aliens may act quickly to invade before Earth can marshal much of a defense.

The classic first wave of an invasion is the ominous appearance of a fleet of alien ships in the sky, or giant motherships hovering over capitol cities, disgorging fighters and ground troops. Preceding them may be some type of distraction: a massive energy pulse that disrupts power systems around the world, for example, or a meteor shower engineered by the aliens. The meteors themselves might be “landers” for the invaders, a planetary

bombardment to soften up Earth's defenses, or just a harmless distraction to cover their approach.

In a "secret invasion" scenario, the first wave may not even be noticeable until it's too late and the invaders have made their move. They might already be amongst us, wearing human guises, or the aliens might arrive openly, declaring their friendship and desire to help humanity, but covering up their sinister plans until they are ready to move on to the next stage. In a secret invasion, this stage may overlap with Stage 1, as the aliens continue gathering information and making preparations in secret, leaving clues for the heroes to discover their true intentions.

STAGE 3: OCCUPATION

If the invasion is successful, the aliens establish a beachhead and consolidate their gains. They may assume effective control over the whole planet, rather than just a region of it. Once an occupation has begun, the invaders work to quell and eliminate resistance and begin pursuing their goals for invading in the first place, whether it is taking humans for genetic experimentation, slave labor, breeding, or food, stealing Earth's resources, or building a hyperspace bypass on a strategic planet as their next move in an interstellar war.

How long the occupation lasts depends on the scenario, and the actions of Earth's defenders. Some alien occupations last no longer than a single adventure, others can last longer, perhaps *much* longer (see the **Our Alien Overlords** for some ideas). The length of the occupation also depends on the aliens' goals, and may impose another deadline: If the invaders plan to destroy Earth, or humanity, once they have seized control, then the heroes have to act quickly!

STAGE 4: THE TURNING POINT

The turning point in the invasion is when the heroes (or their allies) uncover an important quality of the aliens or their plans that they can use to their advantage.

The clues may have been planted during the first stages: The mysterious sabotage of the world-wide communications grid is not only to disrupt human response to the invasion, but because the invaders are sensitive to specific radio wavelengths, which disrupt their own technology or nervous systems. In assuming human forms, the aliens also take on a "Human" quality that can be appealed to. Alien technology has an exploitable weakness, and so forth.

The turning point gives the heroes a potential weapon to turn against the invaders, and one they can share with others to do the same. This stage is

typical for fairly short invasions, intended to last for just an adventure or two, with the potential to end quickly. For longer invasion scenarios, the turning point may involve a long and drawn-out struggle, with no easy way of getting rid of the invaders.

STAGE 5: THE FINAL BATTLE

Whether the culmination of a long and difficult struggle or a lightning reversal after the turning point, the fight against the invaders comes down to a final battle that decides whether they will be ousted from Earth or break all resistance (at least for now) perhaps leading into an **Our Alien Overlords** scenario.

Given the challenges the heroes have faced up until this point, they should have built up their Determination Points and learned or created some useful qualities to spend them on in order to gain advantages. This is a good thing, since the final battle is usually a fight against all odds.

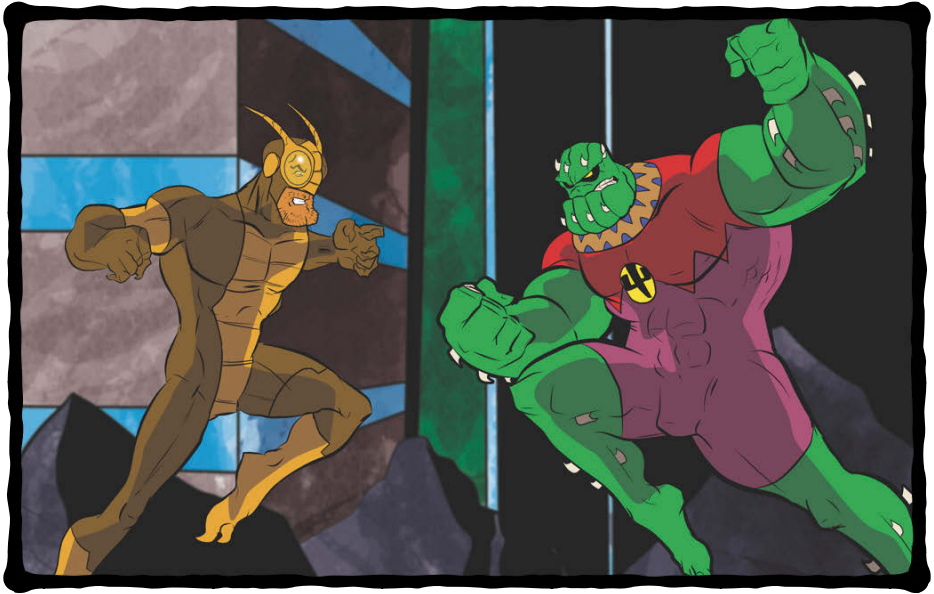
Of course, it doesn't have to be a "battle" at all. It might be a daring commando raid to seize an alien command center or leader, or to neutralize an alien power source or weapon, forcing the invaders the retreat when they have lost the upper hand. It could likewise be a desperate final negotiation with a potential ally, a debate with alien leaders, or resolving a conflict or misunderstanding between the invaders and Earth, such as proving to an invading force that humans are not what they have been led to believe.

OUR ALIEN OVERLORDS

One variant of the alien invasion scenario is "alien rebellion" where the invasion is already over and Earth *lost*. Now humanity struggles under the repressive rule of alien overlords, but a few brave heroes are willing to carry on the fight for freedom. These heroes may be the last remnants of Earth's costumed champions (or their heirs or descendants), escapees from the alien labor camps or laboratories, or aliens themselves who have developed empathy and respect for humans and now wish to help free them, even if it means betraying their own kind.

The rebels could even be Earth's former *super-villains*, now Humanity's Last Hope, since they no more want to see the Earth conquered than anyone else. The struggle can certainly make for some unusual alliances and provide opportunities for roleplaying and conflicting qualities amongst the characters.

"B" IS FOR "BATTLES"



While comic book conflicts in **ICONS** often feature heroes and villains fighting one-on-one or in small groups, stories sometimes include much larger battles of entire armies fighting against each other. You can simply use the guidelines for pyramid tests from **ICONS** to handle battles, usually making them long, competitive pyramid tests. The following system adds some detail while keeping the process of running a large battle fairly abstract and simple.

FORCES & ABILITIES

A battle is made up of two or more **forces** in conflict. A force is an abstraction of one side in a battle, and may range for an entire army to just a handful of characters, creatures, or machines, depending on its makeup.

Just like characters, forces have abilities, rated on the scale from 1-10. Unlike characters, forces have only three abilities: Strength, Prowess, and Willpower.

STRENGTH

The Strength of a force is its overall power and ability to withstand attack, which might come from sheer numbers, training, superior equipment or powers, or various other factors. The strongest force in any given battle is Supreme (level 10) with lesser forces given a proportionately lower level.

Note that this means a force's Strength is situational and relative to that of the other forces involved, rather than a set level, and can change from battle to battle, unless the GM wants to set Strength levels proportionate to every force in the setting, much as is done with characters.

PROWESS

A force's Prowess serves as its combat effectiveness, combining both tactical and strategic deployment and the ability to execute battle plans. Prowess is the acting and opposing ability in most battle tests.

WILLPOWER

Lastly, a force's Willpower measures its morale and discipline, the ability to retain cohesion and keep fighting in difficult conditions, following losses, and so forth. It is the acting ability for morale tests. In some cases, the Game Master may wish to limit a force's other abilities for tests by Willpower. See **Ability Limits** under **Tests** in **The Basics** chapter of **ICONS** for details.

Example: *Dan is setting up a battle between Metaskulk invaders and the united military forces of Earth. The Metaskulks are the Supreme force in this battle, so they have Strength 10. Comparatively, Dan decides that Earth's forces are a little more than half as powerful, giving them Strength 6. The Metaskulks have considerable combat effectiveness, but so do Earth's troops, putting the aliens at Prowess 6 and Earth at Prowess 5. Lastly, Dan sets the Willpower of the Metaskulk force at 6 and that of the Earth force at 7, since humanity is fighting for the survival of its home planet!*

BATTLE TESTS

Once battle is joined, make an opposed Prowess test for each of the forces. Success inflicts the loss of one level of Strength on the other force for each degree (moderate, major, or massive). A marginal success is a tie and inflicts no losses, nor does any degree of failure. So ten total degrees of success are required to defeat the Supreme force in the battle, while lesser forces require fewer degrees of success.

If a force is reduced to Strength 0, it is defeated and removed from the battle. If only one force remains, it is victorious. See **Losses in Battle**, following, for determining the aftermath of the conflict.

Example: *As the Metaskulk ships and troops descend on Earth's cities, battle begins. Dan and the player representing Earth's forces each roll a Prowess test: the Metaskulks roll Prowess 6 plus 4 on the die versus a difficulty of Earth's Prowess 5 plus 2 on the die (a major success for the invaders) while Earth rolls Prowess 5 plus 3 on the die versus the Metaskulks' Prowess 6 plus 2 on the die, a tie for a marginal success (and no effect for a battle test). Earth's force loses 2 levels of Strength.*

MULTIPLE FORCES

In conflicts where there are more than two forces all contending against each other, have each force make an opposed Prowess test against each of the others, reading the results like the battle tests previously. Such multiple force conflicts tend to be particularly fast and vicious, especially for the smaller or weaker forces!

Example: *The alien Zoon are opposed to the Metaskulk invasion of Earth because they claim the right to conquer this world! Zoon forces intercede and fight against the Metaskulks, but they are also working to overcome Earth's defenders and claim the planet for themselves. The Metaskulks and the Zoon do some damage to each other, but there's a good chance of them wiping out Earth's forces in the crossfire unless something is done.*

In the case of two or more allied forces uniting against another, treat the allied forces as a single force with appropriate ability levels as compared to the opposing force, there's no need to handle the allied forces or their tests separately.

Example: *An alliance of Earth's super-criminal masterminds convinces the Zoon to ally with Earth's forces to repel the Metaskulks, promising them the opportunity to turn on and betray humanity once the other invading force is dealt with and the Zoon are welcomed as allied (naturally, the villains will get first pick of places on Earth to rule as the Zoon's appointed governors). The GM assigns Strength, Prowess, and Willpower levels for the combined forces of Earth and the Zoon against the Metaskulks, creating a much more even conflict, with the allies even having a slight edge over the invaders!*

MORALE TESTS

On any page where a force suffers a loss, that force must make a morale test using Willpower: the base difficulty is 2, +1 per total level of Strength the force has lost in the battle. So a force that suffers a major loss (2 levels of Strength) makes a Willpower test against difficulty 4 (base 2 + 2 for levels of Strength loss). The next test on a loss will be at least difficulty 5 (for 1 or more levels of Strength loss), and so forth.

Failure on the morale test means the force will retreat, conceding the battle (see **Conceding**, following). Make one more battle test of Prowess on the following page: unless the force that failed the morale tests scores a massive success on the battle test, the conflict is over and the other force wins.

A massive failure on a morale test results in a rout: The battle ends immediately with the other force as victor and the losing force scatters, fleeing or surrendering as quickly as possible.

Example: *In the battle of the Metaskulk invasion force against Earth's defenders, the Metaskulks score some early victories, resulting in the loss of 2 Strength levels from Earth's force (reducing it to Strength 4). This requires a morale test, using the Willpower 7 of Earth's force against difficulty 4 (base 2 + 2 for the Strength loss). Fortunately, Earth's force succeeds with relative ease, and will fight on, despite the odds. With only Strength 4 left, chances are good the Earth's defenders will fight to the last before their morale breaks.*

CONCEDING

The commander of a force can choose to yield the concede the conflict at any time. This ends the battle in the favor of the opposing force without any further battle tests. The conceding force makes one final morale test: on a massive failure, there's a rout (just as with a massive failure on any other morale test). Otherwise, the force surrenders in an orderly fashion.

If part of an allied force chooses to concede or otherwise quit the field of battle, then the force loses the ability levels granted by that ally, reverting to the levels of the remaining force(s).

QUALITIES IN BATTLE

Unlike characters, forces do not generally have qualities of their own, although the GM may choose to set up some qualities associated with the battlefield or situation when and where a battle takes place. Characters can also create qualities associated with a force or battle through their actions (see **Characters in Battle**, following).

During battle, a force can use its panel on a page for a maneuver to activate a quality, rather than making a Prowess test. This means the difficulty for the opposing force's Prowess test is just the maneuvering force's Prowess level, without a die roll.

Forces can also use tactics to activate qualities, creating trouble for themselves by doing so. This usually reflects things like a more aggressive approach that offers improved effort on the Prowess test to attack in exchange for increased difficulty on the test to defend.

CHARACTERS IN BATTLE

Heroes and villains can also take action during a battle, looking to make a difference in its outcome. This assumes characters are taking key roles in the battle, serving as rallying points or a vanguard to shift the flow of combat in their side's favor.

This is a maneuver, as described under **Learning & Creating Qualities in The Basics** section of **ICONS**. The player controlling the maneuvering character chooses an appropriate ability, depending on the character's described action, and makes a test, typically opposed by one of the enemy force's abilities (Prowess and Willpower being most common). Success creates the desired quality, and higher degrees of success allow the character's force to activate that quality a number of times for free to provide advantage or create trouble for the opposing side.

Example: *Aiding in battle against the undead minions of the God of Death, Miss Tikal uses her Magic to mire the enemy forces and bog them down. The GM decides this maneuver is a test of her Magic against the enemy force's Prowess, and Miss Tikal's player gets a moderate success. This allows her to create the quality "Mired" and activate it once for free to impose increased difficulty on the undead's next Prowess test in the battle, increasing the chances of her own force to overcome their superior numbers.*

Intervening in battle in this fashion is not without risk: A failed maneuver test means the character suffers some Stamina loss due to damage, stress, or other battle conditions: 2 points of Stamina per degree of failure. Characters brought to 0 Stamina in this way are incapacitated, as usual. Game Masters can treat this much like a Costly pyramid test with the potential Stamina loss as the cost for intervening in a battle (see **Pyramid Tests** in **The Basics** chapter of **ICONS**).

LOSSES IN BATTLE

Once a battle is over, you may want to assess losses to each force involved. In some **ICONS** games, this isn't important: losses happen "off-panel" and those of the enemy force aren't that important, particularly if the force is made up of non-humans, or non-living soldiers (like robots, undead, or animated plant creatures, for examples).

If you do want to assess losses, have the force make a test using its unmodified Strength against the difficulty of its unmodified Strength; each degree of success restores one lost level of Strength, while failure or marginal success have no effect. The remaining lost levels of Strength are the percentage of the force lost as casualties (killed or destroyed). For the Supreme force, each lost level is equal to 10% of the force. For lesser forces, determine the percentage each level of strength is of the force's total; a Strength 6 force, for example, loses one-sixth of its total as casualties per lost level of Strength. A force reduced to Strength 0 that does not recover any levels of Strength in the aftermath is completely wiped out (100% casualties).

COLLATERAL DAMAGE

Loss of life amongst the participants is not the only tragic result of battle. There's also the considerable collateral damage battles may cause, both in terms of bystanders and civilians and destruction of property and infrastructure.

Game Masters who want to take this damage into consideration should make an unmodified test (d6 effort vs. d6 difficulty), adding the Strength levels lost by the victor (if any) to the difficulty and reading the result as an indication of the amount of collateral damage done. A massive success on the test means little or no collateral damage while a massive failure means the area surrounding the battle is practically leveled, with considerable loss of life.

Combatants who make a special effort to limit collateral damage grant improved efforts (a +2 bonus) on the test to determine it, at a cost of suffering some trouble of the Game Master's choice during the battle due to their greater caution.

"C" IS FOR "COSMIC"



“Cosmic” is both a sub-genre and a power level in superhero comics: adventures occurring out in the vastness of space involving other planets and stars, alien civilizations, and vast, powerful entities. Cosmic characters tend to be quite powerful, operating at a larger scale than heroes concerned with just a single city, nation, or even planet.

COSMIC SCALING

“Cosmic” is quite often a matter of scale: cosmic adventures occur out amongst the stars, involving tremendous distances, and cosmic characters may have abilities that go beyond even the top levels of the scale given in **ICONS**.

COSMIC ABILITIES

“Cosmic” is typically the same as “off the scale” in most **ICONS** games, so vast and powerful it’s not really worth measuring. In settings and games where it is quantifiable, there are basically two approaches to handling cosmic levels of ability:

Extend the Scale: The 1-10 scale is largely for simplicity, and there's nothing saying that it can't be extended past 10 almost indefinitely, although there is a point beyond where measuring numerically doesn't really matter any more. For a cosmic game, you can extend the **ICONS** scale past level 10 as far as you want. Keep in mind that the best effort any character will achieve without advantage is (ability + 6), so a difference of 5 levels is hugely significant.

The scale can even become more "granular" at the cosmic levels, not needing to include every intermediate value, but leapfrogging over some of them to add on just a few truly powerful levels, such as: **Vast** (12), **Cosmic** (15), and **Godlike** (20). Cosmic level (15) is such that even a Supreme character will only achieve that level with a massive outcome, and Godlike is as far beyond Supreme on the scale as Supreme is beyond Weak!

Cosmic level abilities require some extension of the **Benchmarks Table** from **ICONS**, as follows. The "virtually anywhere" distance of level 10 becomes "Stellar" (that is, "virtually anywhere within the same star system").

Level	Weight	Material	Distance	Speed
Vast (12)	Asteriod	Super-alloy	Interstellar	Warp speed
Cosmic (15)	Planet	Dwarf star	Intergalactic	Trans-warp
Godlike (20)	Star	Invincible	Anywhere	Limitless

Recalibrate the Scale: Instead of changing the scale, you can instead change what the scale *means*. In essence, you shift the descriptions on the **Benchmarks Table** given in **The Basics** chapter of **ICONS**, pushing the lower levels down "off the scale" to make room for even higher levels above.

Example: *Let's say you decide that Incredible level is going to be the new "average" on your scale, shifting everything down by four levels. This makes Great (the "human maximum") the cosmic equivalent of Poor, and Supreme the cosmic equivalent of Incredible. Now you have room to add four more levels (7-10) at the top of the scale with benchmarks higher than those already given.*

This approach is best suited to series where human-scale abilities are largely irrelevant and mere mortals are no more of a concern to cosmic beings than the ants and other insignificant creatures that are normally off the low end of the scale in **ICONS**. This approach keeps the 1-10 scale for simplicity.

DESTROYING A PLANET

So, at cosmic scale, what does it take to destroy a planet? Generally, the GM can treat this kind of thing as off the scale much of the time, but for cosmic beings, the Cosmic and Godlike levels, pretty much anything 15 and over, is sufficient. Once you have the power to push a planet around, after all, destroying it is relatively easy: You just shove it out of orbit or push one planetary body into another.

If you want to make things just a *bit* more difficult, you can make destroying a planet a pyramid test with a base difficulty of 15. Thus a Cosmic (15) level of ability can accomplish the task with a single massive success or several lesser degrees of success, while Godlike (20) power can achieve the necessary massive success pretty much automatically. Apply the various pyramid test modifiers from **The Basics** chapter of **ICONS** to adjust the process as you see fit.

The same concept can apply to destroying moons, suns, or other massive astronomical bodies, including world-sized space stations or vessels.

COSMIC CHARACTERS

In creating characters for a cosmic **ICONS** game, the Game Master may want to take a few capabilities into consideration:

Life Support: Much of the action in a cosmic series takes place in the void of space or hostile planetary environments, and characters need the ability to survive in such conditions. Game Masters may wish to assign a minimum level of the Life Support power to all characters: Life Support 4 is needed to ignore the airless cold vacuum and radiation of space. Those characters who receive Life Support as a regular power can add the free bonus levels to their rolled level, topping out at 10, as usual. The “free” Life Support levels may be an innate power, derived from a device, or some mix of the two, depending on the characters and the series.

Anyone lacking such Life Support suffers 1 Stamina damage per page of exposure to space for each one missing (4 damage per page for all 4). Damage Resistance does not protect against this damage. Upon reaching 0 Stamina, the character begins losing Strength, just like a failed test against a killing outcome.

Movement: To cover the kind of interstellar (or even intergalactic) distances involved in a cosmic setting, characters need some kind of faster-than-light movement, either the Spaceflight extra of Flight or Supreme (or higher

level) Teleportation, perhaps using “star-gates” or “hyperspace.” As with Life Support, this power might be an innate capability or come from a device, particularly a vehicle. A shared space vehicle is a common resource for a team of cosmic characters, possibly also serving as their mobile headquarters and a team quality (see **Team Qualities** in **The Basics** chapter of **ICONS**).

Communication: Lastly, there is the question of communicating across interplanetary or interstellar distances. This isn’t as essential a capability as the first two and, in fact, may not be available in some cosmic settings. A limit on communication tends to isolate characters in different parts of space, making it more difficult to coordinate and pass on information, while freely available universal communication means characters can call for help or pass information on to each other from almost anywhere.

Communication is generally handled by the Super-Senses power, and the GM may wish to require a level of Extended for truly universal (interstellar or intergalactic) communication. Powerful telepaths may also bridge the distance between planets and stars; **ICONS** is deliberately vague about the maximum range of things like telepathic links for exactly that reason.

Any such bonus powers don’t count against starting Determination level for a cosmic series, since all characters are assumed to have them.

Power Levels: Given the greater power of cosmic characters, you may wish to increase the results of the **Level Determination** table by 2, so the minimum rolled level is 3 and the maximum is 10. The maximum adjusted level will depend on how you’ve adjusted the scale (see **Cosmic Abilities**, previously). This adjustment to level determination applies to powers as well as attributes. For the point-based character option, consider increasing the number of points to at least 60 for cosmic characters.

COSMIC CHALLENGES

Everything in the cosmic genre is *big*: rather than protecting a city, the heroes are out to protect the galaxy or the entire universe. Likewise, rather than saving the world from conquest or destruction, they save the cosmos on a semi-regular basis. When coming up with stories, themes, and antagonists for cosmic **ICONS** adventures think BIG!

You can use the same guidelines from **Destroying a Planet** to save one, and perform similar feats of cosmic awesomeness. Essentially, a difficulty 15 pyramid test (that is, a massive success on a difficulty 15 test) should be enough to accomplish pretty much anything with higher difficulties reserved for truly Godlike accomplishments. Saving the entire cosmos (or omniverse), for example, might be a difficulty 16–20 pyramid test for Godlike characters.

ACTION IN SPACE

Slam outcomes in the microgravity of space result in the slammed target moving continuously in a straight line until impacting an obstacle of some sort. The GM may wish to give a slammed hero the opportunity for a Coordination test to grab onto something before being thrown off into empty space unless there is someone else able to catch them! Targets in microgravity can potentially be slammed regardless of comparative Strength and damage levels.

POWERS IN SPACE

The primary issue with powers in space is the lack of an atmospheric medium or gravity. So, for example, Fire Control is largely ineffective without oxygen to feed flames. Likewise Sonic Control—and other powers dependent on sound waves—cannot carry through airless vacuum.

Although objects in space have little or no weight, they do still have mass, which affects powers used to lift or move things. So a hero with Earth Control can still move the same mass of space rock as ordinary earthbound stone, and Telekinesis still affects the same mass whether on Earth or in space.

As with the aquatic environment, the GM can treat the inability to use some powers in space as a temporary challenge, tagging it and awarding the hero's player Determination. The player, in turn, can use that Determination for some creative stunts to get around the limitations of operating in space.

COSMIC DISTANCES

Space is *big* and, once you leave the confines of the surface of a planet, distances become a whole different story. Game Masters may want to modify abstract and benchmark distances when dealing with events happening Out There.

Generally speaking, extended distance attacks should be useful in things like space dogfights and similar battles, even if the actual distance between targets is much more than it would be on the surface of a planet. Visual distance can be quite far, without a horizon to block line of sight or atmospheric distortion to limit it. The GM should decide if, for example, being able to see a distant star (that is actually many light years away) counts as “visual”.

Abilities reaching beyond visual distance, or at the “nearly anywhere” benchmark of level 10 should be able to extend universally, unless the GM wants to refine the benchmarks to account for cosmic level abilities, as described previously.

COSMIC ENTITIES

Superhero universes are full of powerful cosmic entities, embodiments of fundamental forces or ancient alien beings so far in advance of humanity that they are to us what we are to single-celled organisms in terms of their power and knowledge. From time to time, these entities take an interest in Earth and its inhabitants, or their conflicts spill over to affect humanity or involve Earth's defenders, its superheroes.

Whether or not cosmic entities are off the scale (having no capabilities measurable at those levels) or possess cosmic levels of ability depends on how the series handles them (see **Cosmic Abilities**, previously). Since cosmic levels of ability are somewhat compressed, making all such entities seem the same (all having Godlike abilities, for example) an important area to differentiate cosmic entities tends to be their qualities, which also provide heroes with ways to interact with them, by activating the entity's qualities to gain advantage or to create trouble for the entity, such as compelling a particular action (or using a compel to prevent or delay an action, like say destroying the Earth).

WHY DOES EARTH MATTER?

One thing to consider in the vast scale of a cosmic setting or series is, "does Earth matter and, if so, why?"

The simple answer is that Earth is just another planet with life and no more or less important than any other in the grand scheme of things. This particularly suits series that do not focus on life on Earth and take place largely away from it, out amongst the stars.

If Earth is important to the series, it should generally be important on the cosmic stage as well. Usually, the answer is that Earth is unique in some fashion. It might be that humans have considerable potential, making the future of our planet vital to the larger cosmos, or Earth could be strategically located near an important star-gate or hyperspace bypass, a potential staging area in some alien war. Perhaps cosmic entities have interfered with Earth in the past and it remains important to them for some inscrutable reason, but sufficient to draw the attention of other civilizations.

In a far-future or alternate history setting, Earth might be the center or capitol of an interstellar civilization in its own right.

"D" IS FOR "DEMONS"



...and devils, and other dark denizens of the daemonic dimensions.

Demons of various sorts show up in superhero settings as antagonists, minions of sorcerers, scheming master-villains, and even occasional heroes, working—if not “on the side of the angels”—at least against the bad guys for the benefit of humanity.

DEMONIC DIMENSIONS

Where do demons come from? In most superhero universes (multiverses, really) there are myriad other dimensions. Some are parallel worlds while others are realms of imagination—or nightmare. Demonic or “hell” dimensions are strikingly similar to mythic and religious hells from human religion. Did these hellish realms inspire earthly prophets and religious teachers or did their faiths create infernal other-worlds for the punishment

of the damned? No one can say for sure, and the demons themselves are infamous liars.

Demonic dimensions tend to appear like classic mythic “underworld” places: vast cave and tunnel complexes, often filled with lakes or rivers of fire or molten lava, which may or may not contain (or be made up of) tormented souls. Their tunnels and passages are maze-like and confusing places where one could wander, lost forever, without guidance. Some feature specific strongholds of archfiends and other infernal powers, who have shaped the realm to suit them, gathering their followers and underlings around them.

Demons get to Earth from their home dimensions either via the Dimensional Travel power or by being summoned by mortals (see **Demon Summoning**). At the GM’s discretion, demonic dimensions might have a higher initial difficulty to visit than the base 3 difficulty given for the Dimensional Travel power in **ICONS**.

DEMONIC CULTS

Demons—particularly powerful ones—tend to attract cults of mortal followers, usually believing service to a demon will be rewarded with earthly power and the fulfillment of their desires. These cults work to further the demon’s schemes on the earthly plane, usually arranging for some type of summoning ritual, allowing the demon to manifest there, or acquiring sacrifices or arcane offerings to enhance their master’s power.

The **Cultist** from the **Stock Characters** section of **ICONS** covers most rank-and-file members of demonic cults. Cult-leaders may simply be cultists with higher abilities, more levels in Occult and related specialties, possibly even levels in the Magic power, or full-fledged villains in their own right.

DEMONIC QUALITIES

The primary quality for demons is simply “Demon” or “Demonic” or related qualities like Infernal, Hellish, Devilish, and so forth. These can represent all of the things associated with demons, from their otherworldly and infernal nature to their occult power and their vulnerabilities involving holy items, hallowed ground, and potentially substances like silver or cold iron. It can also include (understandably) prejudiced reactions or fears, and trouble like demon-hunters who are not interested in the nuances of Creatures of the Pit who are looking to do good, and think the only “good” demon is a banished or destroyed one.

A related quality describes the demonic tendency towards evil, which can be a part of the general Demon quality, or something separate. This can include things like demonic possession, where a character has a “Possessed” quality to reflect the presence of a demon influencing the character’s actions. The possessing demon can grant certain advantages, but also creates all kinds of trouble, including compulsions and strange disabilities (like vulnerabilities traditionally associated with demons).

THE LEGIONS OF HELL

Demons come in many forms. The following are some of the major types that show up in the superhero comics, for use in your own **ICONS** games.

IMP

PROWESS	COORD.	STRENGTH	INTELLECT	AWARENESS	WILLPOWER	STAMINA
3	4	2	3	3	4	6

Specialties: Occult

Powers: Damage Resistance 2, Extra Body Parts (Tail 3, Wings 3), Life Support 10, Teleport 3

Qualities: Demonic Imp, Devilish Cunning, Easily Underestimated

Among the lowest castes of demons, imps tend to be small, vicious creatures sent to serve demon summoners. Still, imps are cunning and mortals underestimate them at their peril.

TEMPTER

PROWESS	COORD.	STRENGTH	INTELLECT	AWARENESS	WILLPOWER	STAMINA
3	3	4	3	5	5	9

Specialties: Performance (Acting) Master, Psychology Expert

Powers: Emotion Control 6, Energy Drain 4, Life Support 10, Transformation (Humanoids) 5

Qualities: Demonic Tempter, Let’s Make a Deal, Not What It Appears

Tempers exist to prey on human weakness and desire and bargain for things ranging from seemingly innocuous favors to ownership of souls, which they can turn over to their infernal masters to curry favor.

WARRIOR

PROWESS	COORD.	STRENGTH	INTELLECT	AWARENESS	WILLPOWER	STAMINA
5	3	4	2	3	4	8

Specialties: Blades, Bludgeons, Throwing

Powers: Damage Resistance 3, Life Support 10, Strike 5 (demonic weapon)

Qualities: Fights Like the Devil, Infernal Soldier

Warrior demons are the mainline shock-troops and soldiers of the infernal realms, the prime constituents of its legions.

BRUTE

PROWESS	COORD.	STRENGTH	INTELLECT	AWARENESS	WILLPOWER	STAMINA
4	3	6	1	2	3	9

Specialties: Wrestling

Powers: Damage Resistance 5, Life Support 10

Qualities: Hulking Demon, Savage Brute

Brute demons are just what their name implies: sheer muscle, used to bully and push around less powerful creatures (including other demons) and to do physical grunt-work. Brute demons are known to not be very bright, although some powerful brutes have been around long enough to develop their cunning and intellect.

POSSESSOR

PROWESS	COORD.	STRENGTH	INTELLECT	AWARENESS	WILLPOWER	STAMINA
0	0	0	3	4	5	5

Specialties: Occult Expert, Psychology Expert

Powers: Ghost Form 7, Life Support 10, Mind Control 7 (Merge)

Qualities: Demonic Presence, Unseen Influence

The opposite of the Brute, a Possessor demon has no physical presence at all. Instead, it is a malign force that takes over the body of a host, ideally an innocent human being, granting that host certain demonic powers and

using their body to cause evil in the world. Getting rid of a Possessor demon without harming the host usually requires some type of exorcism, casting out the evil spirit while (hopefully) leaving the host unharmed.

MONSTER

“Monster” is a catch-all for the vast array of nightmare creatures spat out by the bottomless pits of the hell-dimensions, ranging from scorpion-men to hell-hounds, or tentacled things that should never see the light of day.

You can easily create some demonic monsters by applying powers like Damage Resistance and Life Support along with demonic qualities to some of the creatures from the **ICONS** book, particularly predatory animals.

ARCHFIEND

Finally, there are the archfiends, the self-proclaimed Rulers of the Pit, those demons who have risen to power over their kind, often forging vast dominions in their own dimensions, with legions of servants and underlings.

DEMON SUMMONING

Characters with the Servant power from **ICONS** may be able to summon demons, particularly with the Variable extra from **Great Power**, allowing Summon to call up a wide range of demons. A few “boss” level demons have the Servant power themselves, calling upon their demonic underlings to do their bidding.

Those lacking Servant (or the ability to mimic it using another power like Magic) have to make do with demon summoning rituals. An Occult Master can perform a summoning ritual as a stunt using the guidelines from Icons: a summoner with advantage can duplicate the effects of the Servant power at a chosen level. Typically, the summoner gains advantage through a maneuver, performing a ritual and making a test of Willpower (plus Occult specialty) against the difficulty of the desired Servant level.

Demon summoning is dangerous enough for Occult Masters; it is especially foolhardy for those with a lesser level of the specialty, or no Occult specialty at all. Normally, they would be incapable of performing a stunt to gain the Servant power. Unfortunately for mortals, and fortunately for demons, would-be summoners can choose (knowingly or not) to open themselves up to the trouble of “demonic bargaining.” In essence, they accept the trouble of drawing a demon to them, hoping they can come out ahead in the end. Most don’t.

HELLFIRE CONTROL

You can summon and control hellfire, also known as soul-fire or demon-fire, a fire-like mystical energy capable of causing excruciating pain to living beings through direct stimulation of a person's life force (or soul). Hellfire does not physically burn in the sense that true fire does, but can be perceived by its target as heat if its wielder wills it.

You can make a hellfire blasting or shooting attack (choose one when you acquire this power); make a Coordination versus Coordination test for the attack and use your power level for the damage, ignoring Damage Resistance, but not Mental or Magical Resistance. As an extra, you can choose between a blasting or shooting attack each time you attack with your hellfire.

For random character creation purposes, treat Hellfire Control as a form of Energy Control (see the **Powers** chapter of **ICONS**).

EXTRAS

Standard: Reversible, Slow Recovery

Powers: Affliction, Aura, Blast, Dazzle, Dimensional Travel, Emotion Control (fear and hate only), Energy Drain, Servant (summoned demons)

Hellfire Weapons: You can form close combat weapons out of hellfire, giving you a slashing Strike attack at your power level.

Hellride: You can form a mount or vehicle of hellfire to carry you, giving you Flight or Super-Speed at your Hellfire level (choose one).

Tormenting Stare: At a personal distance, you can glare into a target's eyes. Roll a test of your Hellfire Control vs. the target's Willpower, reading the results like a Stunning attack.

LIMITS

Standard: Blocked, Performance (Ritual), Tiring, Uncontrolled

"E" IS FOR "ENVIRONMENTS"



Superheroic adventure doesn't just happen on (and above) the city streets, heroes visit all sorts of exotic locales in the pursuit of their calling, and **ICONS** Game Masters should be prepared to take their heroes from the bottom of the ocean or the depths of the Earth into the vastness of space and beyond. This section looks at some different environments for **ICONS** adventures and how to handle them in the game.

AQUATIC

Superheroes end up beneath the waves for any number of reasons: sunken civilizations, pursuing aquatic creatures, exploring the ocean depths, or perhaps the underwater world is already their home! Whatever the case, if

you take the plunge with your **ICONS** game and go underwater, there are some things to consider.

DROWNING

First and foremost: how are the heroes going to breathe? As detailed under **Exhaustion** in the **Taking Action** chapter of **ICONS**, characters holding their breath must make an escalating Strength test each page to avoid unconsciousness and drowning: the difficulty increases by +1 per page until the character can take a breath. Even the strongest heroes can only last so long. Obviously, those with the Aquatic power have no concerns, but the rest need some way to keep breathing.

They may have access to underwater equipment like SCUBA gear or miniature “rebreathers” that can stave off the need for Strength tests for a short while (anywhere from 10 to 20 pages). You can provide the heroes with this gear as part of the plot, or they might spend Determination to retcon having it around. Similarly, a hero might be able to use Gadgets or a stunt of a specialty like Occult or Technology to whip up some underwater breathing gear for the team, from something SCUBA-like to personal life-support fields or even magical spells or amulets of water-breathing!

UNDERWATER MOVEMENT

By definition, movement underwater requires either swimming or some other means of propulsion. See **Swimming** under **Movement** in the **Taking Action** chapter of **ICONS**.

Aquatic characters move at a speed based on their level, as noted for the power. Treat Flight as an equivalent level of Aquatic while underwater—slowed by the greater resistance—provided the power works in that medium at all. (See **Powers Underwater**, following, for some possible adjustments.)

Most other movement powers either work unchanged underwater (Dimensional Travel, Teleportation) or don’t work at all (Leaping, Swinging). Also note that any level of the Density power gives the character negative buoyancy; while the power is active, the hero literally sinks like a stone!

UNDERWATER CONFLICT

The Underwater Combat specialty increases the character’s combat tests underwater. Aquatic characters also benefit from an increase in Coordination and Awareness while submerged, giving them an added advantage in combat (along with not having to worry about breathing, of course).

Underwater targets have less bracing, and can be slammed regardless of comparative Strength and damage levels.

POWERS UNDERWATER

The underwater environment affects how some powers work.

Powers relying on combustion, like Fire Control or fiery Blasts, do not work underwater. Air Control only works if the character has the ability to generate air. Otherwise, there's very little to control. Water Control, conversely, works much like Air Control, commanding the medium all around the characters, even creating strong currents in place of "winds." Plant Control works on kelp, seaweed, and other underwater plants, but may be limited away from them in open water.

Light-based powers tend to be limited due to the way water refracts light. Laser Blasts tend to scatter, as do light-based Blinding attacks. On the other hand, sound carries more easily through water than air, so sonic attacks may affect all targets in a close distance, much like an explosive blast. The same is true for electricity, but the difficulty is such attacks can be difficult to limit to just one target!

As previously mentioned, some movement powers are reduced in effect underwater. Flight and Super-Speed provide, at best, the equivalent speed of the same level of the Aquatic power (half power level) due to the denser medium. Some forms of Flight, like wings or rockets, won't work at all due to the lack of air.

Most other powers work normally underwater, so long as they are not dependent on air as a medium or upon something else not found in the aquatic environment. For example, Animal Control limited to avians is of little use, as is Interface, unless the heroes happen to be someplace (like a sea-base or submarine) with underwater electronics.

In situations where a character is a real "fish out of water" in the aquatic realm (so to speak), the GM can treat the trouble of powers working poorly or not at all as a challenge or disability, awarding the player Determination. So, for example, when the heroes venture beneath the waves to negotiate with the Lost Kingdom of Atlantis and come under attack, and the flame-controlling hero's powers prove useless, you can award his player some Determination.

The good part about this is players can turn the added Determination towards stunts intended to compensate for the challenges of the environment. Perhaps the flame-controlling hero can learn to superheat the water, for example, or turn to other strengths. Encourage clever ideas and innovation from the players, as always.

HEAT & COLD

Heroes can end up in places from burning deserts to arctic blizzards, or alien environments just as extreme (or more so). Normal variations of temperature are of little concern, but if characters spend a considerable amount of time in a particularly hot or cold environment without proper care or protection, they may have problems. Treat exposure as exhaustion (see **Exhaustion** in the **Taking Action** chapter of **ICONS**) with Strength tests to avoid collapse. A complete collapse due to exposure results in the character losing Strength levels like a killing outcome, unless treatment is received immediately.

Temperature extremes can create trouble for characters in other ways as well. Some may be especially vulnerable or sensitive to heat or cold, running into challenges or disabilities (and earning Determination for them). An ice- or cold-base hero, for example, might suffer greatly from heat exposure. On the other hand, such a character might have built-in “air conditioning” and actually be less affected! Conversely, a plant-based hero may have a difficult time when it’s below freezing and all of the plants are withering!

Similarly, temperature extremes can cause trouble for powers and devices, which may be less effective—or not work at all—when it is especially hot or cold. Using powers to create ice or water in a hot, arid, environment, for example, may result in a reduced effect, or none at all, while extreme cold might freeze up mechanisms from vehicles to power armor.

UNDERGROUND

There is a lot going on beneath the surface of most superheroic worlds: lost civilizations, vast cave and tunnel complexes inhabited by mole people, dwarves, or magma men (or all of these), passages to the “center of the Earth” where dinosaurs still roam, and so forth. Here are some guidelines for when adventures take the heroes beneath the earth.

SURVIVAL

Assuming the heroes find sufficient passages and tunnels to take them underground, their primary concerns are having sufficient air to breathe and the potential for collapses and cave-ins.

Running out of air results in suffocation similar to drowning (see **Aquatic**, previously): escalating Strength tests to avoid unconsciousness and loss of Strength. This only occurs once the heroes are actually out of oxygen; more often, the threat in an underground adventure is being trapped and having

to escape before the available air is exhausted, potentially handled as a timed pyramid test, possibly balanced or collapsing, if conditions are precarious.

Underground tunnels and caverns are often unstable, particularly with the kind of force superheroes are known to exert. Most of the materials around them are Strength 6. Any attack which misses its target within range of a nearby surface may trigger a collapse: total the levels of damage striking the surrounding area, subtract the material's Strength, and roll a die, if the result on the die is less than the value, there is a cave-in. If not, nothing happens, but damage to the area continues to accumulate.

Example: *Volcano and some allies have cornered some of Gorn's Molten Men in a cavern and a fight breaks out. Volcano carefully blocks a Molten Man's attack, but Electric Judy dodges out the way and the Molten Man hits the cave wall. He has Strength 8, inflicting 2 points of damage above the wall's Strength 6. The GM rolls a die and gets a 3. That's not less than the 2 total damage, so while the wall cracks a bit, nothing happens. Then Thruster blasts at one of the Molten Men... "Thruster, no!" Volcano calls out, too late. Thruster misses. His level 8 Blast of Tau energy strikes the cave wall for another 2 damage. The GM rolls the die again... and gets a 2. The cavern shakes and collapses.*

A collapse does level 3 damage to all characters in the area plus an amount equal to the accumulated damage that caused the collapse (or simply 3 plus the roll of one die, if you prefer). Characters are pinned under debris and must have a Strength at least equal to the damage level to pull free. Otherwise they suffer the same damage each page until they reach Stamina 0 and begin losing Strength. Other characters can help a pinned character get free (see **Combined Effort** in **The Basics** chapter of **ICONS**).

Example: *Thruster's blast collapses the cavern. The collapse does level 7 damage to everyone there (3, plus the accumulated 4 levels of damage) and they need Strength 7 or better to pull themselves free from the rubble to avoid taking another 7 damage each page thereafter.*

PERCEPTION

Unless there are light sources in place (artificial lightning, luminescent moss or fungi, glowing crystal deposits, etc.) characters will not be able to see much, if at all, deep underground. All actions requiring vision have +2 difficulty and the GM may call for Coordination or Awareness tests to avoid blundering into obstacles or hazards.

MOVEMENT

Movement underground is limited to available tunnels or passages unless characters have powers like Burrowing or Phasing (or can stunt them off of their existing powers). In some situations, the GM may call for tests of Coordination to slip through tight passages or narrow openings, with failure meaning the character gets stuck and must make another test to get free. High levels of Strength can potentially widen narrow spaces by force, but at the risk of causing a cave-in or collapse (see **Survival**, previously).

POWERS

Most powers are unaffected by the underground environment, although some Elemental Control powers—Water and Weather, for example—may be less effective when their user is surrounded by tons of earth and stone. Earth Control, on the other hand, has plenty to work with!

Heroes mainly need to be concerned about the potential of causing collapses with their damaging powers (see **Survival**, previously) and some other side effects, like flame-based powers burning up the available oxygen in an area. The GM should feel free to consider heroes seriously hindered by the environment facing a challenge and award their players Determination.

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITIES

Environments can have or become qualities unto themselves, which players and the GM can then activate in play for advantage or to create trouble in various ways.

For example, a burning buildings might have an “On Fire” or “Inferno” quality, perhaps in addition to having a fire damage level assigned to it. The fire can cause trouble ranging from sudden collapses of the structure to choking smoke and blinding haze or even inhibiting or affecting some of the heroes’ capabilities while at the same time characters may be able to use the environment to give them an advantage: weakening a structure they need to break, for example (“Since the door is *on fire*, I get *improved effort* in trying to break it down.”)

Some powers—such as Weather Control—could even create or change environmental qualities in play as maneuvers.

"F" IS FOR "FEAR"



Heroes and villains alike in the comics use fear as a weapon, heroes striking at the heart of a “superstitious cowardly lot” and villains obsessed with the power that sheer terror gives them over people. Heroes face fearsome challenges and find the courage to overcome them. Sometimes they encounter monsters out of myth and legend, or sanity-blasting horrors from beyond reality. What are the ways of incorporating an element of fear into your **ICONS** games?

FEARSOME QUALITIES

First and foremost, fear—like other character emotions—arises out of different qualities in **ICONS**. Fear is one aspect of activating a particular quality, and has as wide a range as the qualities themselves.

Some qualities are obviously associated with fears: A character with a “Claustrophobic” quality, or any “-phobic” quality, is clearly afraid of something. The GM can activate that quality to cause trouble related to the character’s fear, while sometimes the character may draw strength and Determination from overcoming that fear, an opportunity for the player to activate the quality for advantage.

Other qualities may have the seeds of fear within them. Relationship qualities like “In Love with X,” “Sense of Duty/Responsibility” or a particular supporting character listed as a quality can lead to fears of loss, break-up, or harm befalling that character. Similarly, a threat or enemy associated with a quality can be fearsome, perhaps triggering deep-seated fears or trauma.

Even seemingly unrelated qualities can be associated with fears. A “Patriotic” hero might fear for the future of the nation or fear becoming a political pawn. An “Industrialist Inventor” could fear the misguided applications of technology, or that inventions are not enough to help people. Characters with particular codes of ethics or inspirations may fear failing to live up to them, and so forth. Almost any quality can contain an element of fear, if you look at it in the right way.

Game Masters commonly activate qualities for fear to create trouble. The most common is a compulsion: fear causing someone to act irrationally or against their best interests, but it can just as easily be a moment of hesitation (lost panel) or a weakening of resolve (increased difficulty). Fear can be paralyzing or even undermine confidence so severely that a character is unable to function normally (disability). Fear-based challenges tend to be a consequence of actions taken out of fear, although it can also represent bringing a fearsome element into play, such as having a feared opponent unexpectedly show up, or a phobia “coincidentally” occur.

Note, as always, that *players* can also activate their qualities to cause this kind of trouble for their characters, if they want to bring a character’s fears to light and earn some Determination Points for doing so. Bringing out a hero’s fears in play can be an excellent spotlight for learning about the character, as well as a great roleplaying opportunity.

INTIMIDATION

Heroes and villains often use force, and threats, to cow their opponents into cooperating: heroes may rely on fear both to keep criminals off-balance and to interrogate them for information.

In **ICONS** terms, intimidation is a maneuver (see **Maneuvering** in the **Taking Action** chapter), usually relying on Willpower: as your action, roll a test of Willpower against the target's Willpower. You're looking to create an "Intimidated" quality for your target; marginal success means you create it and can then activate it normally. A moderate or better success means you also get to activate the quality for free (once per degree of success above marginal).

Example: *Hangman, about to confront Speed Demon, wants to use fear and intimidation to take away the advantage of the villain's super-speed. So he looms up, his shadow falling across the villain, and dropping the loop of the Noose of Justice so it is clearly visible. "Going somewhere...?" Hangman asks in an ominous tone.*

Hangman's player rolls a 4 on the die, adding the hero's Good (5) Willpower for an effort of 9. The GM rolls a 3 for Speed Demon, adding his Fair (4) Willpower for a difficulty of 7. Hangman's player also spends a point of Determination to activate the hero's "Grim Guardian of the Gallows" quality, applying improved effort to the test (increasing Hangman's effort from 9 to 11). That is a major success (11 effort - 7 difficulty), garnering Hangman two free activations of the "Intimidated" quality he places on Speed Demon, who gulps in fear at the hero's appearance. He uses the first to impose the lost panel trouble on the villain as Speed Demon hesitates and Hangman leaps into action!

Note that, rather than imposing a quality on the target, characters can use an intimidation maneuver to give themselves a temporary quality of being more fearsome or intimidating. This is useful for those who do not have such qualities regularly. It's also a way to use abilities other than Willpower to lend the character the necessary quality—any ability can be intimidating if the character shows it off in the right way.

For example, All-American Girl isn't particularly intimidating, but when she gets really mad ... watch out! Her player could use a maneuver to give All-American Girl the temporary "You Don't Want to Make Me Angry" quality, and potentially gain one or more free activations of it. Of course, the drawback of gaining such a quality is that others might be able to activate it as well, such as a villain taking advantage of All-American Girl losing her temper to cause trouble for America's Sweetheart.

FEAR AND MADNESS

Fear can go beyond mere intimidation or a sudden fright into trauma that threatens the victim's sanity, causing lasting harm.

Growing influence of madness and the crumbling of a character's sanity can be handled through a pyramid test (see **The Basics** chapter of **ICONS**). The following modifier may apply:

- **Collapsing** if the pyramid loses successes over time, meaning the character recovers from the shock and fright and eliminates some of the accumulated successes. This reflects the hazards of a rapid succession of traumatic shocks versus time to recover.
- **Escalating** if, the more the victim experiences, the worse it becomes, and the more difficult it is to resist further trauma.
- **Fragile** if outside aid or treatment can remove accumulated successes. This can be anything from therapy and psychic assistance to just having a chance to receive comfort from a friend.
- **Long** or **Wide** to draw out the process, requiring more degrees of success to the character's mind to truly crumble under the weight of all of the fear and horror.

Like short-term fear, madness imposes qualities on the victim, ranging from specific phobias or behaviors to a general "Madness" or "Insanity" quality. At moderate and major degrees, the madness qualities are short-lived, lasting for only pages or minutes, but a massive degree of madness makes the quality essentially permanent unless the character receives some kind of treatment to facilitate recovery.

FEAR POWERS

A number of different powers interact with or use fear in a variety of ways:

DREAM CONTROL

This is a common power for nightmare-creating characters, able to infiltrate dreams and dredge up the victim's deepest fears. It often has the Psychic extra of Illusion (following) and a dream-thief or nightmare creature may also have Fear Absorption (following) to enhance its powers.

EMOTION CONTROL

The primary power for creating and controlling is Emotion Control, of course, potentially limited to Fear Only. It creates and imposes fear-related qualities on targets, essentially using the same approach as **Intimidation**

(previously) but potentially lasting for much longer, with greater opportunities to activate that quality for compels or other types of advantage or trouble.

Emotion Control may be a mental power, but it can just as easily come from other sources. For some it is a magical or mystical ability, either an enchantment or an innate power for a fear-mongering demon or nightmare being. In other cases, Emotion Control is scientific, ranging from biochemical compounds delivered in a variety of different ways to subliminal ultrasonics or radiation stimulating the fear centers of the brain.

FEAR ABSORPTION

A character—usually a villain—may “feed” on fear, becoming more powerful the more others’ fears grow. Generally speaking, this is an example of Ability Boost, with the Source limit. The level of Ability Boost sets the upper limit of how much fear the character can absorb, while the ambient level of fear sets a limit of how much “energy” is available to improve the character’s abilities. The Ability Boost may have extras broadening the abilities it enhances as well.

A character can also have a “Feeds on Fear” quality, which can be activated to grant advantage when the character has fear to draw upon, but also causes trouble, since the character is dependent on fear, and may suffer disability when deprived of it, or be compelled to create and feed upon it.

ILLUSION

The Illusion power (and Images as well) can add the following extra:

Psychic: Your power taps into the target’s mind to produce its effect, lending support from the target’s own thoughts, emotions, and expectations. You can use your power to learn the target’s qualities as well as impose them through maneuvers, creating illusions like your target’s greatest fear, heart’s desire, and so forth.

Naturally, fear-based illusions often have Limited to Fears in addition to the Psychic extra, suitable for a character who only creates terrifying illusions out of the victim’s subconscious.

RESISTANCE

Mental Resistance generally protects against fear-based attacks, although some biological forms of fear (see **Emotion Control**, previously) might work around it. A character can also have a Limited Resistance to Fear, which only works against fear-based effects. This reflects a character with a specific resistance to having fear imposed from outside influences; for someone who is generally more courageous and fearless overall, increase

the character's Willpower level and add qualities like "Courageous" and "Without Fear".

SERVANT

More than just conjuring up illusions and nightmare images of people's worst fears, this power, coupled with the Psychic and Variable Extras, and possibly Limited to Fears, can literally summon "creatures from the id"—turning a target's worst fear into reality. Arachnophobia becomes a swarm of spiders or a giant spider-monster, while fear of clowns (coulrophobia) could be a group of demonic clowns or a giant monster in greaspaint and floppy shoes.

MOB SCENES

"A person is smart. People are dumb, panicky, dangerous animals," says Agent Kay in *Men in Black*. Fear is a force that creates mobs and drives them.

Rather than dealing with a mob as individuals, you can handle it as a single entity in **ICONS** game terms, with its own ability levels. In particular, a mob effectively has the Burst extra (see **Extras** in the **Powers** chapter of **ICONS**) on its attacks: able to simultaneously attack all targets within reach of the mob. The ability to gang-up on targets may also grant a mob slightly greater effective Prowess and Strength compared to its individual members.

A mob's Willpower largely represents the forces driving it and holding the mob together. The mob's Stamina is a combination of its physical make-up (effectively increased Strength) and this drive, or Willpower. You can base a deliberately created mob's Willpower on the level of the effect that created it, be it a power like Emotion Control or the Willpower level of an instigator.

Example: *The Serpent Sphinx whips up a mob of mind-blitzed bystanders to distract and delay the heroes. The people making up the mob are strictly Average, but the GM decides the mob as a whole has Fair (4) Prowess and Strength and Great (6) Willpower from the Sphinx's Great Mind Control. That gives the mob as a whole Stamina 10 and the GM gives it Poor (2) Damage Resistance to Bashing and Blasting, representing that little bumps and bruises aren't going to deter it. If the Sphinx's power lets him keep replenishing the mob with more and more people, the GM can assign it a Regeneration level as well. The mob has the Burst extra on its attacks, able to affect any target within close range of any part of the mob.*

"G" IS FOR "GOLDEN AGE"



The Golden Age of comic books, from the late 1930s until the 1950s, encompasses both a more innocent and a more raw portrayal of superheroes, before that term was even commonly in use. The heroes of the Golden Age are known as fearless spy-busters and fighters against fascism in the World War II era, but also include elements of the more violent pulp characters of earlier decades, before the imposition of the Comics Code created the more pacifist and “sanitized” heroes of the Silver Age.

You can use **ICONS** to run superhero games set in the Golden Age with fairly little modification, whether the characters are all-star home-front heroes or fearless invaders of enemy territory.

KEEP 'EM FLYIN', HEROES!

A central element of the the Golden Age of comics is the Second World War, which began shortly after the appearance of the first superheroes, and involved the United States of America within a couple of years of those first appearances. The comic book publishing business sold millions of books to overseas G.I.s as well as kids at home, and benefitted from building on patriotic themes.

Any Golden Age series will have to ask the question: will superheroes fight on the various fronts of the war or not and, if not, why not?

HOME-FRONT HEROES

A common approach for the comics is to ban superheroes from the front-lines of the war. Practically, this is both to keep the horrors of warfare out of the pages of the comics and to avoid the logical issue of heroes powerful enough to end the war in an afternoon by invading Berlin, Rome, and Tokyo and rounding up the Axis leaders.

In the context of the setting, there might be various reasons why costumed and super-powered heroes don't fight on the front lines, including:

Countermeasures: The Axis powers have some type of countermeasure against super-powered soldiers, making it too risky for them to enter the war directly. A classic example is the magical barrier created by the Axis in DC Comics' *All-Star Squadron*, which would brainwash superhumans to their cause. The great heroes of the Allies couldn't risk invading Axis territory or else they would be turned against their own people! Similar countermeasures might deprive all superhumans of their powers (keeping both Allied and Axis supers off the battlefield), prevent them from entering certain nations or territories, or keep them from intervening in the outcome of battles.

Propaganda: Costumed heroes are great rallying points for troops and civilians alike, but the loss of a major hero on the battlefield would be a terrible blow to morale and a propaganda victory for the opposing side. This might cause the leaders of the different factions to forbid their superhumans from taking part in battles, so as not to risk such a setback. This might be particularly true if the super-powered assets or countermeasures of the other side are unclear, making it difficult to assess the risks involved.

Secrecy: Super-soldiers tend to be unique and special assets, and a faction might be reluctant to reveal the full extent of their capabilities. Since most superhumans aren't likely to make more difference in a major battle than a

couple of tanks, bombers, or similar weapons, they're often better kept in reserve and used for special commando missions, to guard important targets, or as propaganda weapons, keeping them visible to support troop morale. An extension of the secrecy factor is the "secret war" approach: An entire other conflict is being fought behind the scenes of the war by super-powered assets on either side, where the Axis and Allied super-agents largely balance each other out, allowing the mundane course of the war to occur essentially unchanged.

ON THE FRONT LINES

On the other hand, the Golden Age comics were full of heroes punching out Axis soldiers, even leaders like Hitler and Tojo! So there's plenty of precedent for superheroes fighting on the front lines of the war, either as "super-soldiers" working for the military, or independent vigilantes operating on their own, but in concert with the Allied war effort. Axis super-soldiers nearly always work for the military, although some Axis super-villains operate on their own, or even have designs to overthrow and seize power from their own leaders eventually.

Powers vs. Powers: Often, the super-soldiers on either side of the conflict cancel each other out, particularly in the larger scheme of things in the war. They certainly tend to be drawn to each other: When Axis super-soldiers show up on the battlefield, their Allied counterparts are likely to appear in order to deal with them and vice versa.

The Tank Standard: While combatants with super-powers are a significant difference from the real World War II, they're not necessarily *that* significant a difference. Most of the costumed heroes and villains of the Golden Age aren't that much more powerful an asset than a main battle tank, fighter plane (or squadron) or the like, certainly more maneuverable and easier to conceal than a tank, but not likely to make that much more difference in a vast battle between thousands of soldiers than a single tank or machine-gun nest or squadron of planes. So long as most of the super-soldiers involved are less than Fantastic levels of power, it's quite believable that they don't hugely alter history as we know it in terms of the progress and ending of the war.

BEHIND ENEMY LINES

Lastly, superheroes often served as spies and covert operatives for either side in the war, operating behind enemy lines to gather intelligence, commit sabotage, and otherwise hinder the enemy's war-efforts, while keeping out of the spotlight and off of the front lines, where they would be obvious targets. This is a compromise position between the home-front heroes and

front-line fighters, offering some action in the theatre of war, but staying away from the major battles.

WAR IS HELL

While Golden Age comics tended to downplay a lot of the terrible realities of warfare, it's up to you how much you want to do that in your own **ICONS** series set during World War II. Certainly, the early Golden Age comics, in the years before the Comics Code, featured more realistic violence, with superheroes carrying guns and letting foes fall to their deaths, if not turning them over to authorities almost certain to execute them in the electric chair!

In particular, you may want to include options like **More Lethal Damage** and **Injuries**, described in **The Basics** chapter of **ICONS**, in order to up the stakes of conflicts in the game. Certainly, more adversaries are going to perish in the course of adventures, at least apparently, until they somehow return in a later story with an explanation for their survival or resurrection, although sometimes it's little more than "That is for me to know..."

THE WARTIME SERIES

American involvement in World War II lasts from the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 ("A date which will live in infamy," according to President Franklin D. Roosevelt) until V-J Day on August 15, 1945, about three and a half years, which is certainly time enough for a detailed Golden Age **ICONS** series, particularly one that starts before the end of 1941 (as the Golden Age comics did).

Game Masters can use timelines of events during the war, as well as the history of the comics themselves, to fill out adventures and storylines connected to major wartime events, from the attack on Pearl Harbor itself through D-Day in Europe and the final days of the conflict with the Empire of Japan.

GOLDEN AGE ORIGINS

All of the origins found in the **Hero Creation** chapter of **ICONS** are suitable for a Golden Age setting. In fact, all of them appeared for the first time in the Golden Age of comics in one form or another. Gimmicks in the Golden Age are just as often wielders of some magical talisman as they are

technological, and technological devices tend to be different (see **Golden Age Devices** following) but, otherwise, things work pretty much as-written.

PUBLIC DOMAIN CHARACTERS

The first decade of comic book publishing in America saw an explosion of costumed characters, as publishers sought to cash-in on the superhero fad. Many of these publishers, and characters, didn't last and have since shifted into the public domain. A quick search of "public domain super heroes" on the Internet will turn up hundreds of largely forgotten heroes and villains from this era of the comics, including entire comic book stories now in digital formats. Players and Game Masters of a Golden Age (or even modern) **ICONS** series can use these characters and stories as an inspirational resource. Some publishers have even produced **ICONS** supplements using public domain characters suitable for use in the Golden Age.

GOLDEN AGE DEVICES

Many Golden Age heroes and villains wield various devices as part of their powers. Gimmick characters based around a particular device are fairly common, as are Trained characters with one or more devices to supplement their abilities and specialties.

SUPER-SCIENCE

"High-tech" in the world of the 1930s and '40s is quite different from the post-transistor era: home radios are the most common piece of electronics, and broadcast television is still "new fangled". Electronic computers develop during the war, primarily as code- and encryption-breakers, but they're massive, delicate machines.

Much of the super-science of the Golden Age takes the form of mysterious rays, exotic radiation, chemical compounds, and the like. So various types of ray guys—from heat and lighting Blasts to different Alteration Rays—are common inventions. So are formulae for advanced synthetic materials and compounds: solvents, adhesives, metal alloys, and "wonder materials" like bullet- or fire-proof cloth. Chemical compounds also included wonder-drugs, from super-serums to pills able to grant temporary powers.

Artificial characters also make their first major appearance in this era, with synthetic "life" appearing in the form of androids, robots, and "mechanical marvels." They range from virtually indistinguishable from human to clunky automatons, not so different from most of the history of comics.

"Mad science" (and mad scientists) abound in the Golden Age, although inventors are more likely to be either the supporting characters behind the

heroes (and sometimes responsible for giving them their abilities), the victims of villainous plots, or villains themselves. Inventor-heroes tend to be somewhat less common. Preventing some new scientific device or discovery from being misused is a common plot in the Golden Age, particularly when war-time heroes are keeping dangerous new weapons out of enemy hands, or preventing the kidnapping of the greatest scientific minds of the free world.

MYSTERIOUS MAGIC

Magical devices are also quite common for Golden Age characters, particularly Gimmicks, who draw all of their powers from a particular magical device. Such devices are usually unique ancient artifacts, often unearthed by archeologists and treasure-hunters, or awaiting a destined wielder, although their initial appearance might seem like an accident or coincidence. Ancient Egypt, and the Far East—particularly Nepal and Tibet—are common sources of magical devices. Unearthly Golden Age characters tend to be magical, visiting gods or immortals, rather than alien, as becomes more common in the science-fiction influenced Silver Age.

JUST VISITING

Even if you don't run a full-fledged Golden Age series, a regular **ICONS** series offers plenty of opportunities for the occasional Golden Age style adventure. Heroes might time-travel back to the 1930s and '40s, either meeting their costumed predecessors, or even creating a time-loop wherein they *are* the heroes of the Golden Age, perhaps in disguise, or somehow trigger the origins of heroes in that era.

The time-trip might occur by accident or deliberately in an effort to prevent a villain from tampering with history. This can lead to awkward situations like the heroes having to save historical villains like Adolf Hitler in order to preserve the history they know, and possibly prevent an even worse timeline where Nazi Germany is run more efficiently and ruthlessly.

Along with actual time travel, you can run Golden Age scenarios as flashback sequences to fill-in the history of characters from this era. For example, you can add to an adventure like *Sins of the Past* by including some sequences of the Golden Age characters in their prime “back in the day” to add context to the modern-day events.

"H" IS FOR "HEADQUARTERS"



Most super-teams, and many solo heroes, have some kind of headquarters or base of operations, at least a place to stash their cape and park their super-vehicle or the like. For some it may be a getaway from the mundane world, for others, it's a workplace where they can do their job. Such bases are largely background color in **ICONS**, although they can come into play as qualities (discussed in the **Team Qualities** and **Team Devices** sections of the **Assembled Edition** as well as here).

This chapter offers additional rules for the creation and use of bases in **ICONS**. For the purposes of these rules a "base" describes such an installation in general, or when used by a single hero, while "headquarters"

refers to the center of operations for a group or team. During play, of course, feel free to use whichever name you prefer.

There are three options for handling bases in *Icons*: as qualities, as devices, or as full-fledged installations. Choose the option that best suits your own group and series.

BASE AS QUALITY

The default approach to bases in *Icons* is to handle them as qualities, or aspects of qualities, activated for advantage or trouble when the base is relevant to the story.

A base might be an entirely self-contained quality of its own, such as “The Tower of Justice” or “The Unseen Academy” or it can be part of another quality, such as “Vast Resources,” “Billionaire Industrialist,” or even “World’s Greatest Heroes” (you would expect the world’s greatest heroes to have a headquarters, after all).

BASE ADVANTAGES

Players can activate a base quality for an advantage just like any other. Consider some of the following possibilities:

- **Improved Effort:** Resources at or from the base help the hero to succeed on a test. This can be anything from power-boosting devices to the information from an extensive library or database for doing research.
- **Insight:** Speaking of research, a base’s informational resources are an excellent opportunity for insight, looking for files on the crime computer or reading dusty tomes of ancient lore.
- **Push Ability:** Similar to improve effort, a base might have resources to enhance a character’s capabilities, particularly things like power-boosting equipment to improve the range of abilities like ESP or Teleportation, for example.
- **Recover:** Bases often feature infirmaries, medical bays, or even “auto-doc” systems to treat injuries. These may include “quick-fix” resources suitable for this advantage.
- **Retcon:** The catch-all category for having something useful at or from a base, adding a particular detail that wasn’t there before, or revealing an item from the base’s trophy room, arsenal, or just stock of supplies.
- **Stunt:** The other useful category for base advantages, allowing the character to substitute one ability level for another, including temporary

use of an otherwise unavailable ability. This includes attribute stunts for jury-rigging devices from the base's resources.

BASE TROUBLE

Players and the GM can also activate a base quality to cause trouble for a character, such as:

- **Challenge:** The most common trouble associated with bases. Something about the base poses a challenge for the heroes. It can be anything from trouble with their landlord or the city for not having the right permits to a malfunction in the base's inter-dimensional portal allowing roaches from the Zed-Zone to find their way into the base's infrastructure.
- **Compulsion:** While it's rare for a base to compel a character to act in a particular way, bases can place certain responsibilities upon their owners and custodians (more covered by Challenges, previously) and certain bases may indeed compel characters, especially if they are supernatural in nature.
- **Disability:** The quality of a base might cause some disability, such as a "Temple of Peace" where "violence is never a solution" or a base screened against certain kinds of entities. A base that simulates the conditions of a character's home-world might be a comfort, but also a condition that disables some of the powers that character has in Earth's environment. In addition to disability for a character, this can also relate to disabling of some of the base's systems—such as say, life support—causing trouble for the heroes.
- **Increased Difficulty:** Related to Disability, certain qualities of the base might make some tests more difficult. Perhaps it has an "anti-technology" effect due to its mystical nature, causing trouble for technological devices and related tests, for example.
- **Lost Panel:** Something about or within the headquarters causes a momentary distraction. A character linked to the base might receive an alert signal, for example, or even a direct experience of the base's "pain" from an attack, resulting in a lost panel. The same can occur due to a sudden input from sensors, or the concentration required to activate the base's quality in exchange for an advantage.

HEADQUARTERS QUALITIES

A team's headquarters can be a team quality (**Icons: The Assembled Edition**, pp. 33 and 120), shared by the team as a whole and available to all of them for activation (for both advantage and trouble).

BASE AS DEVICE

A base can be considered an ability in its own right, a kind of device. In this case, a Base is a power any hero can choose to substitute for a rolled power (or spent points on in the point-build option). Determine the base's level normally.

BASE

You have your own headquarters. The base's structure has a Material level equal to the power level + 2 (maximum of 10) and one of the following features for each power level. You can add (power level) additional features to the base as an extra.

- **Concealed:** The base is hidden from casual sight by some kind of camouflage and/or its location is not generally known. The difficulty of finding the base 3 + its level (maximum of 10).
- **Communications:** The base can communicate via radio and TV waves (or one other means of the owner's choice).
- **Computer:** A computer capable of processing information from a library and running the base's systems. As an additional feature, the computer can be artificially intelligent, with an Intellect equal to the base's level.
- **Danger Room:** A room capable of creating various holographic threats and traps for training and testing purposes.
- **Deathtrap:** The difference between a deathtrap and a defense system is generally that the deathtrap pulls no punches; it tries to kill you. Villain bases may have many different deathtraps as part of the defense system, or reserved for putting captured heroes in.
- **Defense System:** A defense system provides the base with weapons it can use to protect itself from intruders. Choose an attack power at the base's level.
- **Infirmary:** A medical facility for treating injuries, illness and other maladies, giving the base the Medicine specialty at its level.
- **Isolated:** The base is isolated from the rest of the world in some way, making it more difficult to reach. It may be deep underground, underwater, in a distant place (like Antarctica), in outer space, on the Moon or even in another dimension. An isolated base must be Sealed if it exists in a hostile environment.
- **Mobile:** The base can move under its own power, like a vehicle. Give it an appropriate movement power at its level.

- **Power:** The base has an inherent power at a level equal to its level.
- **Prison:** A facility for holding people captive. It includes power nullifiers or other measures to hold super-powered prisoners at the base's level.
- **Sealed:** The base is independent of the outside environment and has its own air, food and water resources.
- **Security System:** The base has alarms and sensors designed to detect intruders. The base difficulty of overcoming the the security system is 3 + the base's level (maximum of 10).
- **Sensors:** The base can visually detect things inside and outside (using closed-circuit cameras or something similar) with an Awareness equal to its level.
- **Staff:** The base has a staff of personnel to take care of it and the needs of its residents. This may be a single very efficient butler or housekeeper, or a full staff of specialized personnel.
- **Vast:** The base is much larger than a mansion, castle or office building. It may be a tesseract, larger on the inside than it appears outside, or a huge installation, perhaps even an entire world or dimension!

You can give a base a one-time use of a feature it doesn't have as a stunt by activating an appropriate quality.

BASE AS INSTALLATION

Lastly, bases can be installations as detailed as vehicles (see **Vehicles** in the **Assembled Edition**), constructed by their owners and custom-designed to have particular abilities.

INSTALLATION ABILITIES

The abilities defining installations, like those of vehicles, are different from those that define characters. A base has three abilities: Resources, Security, and Structure.

Resources is a measure of the bases' useful resources and covers everything not covered by the other two abilities.

Security rates the headquarters' defenses to infiltration (whether physical, electronic, or sensory) and sets the difficulty for attempts to overcome the base's security.

Structure is a rating of the overall material strength of the base itself. Note that Structure is only general material strength, exceeding the Structure in combat will certainly damage the base, breach walls, etc., but a villain

would have to achieve a massive success (possibly via a pyramid test) to destroy the base entirely.

CREATING AN INSTALLATION

An installation is built with a number of points equal to the Base power level x 4. Each ability costs 1 point per level, to a maximum of 10. Resources and Security start out at level 0, while Structure starts out at Poor (level 2) and is increased from there.

INSTALLATION FEATURES

The installation can have features from the list given under **Base as Device**. Each feature costs 1 point from the installation's pool of points. The GM is free to invent additional features, or to allow the players to do with with GM approval. The Concealed, Defense System, Prison, Security System, and Sensors features use the installation's Security as their level. Other features use the installation's Resources level as their level, where applicable.

INSTALLATION QUALITIES

Lastly, the installation can have up to three qualities of its own that further define it. These qualities can be activated normally for advantage or to cause trouble for the installation or the characters using it (see **Base as Quality**, previously).

Examples of installation qualities include things like: Abandoned Subway Platform, Above It All, Alien Ruin, Ancient Dimensional Schooner, Arctic Fortress, Dark Cavern, Haunted, Hidden Island, Last Refuge, Living Structure, Industrial Warehouse, Mind of Its Own, Mysterious Inheritance, Part of the Neighborhood, Old World Mansion, Orbiting Satellite, Sanctum, Powered by a Black Hole, School for Special Students, and Trans-Temporal Tower, just to name a few.

ICONS TEAM-UP

An additional, even more detailed, headquarters construction system appears in the **Icons Team-Up** sourcebook, published by Adamant Entertainment, and is suitable for groups looking for something similar to, but more involved, than the **Base as Installation** option presented here.

"I" IS FOR "INTERACTION"



Characters interacting with their environment, and each other, is covered in a few pages in the **Taking Action** chapter of **The Assembled Edition** of **ICONS**. Such interactions broadly break down into interpersonal—interactions between characters—and perceptive, interactions between characters, their surroundings, and their own experiences and mental processes. This **A to Z** entry focuses primarily on interpersonal interactions, although there are elements of the perceptive, particularly as it applies to interpersonal interaction.

INTERACTIONS

The interactions described here tend to fall under the categories of communicating, knowing, or maneuvers as described under **Interactions** in the **Assembled Edition** of **ICONS**. Communicating and knowing are largely unlimited during action time while maneuvers involving interaction actions involving tests.

DECEPTION

Make an Intellect or Willpower test, opposed by your target's Awareness, to tell a convincing lie, or otherwise deceive your target into believing something that isn't true. The GM may modify the difficulty (effectively granting your target a bonus or penalty) based on the believability of your deception.

Deception as a maneuver uses success to impose a quality on the target such as "deceived," which can be activated for advantage against that target or to cause trouble for the target, such as someone acting on false information and losing a panel or suffering increase difficulty or a temporary disability.

INTIMIDATION

As described in "**F** is for **Fear**" intimidation uses threats and shows of force to cow targets into cooperating. As your action, roll a test of Willpower against the target's Willpower. You're looking to create an "Intimidated" quality for your target; marginal success means you create it and can then activate it normally. A moderate or better success means you also get to activate the quality for free (once per degree of success above marginal).

Intimidation relying largely on a bluff or deception might be opposed by the higher of Awareness or Willpower, as the target might realize the character's threat is an empty one.

INSIGHT

A part of interaction is insight into the thoughts, feelings, and motives of others, essentially the knowing and learning interactions from the **Assembled Edition** of **ICONS**. Roll a test of Awareness against someone's Willpower to gain insight about them, with success meaning you pick up on something about their true feelings or motives.

Insight (through Awareness) is often the opposing ability for interaction tests. It can also be a maneuver for learning someone's qualities in order to activate them, as described under **Learning & Creating Qualities** in **The Basics** chapter of the **Assembled Edition**.

PERFORMANCE

Various forms of performance can be considered interaction, particularly when done with the intention of impressing an audience or influencing their mood or opinions. Such performances are usually Willpower tests (modified by specialty) with the outcome determining how impressive or effective the performance is overall. The difficulty may be based on the

Willpower of the audience or a level chosen by the GM based on the intention of the performance.

PERSUASION

Outside of action time, roll an opposed test of Willpower versus Willpower when one character tries to persuade another to go along with a proposal. If each character is trying to convince the other, have them both roll Willpower tests, with the higher outcome succeeding.

It can be difficult to use persuasion during action time, when a lot is going on, but in instances where one character is looking to persuade another to do (or not do) something, handle it as a maneuver that places as “persuaded” quality on the subject, which the persuader can activate, usually to compel the character to go along for the moment, or for a lost panel where the persuaded character wrestles with the decision and hesitates, not doing anything for that page.

SEDUCTION

When using romance and flirtation to get others to do what you want, roll an opposed test of Willpower versus Willpower, much like persuasion. Indeed, seduction is essentially a particular form of persuasion. If you succeed, you get your target to do what you want. The GM may modify your difficulty based on the approach you take, and whether or not your target is open to seduction at all. As with other interactions, the subject may use the higher of Awareness or Willpower to oppose the attempt if your efforts are insincere or otherwise based on deception.

DETERMINATION & INTERACTION

Note that the end result of many interactions is to activate a quality in order to cause trouble, particularly to compel a character to act in a certain way. Players have an “out” when it comes to these situations in the form of Determination Points, which they can spend to avoid trouble (see **Spending Determination Points in The Basics** chapter of the Assembled Edition of Icons).

So if a player *really* doesn't want to go along with the results of an interaction, there's an “escape hatch” option, so long as the hero has Determination Points left to spend.

INTERACTION SPECIALTIES

Each of the interactions described in the previous section can be a specialty unto itself:

Deception: You're a skilled liar and prevaricator. Add your specialty bonus to tests to deceive or otherwise convince someone you are telling the truth.

Intimidation: You know how to use threats to get what you want. Add your specialty bonus to tests to intimidate or frighten others.

Insight: You know what makes people tick. Add your specialty bonus to tests to learn about someone's thoughts, feelings, or motives, and to tests to resist interactions where knowing those things can help you, such as telling when someone is lying to you.

Persuasion: You're good at making a convincing argument or getting people to come around to your way of thinking. Add your specialty bonus to tests to persuade or otherwise convince people to go along with you.

Seduction: You're skilled in the subtle art of seduction, using romance and flirtation to get what you want, even when the ultimate goal is neither romantic nor flirtatious.

Additionally, Leadership and Performance from the **Assembled Edition** can be considered interaction specialties, and Psychiatry can function much like Insight in interaction. Performance includes things like acting and public speaking as well as other art forms.

Other specialties might apply their bonus to interactions associated with them. For example, Business, Law, and Military specialties could provide their bonus to interactions in those fields, such as a board meeting, court case, or staring down a stubborn military officer, respectively.

INTERACTION RULES

The following rules expand on the use of interaction from the **Assembled Edition of ICONS** for Game Master and players who want additional options for their games.

INTERACTION CONTESTS & CONFLICTS

Some situations may call for a contest of interaction, such as two characters trying to persuade a third of a course of action, or one character trying to intimidate another while another character offers support to make the situation less intimidating, to name a few.

The most basic of these can be handled with a simple test: whichever character gets the best outcome wins the contest. In situations where two characters are pitted against each other, one character's effort becomes the difficulty for the opposing character and vice versa, and the character with the greater effort succeeds by a margin equal to the difference between them.

More involved interactions can be played out as pyramid tests from the **Assembled Edition** of **ICONS** (see **Pyramid Tests** in **The Basics** chapter). A court battle, for example, could be a competitive, fragile pyramid test, where the side that achieves a massive success first wins the case, but the opposing side can choose to either add degrees of success to their own pyramid or subtract them from the opposition, to keep them from achieving the total they need to win.

ROLE-PLAYING VS. "ROLL-PLAYING"

Some gamers and groups prefer to have clear-cut game mechanics to handle interactions and social conflicts, no different than having the same mechanics to handle physical actions and conflicts, whereas others find social mechanics intrusive, either distracting or outright violations of player agency and freedom of choice. So which is the best approach and the "official" **ICONS** stance?

The simple answer is: whatever works for your game group. You can use some, all, or none of the rules guidelines given here to handle interactions in your **ICONS** games, or mix-and-match to suit. For example, you might like the hard-and-fast rules for interactions as maneuvers during action time, but prefer to handle things like persuasion or deception attempts outside of action time with role-playing. Great! The rules are all tools to enhance your game. Use them (or not) as you see fit.

Keep in mind that having game mechanics to fall back on for interaction can be a boon to some players, who might not be great improvisational role-players, but who are playing characters who are charismatic, persuasive, or imposing.

INTERACTION QUALITIES

Qualities—whether permanent or temporary—can add nuance to interactions.

Learning Qualities: Sometimes the purpose of an interaction is to learn one or more of another character’s qualities, particularly ones relating to things the character feels. For example, does the character have particular goals, fears, loves, hatreds, and so forth? Interaction can be the way to find these things out, as detailed under **Learning & Creating Qualities** in **The Basics** chapter of the **Assembled Edition** of **ICONS** and **Interactions** in the **Taking Action** chapter.

Creating Qualities: If you can’t find a quality, create it. A character might not have a particular phobia, but that doesn’t mean you can’t create and impose an “Frightened” or “Intimidated” quality through interaction to use fear as leverage for compels or other trouble for that character. Similarly, you can use interaction to create and apply other qualities to characters, ranging from “Friendly” or “Reasonable” to “Opposed to the Ultra-Mind’s Schemes”.

Activating Qualities: Once a quality is discovered or created, you can activate it, either to give yourself an advantage or to cause trouble for the character with that quality. The process of learning or creating the quality may give you some free opportunities to activate it, and this is the “pay-off” of the interaction process, as the effect of the advantage or trouble is often what you were going for in the first place, such as giving yourself an edge over an opponent, or convincing someone to go along with what you want, at least for the time being.

POPULARITY & PUBLIC OPINION

Icons Game Masters have a number of ways to handle the rise and fall of heroes’ popularity based on public opinion and the hero’s own reputation.

First and foremost, popular heroes may have suitable qualities, ranging from “National Icon” to “America’s Sweetheart” or “Champion of the People”. Heroes can activate these for advantages related to their popularity and influence, such as retconning a connection or access to a resource, recovery from being cheered-on by the crowd, or insight from a helpful admirer. Of course, popularity can be double-edged, and those same qualities might be activated to cause trouble for the heroes when public opinion turns against them and they have to deal with governmental road-blocks, an intrusive media, and mobs of protesters outside their headquarters.

Shifts in public opinion might be temporary qualities, applied to the heroes for the duration of a chapter or most of an issue, similarly activated for an advantage to cause trouble for them. Such qualities can range from “Media Darlings” or “Heroes of the Hour” to “Threat or Menace?” or “Dangerous Vigilantes” to name a few.

"J" IS FOR "JUSTICE"



Superheroes act as agents of justice, often in instances where other law-enforcement is limited, but how do heroes interact with the justice system and the law? What happens after they nab the villains and turn them over to the authorities, and how can you make the justice system an interesting part of your **ICONS** series?

SUPERHEROES AND THE LAW

While heroes generally share an interest in justice, not all of them are so interested in the letter of the law. Indeed, some vigilante heroes go outside the law precisely because they feel conventional authorities can't or won't do enough. This leads to two main types of heroes: *sanctioned* and *vigilante*.

Sanctioned heroes have some official or semi-official status with law enforcement. They might be deputized by the local police or sheriff's department, or given jurisdiction by a federal or even international agency, from the American Federal Bureau of Investigation to Interpol, or fictional equivalents thereof. Sanctioned heroes have the advantage of legal status and the support of the system, but are also subject to its rules and regulations, which can tie their hands.

Vigilante heroes have no legal status, they act on their own, outside the law. Exactly how the law deals with them often depends on the heroes and their actions. Heroic vigilantes tend to get quite a bit of leeway in comic book settings, using precedent for "good samaritans" and "citizen's arrests" and the like to wave away the fact that vigilantes are quite often technically breaking the law. Vigilantes who display a disregard for human life and contempt for the law tend to be treated the same as the criminals they go after.

GATHERING EVIDENCE

Law enforcement is limited in its ability to surveil subjects and to conduct searches without either a search warrant issued by a judge or just cause to suspect criminal activity. The same is generally true of sanctioned heroes, who would be legally prohibited, for example, from entering private property to search for stolen goods or other evidence of a crime without legal authorization. Vigilantes are not so limited, and their ability to get around evidence-gathering restrictions can make them more effective, so long as their arrests are not later thrown out of court.

Similarly, the law requires evidence which can be examined and verified, and testimony subject to cross-examination. This generally means that evidence gathered using sensory powers and similar abilities is inadmissible in court, unless it can be independently verified in some fashion. This is particularly true of mental powers like Precognition or Telepathy. Few courts are going to convict, or even charge someone, based on a vision of a possible future, or testimony that the defendant was *thinking* about committing a crime! A setting where those kinds of things are law is more likely an interesting parallel world than anything resembling our own. On the other hand, sensory and mental powers that lead heroes to verifiable evidence, such as the location of contraband or stolen goods, for example, may be admissible, particularly if the heroes are "good samaritans" acting on their extraordinary abilities to prevent a crime or assist the authorities in the arrest of a criminal.

ARRESTS

Heroes apprehending a criminal usually do so as a “citizen’s arrest,” which is a commonly accepted legal practice, particularly when a person who is not a member of a law enforcement organization stops a crime in progress or apprehends a suspected criminal. Sanctioned heroes may have specific procedures to follow in arresting criminals, although this is often handled by police or other law enforcement officers when the criminal is turned over to them, including things like reading suspects their rights and ensuring they receive legal representation.

Since most villains choose not to come quietly when heroes show up, most superhero arrests involve some sort of a fight. Like the authorities, heroes are excused from a certain amount of force used in the apprehension of criminals, or in self-defense. Vigilantes who use excessive force, much less murder criminals in cold blood, quickly find themselves on the wrong side of the law, and may have a difficult time coming back from crossing that line, if at all.

LEGAL IDENTITIES

Many heroes conceal their true identities, creating various legal complications in both criminal and civil matters.

First and foremost is whether or not the authorities can trust a hero with a secret identity. Gaining legal sanction (previously) may require heroes to disclose their real identities, to the authorities at the least, if not to the general public, and providing the authorities with some way of identifying the hero, since it could be anyone under that concealing costume! Authorities may recognize the practice of secret identities as akin to “undercover work” for law enforcement, providing some protection of the hero’s true identity in the name of safeguarding the hero’s loved ones and “civilian” life.

Secondly, courts must decide if a masked or concealed identity violates a defendant’s legal right to confront their accuser in court. If so, then heroes who conceal their true identities cannot give testimony in court, and cases relying on their testimony may fail. If testimony by masked heroes and others concealing their identity is allowed, then how is the identity of the individual to be verified? Anyone can wear a mask or a costume, after all. There may still need to be some type of registry or legal recognition of a costumed hero.

Third is the question of the legal status of a hero’s costumed identity. Is that name, likeness, and appearance or costume legally protected? Ordinary people have some protection against their name or likeness being used

without their permission. Costumed heroes may or may not have the same rights. If they do not, then all sorts of unscrupulous types may try and use a hero to promote a product, brand, or cause without their permission, and there may not be anything the hero can do about it. This can also hold true for villains as well, although they're more likely to use threats and violence to deal with such problems, without worrying about the legal consequences!

Lastly, there's the question of a character's legal identity status: A great many heroes are not citizens of any earthly nation, or even human at all! Does an unearthly hero have a legally recognized identity? Are there "immigration" or citizenship issues? Is an artificial hero the property of its creator or an independent, legally-recognized "person"? Is a transformed hero still legally the same person as before? These and other legal entanglements can cause trouble for the heroes (see **Heroes on Trial**, following).

COPS & LAWYERS

Superhero involvement with the justice system tends to connect them with police officers and lawyers in various ways. Indeed, some superheroes *are* police officers or lawyers in their secret identities, or previously worked those jobs, before deciding they needed to work outside of the law in order to seek justice. Heroes might also have police officers or attorneys as friends, family members, or allies in their work.

How cops and lawyers react to heroes varies. Many cops take a dim view of vigilantes, costumed or otherwise, especially heroes who think they are somehow above the law. Superheroes can win over local law-enforcement but, unless they are sanctioned—and sometimes even then—the cops tend to be suspicious. Similarly, lawyers are often concerned about ensuring criminal cases are pursued correctly, and heroes tend to complicate matters.

That said, both parts of the justice system find ways to cooperate with superheroes, either openly or behind-the-scenes. Sympathetic police officers may pass tips along to the heroes and gladly take their calls to pick up captured criminals, even if they risk their own badges by doing so. Likewise, lawyers working criminal justice may choose to give superheroes the benefit of the doubt rather than pursuing them for vigilantism, so long as their activities are to the net benefit of the community and stay arguably within the letter of the law.

TRIALS

Once a criminal is apprehended and charged, there's an arraignment to determine if a trial is warranted and, if it is, the defendant is brought to trial. Depending on whether or not they are legally allowed to do so, heroes involved in the apprehension of a criminal may be asked to give a statement or to testify at the trial (see **Legal Identities**, previously). If the hero's statements or testimony is inadmissible, and is the prime evidence against the defendant, then it will be difficult to obtain a conviction, if not impossible.

In **ICONS** game terms, a trial is often a pyramid test between the defense and prosecution, using whatever modifiers are appropriate for the particular trial. Generally, the prosecution is trying to build a Fragile pyramid using tests of Intellect and Willpower (with Law specialty applied) while the defense removes successes from the prosecution's case.

The key parts of trials can also be played out, with roleplaying offering opportunities to learn, create, and activate qualities for advantage on tests for either side, or potentially to create trouble for the opposing side.

HEROES ON TRIAL

Heroes themselves can run into trouble with the legal system, particularly if they are cavalier in their disregard for the law and those who enforce it. Game Masters can use law enforcement and the threat of legal action to keep over-zealous vigilantes in-line, particularly in games where the heroes are supposed to uphold the law, even if they sometimes act outside of it. Two trial scenarios are common even for law-abiding heroes: framed for a crime they did not commit, or on trial over a question of legal rights or status.

Framed! A foe might set up heroes and frame them for a crime, either to damage their reputations and the public's trust in them or as a distraction for some other scheme. After all, heroes tied-up in court can't be out thwarting the villain's plans. With shapeshifters and other forms of disguise, illusion, and mind control, it's a fairly easy matter to implicate a hero in a crime. Secret identities can cause trouble here; a costume and mask that effectively conceal the hero's identity can just as easily be used by someone else to impersonate that hero.

"On Trial for My Life!" Many heroes, particularly with the artificial and unearthly origins, have questionable legal status. As mentioned under **Legal Identities**, heroes may run into trouble with the legal system and even go to trial to determine their rights and status.

SUPER-PRISONS

“J” is also for “Jail.” After super-criminals are convicted, the question becomes: What to do with them?

Most comic book universes feature some type of “super-prison.” It might be a specially modified wing of an existing prison or an independent facility dedicated to holding only super-criminals. There might be just one super-prison, perhaps under the authority of an international body, one such prison per region or nation, or several super-prisons.

LOCATION

The first question concerning a super-prison is: Where is it? Placing the prison close to a major urban area offers easy access, heroes can literally drop new prisoners off. On the other hand, having the prison close to an innocent population puts people at risk if there is a break-out or similar incident, and gives escapees access to resources and places to hide.

Conversely, putting the prison out in the middle of nowhere limits access and adds a layer of security, since escapees have to deal with the environment, but also adds the logistics of transporting prisoners to the facility, offering an opportunity for break-out attempts, and the need to ship supplies and personnel to the facility. Some super-prisons are *very* isolated, hidden away in deserts, arctic ice fields, the bottom of the ocean, or even in space or another dimension altogether.

RESTRAINT METHODS

The other primary question is: How do you contain super-powered prisoners? Answers usually involve some combination of the following:

- **Reinforced materials:** Cells and restraints strong enough to contain prisoners with high levels of Strength or damaging attacks.
- **Nullifiers:** Technology that generates a Nullification effect on prisoners, limiting their powers.
- **Countermeasures:** Use of prisoners’ weaknesses to contain them, such as keeping the cell of darkness-based inmate brightly lit, or a demon contained inside a magic circle.
- **Stasis:** Especially difficult or dangerous prisoners might be kept sedated, in suspended animation, or some form of stasis.

Some of these restraint methods can raise issues with civil rights and the fair treatment of prisoners, and their necessity must be weighed against the morality of their use.

"K" IS FOR "KNACKS"



Knacks are a special type of trait for **ICONS**, neither ability, specialty, nor power. A knack can have one of the following effects, chosen when the knack is created and acquired—substitution, bonus, power, or benefit:

- **Substitute** one ability level for another in relation to a specific kind of test or usage. Examples include swapping Strength for Willpower for intimidating ("My might is intimidating!") or Intellect for Coordination for Dodging ("Totally saw that one coming.").
- Provides a +2 **bonus** for a specific type of test in the form: "Because I [something unique about the character] I get a bonus when I [particular situation or test]." For example, "Because I once belonged to the criminal underworld, I get a bonus when I interact with criminals on their own terms."
- **Power** effect at a level equal to a "linked" ability. Note that this does not count as the "Ability-Linked" limit for powers that feature it (see the **Great Power** sourcebook for details).

- Provides a declared **benefit** the player can bring into play based on a specific Specialty, reflecting the character's knowledge, experience, or resources. For example, "As a Business Expert, I know a lot of people in this field. One of them should be able to help us out." This follows the same guidelines as a retcon.

Each knack a character has costs 1 level of Determination. If you think knacks sound a lot like the benefits of spending Determination Points, you're right: knacks are essentially permanent versions of a specific type of Determination spending, at the "cost" of a permanently "committed" point of Determination.

The key differences are that the player doesn't need to spend Determination to use a knack (other than the permanent point it costs) and therefore does not need to activate a Quality in order to use it. While players can use knacks an unlimited number of times during a game (unlike spending Determination) there are also likely to be adventures where the knack is of little or no use, where it might have been better to have that point of Determination available instead.

KNACKS AND HERO CREATION

Players can add knacks to their heroes during hero creation at the cost of 1 level of Determination per knack. Heroes are not required to have any knacks, and they are all chosen by the player, rather than rolled randomly.

SAMPLE KNACKS

The follow are just a sample of the full range of possible knacks. You can create a fairly extensive list of knacks for use in your game, and feel free to allow players to come up with their own as desired, using the guidelines given previously.

ANIMAL EMPATHY

Because of your strong connection with animals, you have a +2 bonus to tests to interact with them (see "**I is for Interaction**" for additional ideas). This knack also works as a model for other types of empathy with other specific kinds of creatures, such as aliens, demons, plants, machines, spirits or ghosts, and so forth.

ATTRACTIVE

Because you're attractive, you have a +2 bonus to tests where your good looks can influence the outcome.

BEGINNER'S LUCK

Because of your beginner's luck, you have a +2 bonus to tests when you are attempting something you've never tried before (and do not have any specialty in).

BULLET TIME

Your fighting skills and reflexes allow you to substitute your Prowess for Coordination for dodging reactions, allowing you to use Prowess to dodge ranged attacks.

COMMON SENSE

Whenever your hero is about to do something foolhardy or potentially hazardous, you have the benefit of the Game Master giving you a warning, usually in the form of "Are you *sure* you want to do that, because...?" Among other things, this allows an impulsive player to more easily play an aware and level-headed hero.

COSMIC AWARENESS

Due to your connection to higher powers, you can substitute your Awareness level for your Intellect to determine if you know things of a cosmic nature. You might also have the separate benefit of just being able to know certain things based on your connection to the cosmos—this counts as two knacks if you can do both.

DREADFUL PRESENCE

Your dreadful presence, appearance, or manner gives you Emotion Control at a level equal to your Willpower with the Burst extra, but limited only to causing fear.

FAVORED FOE

Because you have carefully studied a particular opponent, you gain a +2 bonus when making attack tests against that foe. This might include individual villains or a general type of bad guys like demons, Nazis, or robots.

GADGETEER

Your inventive genius is such that you have the Gadgets power at a level equal to your Intellect, so long as you have access to sufficient parts, equipment, and resources to assemble various gadgets.

GREAT ENDURANCE

Because of your great endurance, you get a +2 bonus to Strength tests to resist pain, fatigue, and otherwise carry on in the face of physical difficulties.

INSTANT UP

Do to your training in agility and combat reflexes, you have the benefit of being able to get up from being knocked prone as a reaction rather than a move action once per page.

INTERPOSE

Your protective reflexes are such that you have the benefit of being able to interpose yourself between an ally and an attack against that ally as a reaction rather than a move action once per page. The attack misses your ally and you become the new target of the attack, which is resolved against you normally.

LIVING LEGEND

You're incredibly well known and beloved, giving you the benefit of calling upon people for favors and generally getting favorable treatment. (See **“I” is for “Interaction”** for some additional detail.)

MASTER PLAN

Because of your knack for planning ahead, you get a +2 bonus on tests where you have the opportunity to plan all of the circumstances in advance.

MATCHLESS MIND

Your matchless mental discipline gives you Resistance to Mental Powers equal to your Intellect level.

MASTER OF DISGUISE

Your skill with make-up, costuming, and acting techniques gives you the effects of the Transformation power at a level equal to your Performance or Stealth specialty (whichever is higher) for impersonating other people.

MIND OVER MATTER

You use Willpower rather than Strength for tests of endurance, overcoming pain, and so forth.

POWER DEFENSE

You know how to use a power to defend yourself in combat, substituting that power's level for dodging reactions. The power has to be one you

actively use and you have to be capable of action in order to use it defensively.

PRECISE STRIKE

With your uncanny precision, you can substitute your Coordination or Intellect (choose one when you take this knack) for your Strength for damage with close combat attacks.

SPEED OF THOUGHT

You can substitute your Intellect or Awareness (choose one when you take this knack) for your Coordination for initiative tests.

STUNNING STRIKE

Your mastery of vital pressure points allows you to make a close Stunning attack at a level equal to your Strength (or another ability, chosen when you take this knack).

SWIFT DEFENSE

You can substitute your level in a movement power for your Coordination in order to dodge attacks. (This is essentially the same as the Defending extra of Super-Speed in **Great Power**.)

TEAMWORK

Because you are such an excellent team-player, you get a +2 bonus on all combined effort tests to assist someone else (see **Combined Effort** in **The Basics** chapter of **ICONS**).

TOTAL RECALL

You have the benefit of being able to exactly recall anything you have experienced, including details like memorizing entire written works or redrawing maps or diagrams from memory.

WEALTH

Because you have access to considerable financial and material resources, you have the benefit of being able to retcon many problems by throwing money at them. Things like travel or mundane goods, for example, are trivial for you. (See **“W” is for “Wealth”** for expanded options.)

WHIRLWIND STRIKE

You can attack swiftly enough to hit every target within close distance with a single action, applying the Burst extra to your unarmed strikes or a particular close weapon attack (chosen when you take this knack).

KNACKS & QUALITIES

Of course, some knacks can also easily be qualities, activated for a variety of advantages: "Living Legend" might even be both a quality *and* a knack, the knack not costing Determination (or requiring activation) while calling upon the quality requires both.

Even if you don't use knacks per se in your **ICONS** game, they can give you and your players some additional ways of looking at activating qualities for advantage to fill-in some of the details provided by other game systems, which the looser **ICONS** structure tends to leave out, putting such things in the players' hands to whip-up during play via Determination.

KNACKS AS STUNTS

As mentioned in the initial description, knacks are essentially permanent versions of advantages. This means you can also use the sample knacks and knack construction guidelines as a catalog of potential stunts for **ICONS** characters. Rather than spending a level of Determination to have a knack permanently, a player can spend a Determination Point in order to give a character a single use of a knack during play.

Similarly, players can outline different knacks appropriate for their heroes and, rather than spending the Determination levels necessary to have them as permanent traits, spend Determination Points in play as-needed to use those knacks, a "pay-to-play" approach like the other uses of Determination Points. Just be careful players don't create such giant catalogs of knacks that they can't keep track of them all and suffer from indecision during game-play!

KNACKS AS GENRE RULES

You may wish to institute some knacks, not as special abilities, but as default rules in your **ICONS** game, usable by all characters. This can reflect a preferred play style or modifications to the rules to suit a particular genre. In these cases, the knack is no longer a character trait, and therefore does not cost Determination, since anyone can use it at any time, just like any other rule.

For example, a strongly martial arts influenced game might allow Bullet Time, Mind Over Matter, Speed of Thought, and Stunning Strike as standard rules for all characters, without the need to take them as knacks.

"L" IS FOR "LOST WORLDS"



The exploration of the hidden corners and fantastic places of the world has been a part of the heroic genre from the beginning, and quickly found its way into the superhero comics, with some worlds fitting lost and hidden civilizations into every nook and cranny.

Lost worlds make for offbeat adventure locales, potential setting features for Universe Creation (see the **Game Mastering** chapter of the **Assembled Edition** of **ICONS**), and places for Unearthly characters—and sometimes those of other origins—to call home.

LOST WORLD CREATION

To create a quick lost world (or series of them), roll on the following tables, rolling once each for the lost world's location, what conceals it, and what causes or creates that concealment, then roll a die to determine how many different things the lost world contains and roll on the table to determine what those things are, either re-rolling duplicates or creating different versions of duplicates (such as two or more different kinds of creatures, hazards, and so forth) as you prefer.

d6	Location...	Contains 1d6 of...
1	Hidden in Plain Sight	Creatures
2	Island	Features
3	Underground	Hazards
4	Underwater	Inhabitants
5	Valley	Treasure
6	Wilderness	Weirdness

d6	Concealed by...	Caused by...
1	Barrier	Natural
2-3	Cloak	Magic
4-5	Dimensional Anomaly	Technology
6	Secret	Weirdness

As always, feel free to pick from the tables or adjust your rolls to suit your own inspiration.

LOCATION

Hidden in Plain Sight: The lost world is right *here*, but cannot easily be found or reached for some reason. It might be disguised as something seemingly innocuous or other than what it appears to be.

Island: The lost world is on an island, most likely far out in an ocean, isolated or surrounded by other islands, although it could be in a lake or other body of water.

Underground: The lost world site is under the ground, going down in layers from the sewer, storm drain, and subway tunnels under a city to ancient catacombs, or caverns and underground passages. There may even be a “hollow world” inside the planet containing one or more lost worlds. See **“E” is for “Environments** for more on underground settings.

Underwater: The lost world is under water, or is reached deep under water, whether an ocean, sea, lake, or the like, and might be far from shore (and quite deep) or relatively close by. The lost world site itself might be aquatic (see **“E” is for “Environments**) or an air-filled pocket of some sort.

Valley: The lost world is in an isolated or hidden valley, surrounded by cliffs or high mountain peaks. Alternately (a roll of 5–6 on a die, if you want to decide randomly) the lost world is on a high mountain peak or plateau.

Wilderness: The lost world setting is in some inhospitable wilderness far from civilization. It could be a desert, jungle, radioactive wasteland, or frozen tundra or glacier, to name a few.

CONTENTS

What will visitors find in the lost world setting? You can roll a die to determine the number of different results on the contents table, and then roll for each one, either re-rolling doubles or creating a different example of the same type of contents.

d6	Creatures	Inhabitants
1	Aliens	Aliens
2	Chimerical Hybrids	Castaways
3	Dinosaurs	Lost Civilization
4	Giant Creatures	Natives
5	Macro-form	Transformed
6	Mythic Creatures	Unearthly

Creatures: The lost world contains unusual or dangerous creatures other than just ordinary animals and plants.

- **Aliens:** The fauna (and possibly flora) of the lost world includes alien life forms from other planets or dimensions. Perhaps the site was an outpost, laboratory site, or “nature preserve” of some type for an alien race. See **“A” is for “Aliens”** to help create them.

- **Chimerical Hybrids:** Some or all of the creatures are combinations of ordinary Earth creatures, such as eagle-bears, serpent-wolves, shark-squids, or any other two or three animals you want to put together. This includes combining any animal with human for intelligent humanoid animals. The hybrids might be the result of genetic experimentation, chaos energy, occult rituals, or the like.
- **Dinosaurs:** Creatures from previous epochs of Earth's history survive in the lost world. This may include not only dinosaurs but megafauna like sabertooth tigers and woolly mammoths, to name a few. The creatures could have lived in the environment since their earthly cousins became extinct, or might be recreations via genetics or time-travel.
- **Giant Creatures:** The site is home to gigantic versions of ordinary Earth animals, or even insects, from giant apes and reptiles to giant moths or wasps, to name a few.
- **Macro-form:** Instead of being home to gigantic life forms, the entire lost world *is* a gigantic life form, a vast collective macro-form with a collective intelligence. It might be a hive-mind of distinct entities or a collective mass able to manifest seemingly separate creatures.
- **Mythic Creatures:** The lost world is a haven for creatures out of mythology, either a specific human culture, such as Greek, Japanese, or Indian, for example, or a mix of cultures throughout history. Griffons and dragons might lair in the mountains while herds of centaurs thunder across the plains and satyrs and unicorns dwell in the deep wood, for examples.

Features: The setting has prominent or unusual geographic features including, but not limited to: volcanos, waterfalls, ancient ruins, craters, caves, or high mountain peaks.

Hazards: The lost world setting is host to particular hazards or dangers other than those created by its other contents. Examples include plant- or mineral-based toxins, unusual diseases, malfunctioning technology (or magic), creeping madness, or strange radiation.

Inhabitants: The lost world has intelligent inhabitants who may or may not be originally from there.

- **Aliens:** An intelligent alien race lives in the lost world, possibly exiles or the last survivors of their species. See **"A" is for "Aliens"** to help create them.
- **Castaways:** Some people from Earth have become trapped in the lost world at some point. This could be survivors from an expedition, or the site might be a "Sargasso" of castaways lost there for years, even

centuries, explaining numerous mysterious disappearances. Some of the castaways might want to find a way out, while others have settled into new lives.

- **Lost Civilization:** The lost world is home to a “lost” civilization, a nearly perfectly preserved example of some historical human society, which may have adapted in some ways to its new home. The classic example is some version of the Roman Empire, but lost civilizations can include ancient Egypt, Babylon, or Sumeria, classical Greece, medieval Europe, Arabia, or Asia, ancient Aztecs, Olmecs, Incas, or Mayans, and so forth.
- **Natives:** The lost world has a native civilization, although “native” does not necessarily mean “primitive,” nor does it necessarily mean “human.” The natives might not have originated here, but they have lived here so long that they might as well have, and they have their own unique civilization and culture.
- **Transformed:** Some or all of the inhabitants have the transformed origin from **ICONS**, with corresponding powers and abilities.
- **Unearthly:** Some or all of the inhabitants have the Unearthly origin from **ICONS**, with corresponding powers and abilities.

Treasure: The site holds some type of valuable “treasure,” which may or may not be actual physical valuables. Treasures can include magical or technological knowledge or items, rare “X-element” materials, precious metals and gemstones, or cosmic Items of Power, to name a few.

Weirdness: There’s some weird, random thing about the setting, a catch-all for phenomena and contents not falling into the other categories. It might be a “zone of genre enforcement” for example, transforming visitors to suit its idiom (such as making characters into fantasy or historical analogues of their usual selves), nullifying certain powers, or having fantastic sites like floating islands.

CONCEALMENT

How does the lost world stay “lost” from the rest of human civilization?

Barrier: The setting is separated from the outside world by some type of barrier. It might be a dome of mysterious (and near-indestructible) material, a force field, a high wall or fence, or even a container like a bottle holding a shrunken miniature or the like. For an underground setting, the barrier might simply be vast layers of rock and metal, or specific sealed passageways.

Cloak: The lost world is cloaked against detection in some fashion. It might be protected by an invisibility or camouflage screen or impenetrable fog bank, shielded from being scanned by surveillance satellites (useful for an isolated wilderness setting) or even surrounded by a “somebody else’s problem” field that causes most casual observers to simply not notice the place and pass it by.

Dimensional Anomaly: Some anomaly of space, time, or dimension conceals the locale, effectively rendering it undetectable, and potentially making it difficult to get in and out. The lost world might exist in an isolated “pocket” dimension, or out of phase with ordinary space-time. It could be a “micro-verse” contained within a single molecule, or a “macro-verse” containing *our* entire universe inside one of its molecules!

Secret: The lost world’s primary concealment is that few, if any, people from the outside world know of its existence, location, or how to get there. This is easiest for settings with some other natural form of concealment, such as existing underground or underwater, although secret islands or valleys can exist, so long as you explain why no one has spotted them from orbit or the like.

SOURCE

What creates and sustains the lost world’s concealment? You may also want to consider how it was originally set in place and why.

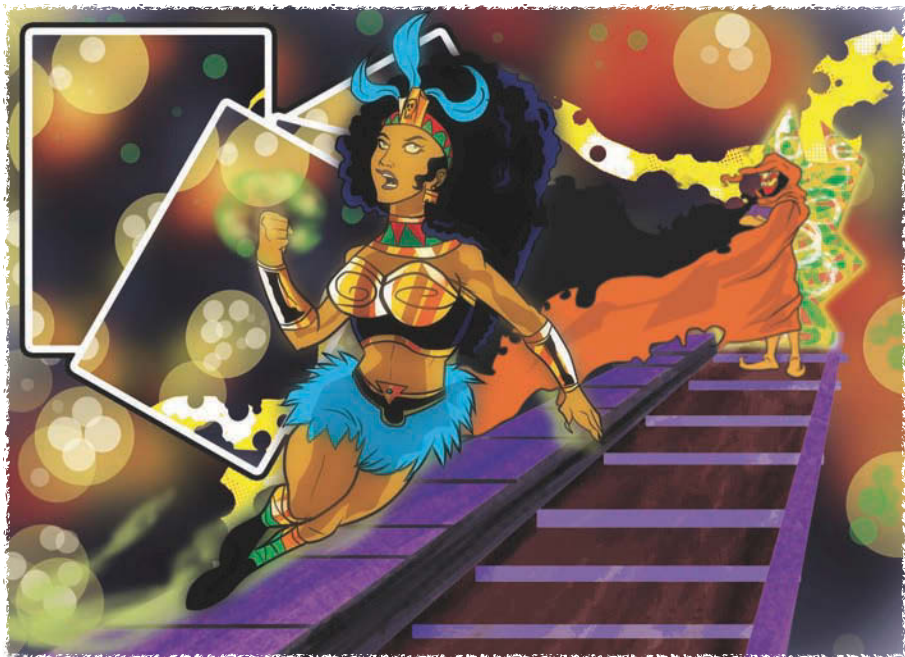
Magic: The lost world is concealed by magic, from an ancient enchantment woven by its founders or creators, to spells worked by its leaders or inhabitants, some of whom may have levels of Occult specialty or even the Magic power.

Natural: The concealment is a quirk of nature in some fashion, such as a confluence of dimensional energies, a nexus of ley lines, an arrangement of rare elements or materials, and so forth.

Technology: Advanced—possibly alien—technology conceals the lost world site from the outside world. It could be the work of whoever created the place, in which case its inhabitants may not even understand it, or it could be their technology, suggesting a technologically advanced civilization.

Weirdness: The lost world’s concealment is just plain weird. It might be the work of gods, spirits, or cosmic entities, or the effect of something outside of the human experience. Maybe the site is built in or around the corpse of an otherworldly entity, or formed of dream-stuff, or willed into existence by the unleashed powers of someone lying in a coma someplace. Who knows?

"M" IS FOR "MAGIC"



The mystic arts, occult powers far beyond the ken of ordinary mortals. It is in this shadowy world of mysticism that magicians of good intent maintain eternal vigilance against hordes of demons, corrupt wizards, evil gods, and cosmic conquerors from other dimensions, protecting an unsuspecting world from the threats they pose.

The **Assembled Edition** of **ICONS** provides basic information on the Magic power and the **Great Power** sourcebook offers an expanded version. This article offers more detail on the mystic arts, with additional information and options usable by players and Game Masters alike.

Magic is the study of forces and how to use them to cause things to happen. Magicians who learn how to manipulate the right energies in the proper way can do almost *anything*, limited only by the extent of their knowledge and will.

THE MAGIC POWER

While many powers may be magical in nature, Magic is a singular power, the ability to harness certain energies to cast a variety of spells. While Magic is often learned, whether from books or a teacher, it may also be bestowed in a variety of ways, depending on the character's origin. A trained magician may have studied for years while a gimmick has an item like a helm, amulet, or wand, granting the Magic power. A birthright or unearthly origin might have innate Magic they have learned to master.

Regardless of origin, wielders of Magic tend to be classified into three levels based on their power and versatility: novice, adept, and master.

NOVICE

The majority of magicians are “novices,” dabblers who have learned a few spells, but do not have the power or versatility of a true Master of the Mystic Arts.

Novices generally have a Good (level 5) or lower level of Magic and can cast spells to duplicate a limited list of powers, as follows: Astral Projection, Binding, Blast, Dazzle, Detection (Magic), Dimensional Travel, ESP, Flight, Force Field, Illusion, Life Support, Servant, Stunning, Telekinesis, Telepathy and Teleportation.

ADEPT

Magicians with a Magic level of Great (6) or higher are true adepts, able to cast spells to duplicate virtually any power. Magic does not normally allow a mage (even a master) to affect their own body, ability scores or skills. For this reason, mages often make use of various helpers and henchmen to handle physical matters.

The following powers generally cannot be duplicated using Magic: Ability Boost, Ability Increase, Alter Ego, Cosmic Power, Extra Body Parts, Gadgets, Healing, Immortality (apart from rumors of secret rituals granting it), Interface, Mimicry, and Regeneration. This is not a hard-and-fast rule, but the Game Master should consider carefully before allowing a magician to duplicate these powers.

MASTER

A true master of the mystic arts typically has Incredible (7) or greater powers, but it is not just sheer power that makes a master, it is skill. Mystic masters often have one or more Mastery extras on their Magic power, spells they have honed until they are second nature, and can be invoked at a moment's notice. The Psychic extra from Great Power is also common for

masters, allowing them to use their magic to duplicate mental or sensory powers like Astral Projection, Detection, ESP, and Telepathy with nothing more than concentration and focus.

SCHOOLS OF MAGIC

Magic is often divided into different “schools,” also known as orders, paths, styles, or traditions. Each school of magic encompasses a basic philosophy and various techniques or spellcasting and may have certain “signature” powers or spells. Examples include (but are not limited to):

- **Chaos:** The school of chaos rests upon the foundation of the cosmos as a chaotic, meaningless place where a magician can impose change.
- **Divine:** Magic—miracles really—drawing upon celestial divine powers and the blessings of a god or gods.
- **Infernal:** Magic granted by or taken from infernal, demonic forces. See **“D” is for “Demons”** for additional resources.
- **Nature:** Associated with pagan or Earth-reverent traditions, nature magic draws its power from the elements and forces of the natural world.
- **Necromantic:** Conversely, necromancy deals with the forces of death and decay, and summoning and commanding the spirits of the dead.
- **Order:** The school of order believes there is an inherent purpose to everything and magic properly defends this cosmic order.

Schools of magic are most often used as qualities, or parts of qualities, to describe and define a particular magician, such as “Agent of the Archons of Order” or “Last of the Druids” (a Nature school), for examples.

MAGICAL DEVICES

As the Assembled Edition of Icons and Great Power both note, devices can be magical in nature rather than (or as well as) technological, and some magical characters are gimmicks who derive their powers from enchanted talismans and objects of power.

- **Alteration Devices** are typically things that are worn, such as belts, jewelry, or clothing (particularly capes and cloaks) or things that are consumed like potions.
- **Control Devices** tend to be wands, staffs, crowns, and similar symbols of authority, although gems and crystals are also common.
- **Defensive Devices** can be actual armor or shields or various sorts of amulets, rings, bracers, or protective cloaks.

- **Mental Devices** are typically crowns, circlets, or other headwear or crystals or gemstones, or some combination of the two.
- **Movement Devices** may be clothing, particularly gloves, boots, or cloaks, or magical vehicles ranging from carpets to broomsticks.
- **Offensive Devices** include enchanted weapons as well as wands, rings, or gauntlets projecting an offensive power.
- **Sensory Devices** are most often masks, lenses, or scrying devices like crystals, mirrors, or pendulums.

THE ASTRAL PLANE

Some magical heroes venture into an “astral” or “ethereal” plane of existence in the course of their adventures.

GETTING THERE

One of the key challenges of the astral plane is getting there in the first place. You need the Astral Projection power to send your spirit form into the astral realm or the Dimensional Travel power to go and take your body along for the ride. Dimensional Travel also offers the potential to bring others with you or open a portal between the two realms. At the Game Master’s discretion the Phasing power may also interface with the astral plane; it could be where the character’s mass goes while physical appearance remains on this plane of existence.

Heroes may also find getting *back* from the astral plane a challenge. An astral projector could be blocked from returning to his body by a force field, magical ward, or similar countermeasure, or simply by finding their body already occupied by another spirit! Likewise, travelers to the astral realm could find their return blocked by magical or technological means to “harden” the walls between worlds. Returning could become a pyramid test with specific parameters based around overcoming these difficulties.

PERCEPTION

Perceptions in the astral realm may be distorted. The GM can play with distances, with things appearing much closer or further away than they actually are. A specialty in the Occult (or a related psychic discipline) may add to Awareness tests on the astral at the GM’s discretion, allowing knowledgeable and experienced characters to notice things there they might otherwise overlook.

MOVEMENT

Movement on the astral plane is as easy and swift as thought, or as slow and difficult as a nightmare, depending on the circumstances. Most of the time, astral beings can move quickly and easily, unhindered by gravity or physical obstacles (through which they pass harmlessly). Certain mystic forces (or foes) can shape the stuff of the astral realm to make things difficult, however, and the GM can place traps and other challenges in the heroes' path.

CONFLICT

Conflict for heroes who have physically entered the astral is similar to the real world, although affected by local influences on movement, perception, and so forth.

For astral projectors, conflict in the astral realm is entirely a matter of mind and spirit, not body. Use the hero's mental abilities in place of the corresponding physical abilities: Astral Prowess is equal to Intellect, Astral Coordination is equal to Awareness, and Astral Strength is equal to Willpower. A character might be a 90-pound weakling in the physical world, but a powerhouse on the astral plane!

POWERS

A mental and mystical realm, the astral plane is most attuned to mental powers and mystical ones like Magic. Physical powers—technological devices, in particular—may not function as expected there. The Game Master can cause trouble by having a hero's powers disrupted or changed on the astral in some way in order to spice-up astral adventures and provide opportunities for the heroes better-suited to working on the astral plane to strut their stuff.

MAGICAL CREATURES

All of the creatures of myth, imagination, and nightmares exist somewhere in the magical world, and can show up in adventures involving magic and magicians. The following are just some of the magical creatures you can include in your **ICONS** games.

For additional stock characters and creatures suited to magical **ICONS** adventures, see **"D" is for "Demons"** and the Game Mastering chapter of the Assembled Edition, particularly for Cultists, Ninjas, and Zombies, as well as Pythons, Swarms, Vipers, Wolves, and dinosaurs!

DRAGON

PROWESS	COORD.	STRENGTH	INTELLECT	AWARENESS	WILLPOWER	STAMINA
5	3	8	3	3	4	12

Powers: Blast 7 (fiery breath), Damage Resistance 4 (tough scales), Extra Body Parts (Wings) 3, Strike 6 (slashing bite and claws)

Qualities: Engine of Destruction, Primordial Power

Great fire-breathing reptiles of legend, dragons sometimes serve powerful magicians, or magicians assume draconic form to do battle. Dragons are sometimes powerful sorcerers themselves, having the Magic power and Occult specialty in addition to their other abilities.

ELEMENTAL

PROWESS	COORD.	STRENGTH	INTELLECT	AWARENESS	WILLPOWER	STAMINA
3	3	6	2	3	3	9

Powers: Alternate Form 6 (Energy, Fluid, Gaseous, or Solid)

Qualities: Elemental Nature

Elementals are composed entirely of one of the four ancient elements of Air, Earth, Fire, or Water, existing in a permanent Alternate Form. Some powerful elementals have higher levels of Alternate Form or additional powers related to their element, particularly Element Control.

GARGOYLE

PROWESS	COORD.	STRENGTH	INTELLECT	AWARENESS	WILLPOWER	STAMINA
3	3	4	2	3	3	7

Specialties: Aerial Combat

Powers: Damage Resistance 5, Extra Body Parts (Wings) 3, Life Support 10

Qualities: Hideous Guardian, Solid As Stone

Gargoyles are hideous, demonic humanoid figures with bat-like wings, animated by magic as servants and guardians. Their traits also serve well for similar horned and bat-winged flying demons.

"N" IS FOR "NARRATIVE ABILITIES"



ICONS generally takes a fairly light approach towards abilities in terms of defining heroes, using just attributes, specialties, powers, and qualities to do so. However, some may prefer an even lighter touch when it comes to defining characters in terms of the game system.

This **A to Z** takes a look at a way to do that, along with an approach that replaces the Stamina score from **Icons** with a narrative system for the effects of damage and strain heroes encounter during adventures. As with all variant and optional systems, consider carefully the overall impact of these changes on your game and implement them on a trial basis to see if they work with the style of **ICONS** game you want to run.

NARRATIVE ABILITIES

In this more freeform approach, characters have *no* numerically quantified abilities: no attributes, specialties, or powers, just qualities and Determination, which is set at the starting value of 6 for all of the player characters (since there are no powers or high level abilities to adjust Determination level). Game Masters may wish to allow for more than three starting qualities with this approach, to allow for more description of the characters—as many as five or six—but this is not necessary.

In addition the qualities, players should write a short, narrative description of their heroes, which may include their qualities (called out in bold or colored text for reference). For example:

*All-American Girl, the **Princess of Power**, was **Trained by All-Star** originally as his sidekick, but graduated from that role to become a hero in her own right. Natalie Prentis was infused with a portion of All-Star's power by an accident when she saved him from a trap set by the Ultra-Mind, giving her incredible strength, stamina, and the power of flight. She's determined to do her mentor proud and her motto is "**I can handle this!**"*

All tests in this variant are a straight-up die roll: 1d6 for the player with 1d6 from the GM subtracted from it (or the player rolling 1d6 - 1d6) for a result of -5 to +5, modified only by advantage such as increased effort from activating a quality or qualities.

NARRATIVE INTERPRETATION

The interpretation of the outcome of a test varies depending on the character, description, and action(s) attempted. For example, since All-American Girl is described as having incredible strength, if she achieves a major success in an effort to escape from being chained up, then she probably does it by simply snapping the chains apart.

Other heroes lacking such physical power in their descriptions might escape the chains using other described powers or capabilities, such as picking the locks or using escape artist techniques to slip out of them, or even using some aspect of the environment or tricking someone else into freeing them.

The narrative abilities approach gives all characters essentially equal capability from a story standpoint: a success is a success, it's just a matter of interpreting *how* the character is successful in the context of the narrative.

AUTOMATIC SUCCESS AND FAILURE

In some cases using this approach there will be times when the situation and the description of the character makes it clear that either no success is possible (the character is a normal human who wants to lift a building, for example) or no test is necessary (the character is described as one of the world's greatest archers and wants to hit a stationary target just to show off her skills). In these instances, the GM can just declare a failure or success based on description and qualities with a die roll or test. If the outcome is in doubt, or the character's efforts are opposed in any way (such as the archer shooting at a moving target) then a test is appropriate.

In cases where the GM declares the effort would be an automatic failure, the player may have the opportunity to rephrase the action or approach it differently, based on the character's description, to have a chance of success. For example, perhaps Hangman has no chance of overcoming the Troll's fantastic toughness with a simple punch, but the Grim Sentinel of Justice could try an attack that turns the Troll's great strength against him to hurl him off the bridge (and even catch him in the Noose of Justice as he does so, with a high enough outcome).

NARRATIVE DAMAGE

In this variant, Stamina is not used to track damage in conflicts. You can use narrative damage in conjunction with the regular numerical abilities and resolution in **ICONS** or with the narrative abilities option, previously. In fact, if using the narrative abilities option, you should also use narrative damage, since characters by definition don't have numerical abilities like Stamina.

STRAIN

One outcome of tests is **strain**, the taxing of a character's capabilities. Like all outcomes, strain is measured in four degrees: marginal, moderate, major, and massive.

Characters can have only one instance of each degree of strain: a second instance causes the strain to "roll up" to the next degree. So a hero with moderate strain who suffers another moderate degree of strain has the two moderate degrees roll up to major, but the hero now has major strain but no moderate strain (and could suffer another degree of moderate strain).

Anyone suffering a massive degree of strain is incapacitated, out of action until able to recover. Otherwise, accumulated strain has no effect on a character other than making it difficult to deal with additional degrees of strain without becoming incapacitated.

Characters acquire degrees of strain in two ways: first, it is imposed on them as part of the outcome of a conflict, ranging from the physical punishment of an attack to psychological shock or emotional trauma. Second, strain may sometimes be the result of degrees of failure on a test, particularly a costly pyramid test, but also tests involving some degree of risk, such as escaping from a burning or collapsing structure.

In some cases, strain is directly from the outcome of an action, in others, such as damaging attacks, it results from the comparison of the attacker's damage level and the defender's resistance level, modified by the degree of success from the initial attack action. In this second case, a major success increases the damage level by 1, while a massive success increases it by 2.

Example: *All-American Girl is fighting against Troll and the Alliance of Evil. Since she's flying out of reach, Trolls snaps off a telephone pole and swings it. The GM rolls a 4 + Troll's Prowess 7 for an effort of 11. All-American Girl's player rolls a 3 + her Coordination 4 and Athletics for a difficulty of 8. That's a major success for Troll! The GM then compares All-American Girl's Damage Resistance of 7 to the Troll's Strength of 9, with +1 for the major success on the attack. That's enough for another major success, meaning America's Sweetheart now has major strain from the hit (and the telephone pole breaks, as Troll's Strength is greater than the level of its material).*

OPTION: MULTIPLE STRAIN TRACKS

By default, characters have a single strain "track" of four degrees from marginal to massive. If you wish, you can differentiate between types of strain, such as physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, or other descriptors, tracking their effects separately.

It is only when one of these strain tracks reaches a massive degree that the character is incapacitated, and it may have different meanings and implications based on the track. For example, an emotionally incapacitated character might be utterly defeated and unable to take further action whereas a physically incapacitated character is unconscious or perhaps even badly injured.

In the case of multiple strain tracks, which type of strain a character is looking to cause can affect the outcome and effectiveness of a test: A target resistant to physical strain, for example, might be taken down by mental or spiritual strain, whereas a physically ordinary character might have a tremendous capacity for mental strain.

You can even sub-divide types of strain such as splitting the physical strain track into lethal (burns, cuts, wounds, etc.) and non-lethal (bruises and stunning), depending on how you want to measure the effects.

RECOVERY

Characters recover strain in-between chapters, unless they have specific powers allowing them to recover during action time.

You can just assume characters erase all levels of strain after a chapter, or you can require a recovery test: this is a difficulty 3 test of an ability, based on the type of strain (Strength for physical, Willpower for mental, for example). The outcome of the test determines the highest level of strain the character removes.

Example: *All-American Girl* get a breather after the fight with the Alliance and makes a Strength test, rolling 2 + Strength 7 for a 9. The GM rolls 3 + difficulty 3 for a 6. That's a major success for *All-American Girl*, meaning she eliminates up to major strain, enough to bounce-back from the hit Troll gave her during the fight.

In some cases, another character may be able to make the recovery test for someone else, or provide assistance (see **Combined Effort** in **The Basics** chapter of **Icons the Assembled Edition**). This can represent anything from medical treatment to a friend lending a sympathetic ear to help overcome mental or emotional strain.

Advantage: Using advantage to recover removes the character's highest degree of strain. So if a hero has moderate and major strain and uses advantage to recover, erase the major strain, leaving the hero with just moderate.

Healing and Regeneration: The Healing or Regenerations powers allow characters tests to recover during action time, using the power's level in place of an ability, with the outcome of the test determining the level of strain recovered. These powers generally only affect physical strain but, at the GM's option, there might be extras or variants affecting other types of strain as well.

CONSEQUENCES

Another outcome of tests is **consequences**, limiting a character in various ways. Consequences are also measured in degrees: moderate, major, and massive. There are no marginal consequences.

Moderate consequences impose a temporary penalty, such as -1 to an ability or type of test for a page, the loss of the character's next turn (taking no actions for a page), getting knocked down, and so forth. The consequence lasts until the end of the character's next turn or takes an action to remove.

Major consequences either impose a greater penalty, equal to a -2 on an ability or type of test, getting knocked into the next distance, or the equivalent of a moderate consequence that lasts longer, at least a number of pages equal to the effect level, perhaps as long as full scene.

Massive consequences are quite serious, equal to a -3 penalty or even the loss of an ability (ranging from a power to vision or the ability to walk, for example). A major consequence lasts for at least the rest of the story, and may require special treatment or other aid for the character to recover, at the GM's option.

Some consequences are the direct outcome of tests, but characters also have the option of trading a degree of strain for a consequence of equal degree. The character suffers the consequence and not the strain. So, for example, a character who suffers moderate strain from a hit may choose to take a moderate consequence instead, such as being stunned and unable to act for a page.

The primary limitation on this option is characters cannot trade strain for consequence if they already have a consequence of that degree. So a character already suffering from a major consequence cannot choose to trade major strain for another consequence. The decision to trade strain for consequence must be made when the strain occurs and cannot be done later.

Stun, Slam & Kill Results: In the Narrative Damage option, consequences largely replace stun, slam and kill results from the standard **ICONS** rules. The only effect of higher degrees of success on attack tests is a higher degree of outcome for strain, either directly or as a bonus to damage or effect level.

OPTION: USING YOUR PAIN

Since consequences are essential a kind of temporary quality, there may be instances where characters can activate a consequence for advantage or to cause trouble like any other quality. This can represent the pain of an injury driving a character forward, or causing some distraction, or harnessing the emotional energy of some psychological consequence for a sudden surge of effort or a breakthrough leading to a new stunt.

OPTION: CONSEQUENCES & STAMINA

Consequences can work in conjunction with the regular Stamina rules from **ICONS**. In this case, rather than replacing a degree of strain, a consequence reduces the amount of Stamina lost to damage, based on its degree: 2 points for a moderate consequence, 4 for major, and 6 points for a massive consequence.

"O" IS FOR "ORGANIZATIONS"



A wide variety of organizations feature in superhero comic books, from law-enforcement and government “black ops” programs to ancient cults and conspiracies devoted to taking over the world. Some organizations may aid heroes, others oppose them, and a few only incidentally become involved in their affairs, usually because something the organization has or does draws the attention of a hero or villain.

This chapter of **A to Z** offers additional guidelines and traits for handling organizations, and the legions of agents that often come with them.

AGENTS

Organizations have **agents**, individuals (although not necessarily *humans*) who carry out the organization's agenda and work to fulfill its goals. Agents are essentially the organizational version of the Servant power from **ICONS**, only on a larger scale. While a hero might have multiple servants, an organization typically has dozens, if not hundreds or thousands, of agents. An interstellar or inter dimensional organization could even have *millions* of agents—or more!

AGENT

PROWESS	COORD.	STRENGTH	INTELLECT	AWARENESS	WILLPOWER	STAMINA
3	3	3	3	3	3	6

Specialties: Guns, Martial Arts

Devices: Blaster Pistol (Blast 4)

Qualities: Loyal to the Agency, One of Many, Outfitted Agent

This represents the “stock” agent character with very little embellishment. More realistic agents may have regular firearms rather than a blaster, along with other mundane equipment. Activate the “Outfitted Agent” quality to retcon important equipment as needed. Activate “One of Many” to cause trouble for the heroes by having more agents appear as back-up.

Variations on the basic agent include Cultists, Henchmen, Ninjas, Soldiers, Thugs, and Zombies from the **Stock Characters** section of the **Assembled Edition** of **ICONS**, as well as:

- **Armored Agents** with 1–3 levels of Damage Resistance from body armor, making them a bit tougher.
- **Powered Agents** with one or more powers, either innate or provided by devices, based on the theme of the organization. Some powered agents may have the Artificial origin, being constructs such as robots or undead.
- **Self-Destructing Agents** that dissolve, burst into flames, or even explode (like a Burst) when they are reduced to 0 Stamina or captured.
- **Squad Agents** under the command of an agent with one or more levels of the Leadership specialty, providing them with some benefits in terms of maneuvers and activating qualities via teamwork. An effective squad of agents can also be handled using combined effort (see the following).

AGENTS & COMBINED EFFORT

One means of handling large groups of well-coordinated agents is by using the rules for **Combined Effort** from **The Basics** chapter of **ICONS**: treat the squad as a single entity with the basic abilities of a single agent, +1 level per doubling of the number of agents present and able to combine their efforts. So two agents is +1, four is +2, eight is +3, sixteen is +4, and so forth. The GM sets a reasonable limit on the number of agents able to coordinate on a particular test in terms of the ability modifier.

The combined group of agents also has effective Stamina equal to the sum of all of the agents involved, with each agent's-worth of Stamina meaning the loss of one of its members. Burst area attacks and other effects that target areas or whole groups can take out multiple agents—and even the entire group—all at once.

ORGANIZATIONS AS QUALITIES

Apart from their individual agents, one way of defining organizations in **ICONS** is as qualities, activated for advantage or trouble when the organization is relevant to the story.

The organization itself might be a self-contained quality, usually just the name of the organization, such as “ULTRA Labs” or accompanied by added description, such as “ULTRA Labs, Cutting-Edge Research.” Alternately, it can be part of another quality, such as “Agent of ARROW” or “On the Run from MURK”.

ORGANIZATION ADVANTAGES

Players can activate an organization quality during play for an advantage just like any other quality. Consider some of the following possibilities:

- **Improved Effort:** This benefit might stem from the character's extensive training or experience with the organization (“Because I ‘Trained with the League of Shadows...”), the character's loyalty to, or dislike for, the organization, or even from the presence of the organization or its agents, such as gaining improved effort on an interaction because of an organization's reputation or influence.
- **Insight:** Many organizations have extensive information resources, ranging from research libraries and secret archives to intelligence-gathering

networks and spies. Government agencies may have access to classified information while scientific organizations have cutting-edge research.

- **Push Ability:** Similar to improve effort, a character's experience with, feelings towards, or support from an organization could aid in pushing an ability just that extra measure.
- **Recover:** This advantage might also come from training, experience, or inspiration from an organization but is more likely attributed to some resource the organization provides, like an "ace-in-the-hole" device, power, or one-time blessing. ("As you know because I am a Templar of the Church Universal, I can sometimes recover quite rapidly, when there is a need.")
- **Retcon:** This category covers a great number of advantages an organization can supply, particularly as part of a character's background, and offers an opportunity to drop hints about said background when activating the quality. ("Because I'm 'On the Run from Majestic-7' I've had to conceal the truth about a lot of things, including...")
- **Stunt:** While the stunt gained from activating an organization quality could represent training, experience, or research involving the organization, it can also include things like devices provided by the organization ("This force beam can also be adjusted to create a force field!") or calling upon assistance from others in the organization. ("Because I'm a 'High-Ranking Agent of the Telsa Institute,' I should be able to access their secret teleport network, at least this once.")

ORGANIZATION TROUBLE

Just like all other qualities, players and the GM can also activate organization qualities to cause trouble for a character, such as:

- **Challenge:** A catch-all of the organization (or the character's connection to it) posing some problem. This can include internal matters of the organization, such as ordered handed down from above, blocking characters from a particular course of action, or running afoul of the organization's limits or regulations, or it might be something like trouble involving one of the organization's rivals or enemies, or budget-cuts foreclosing certain opportunities.
- **Compulsion:** This is an even more extreme version of "orders from above," particularly if the organization *does* have the ability to compel its agents or members in some fashion. Perhaps the mysterious Heads of the Space Patrol tell their officers stationed on Earth not to interfere in a particular matter, or order them to report to their home base in a distant star-system just as something is happening back home. As with other

compulsions (and forms of trouble) the players can refuse, but may still have the deal with the consequences, creating new trouble sometime in the future.

- **Disability:** This trouble is most likely to come up if the organization has the ability to withhold some of the character's abilities in some way. Perhaps a hero draws some of her power from a "broadcast beam" or regular infusions of an exotic drug or radiation. The organization controlling that resource can withhold it, or it can be stolen or otherwise disabled. Maybe refusing the summons of the Space Patrol means the officers' Astro Armor ceases to function until they report in!
- **Increased Difficulty:** Sometimes, association with an organization is not an advantage, but actually makes things more difficult. A hero who is a known agent of a governmental organization, for example, might encounter increasing difficulty in dealing with anti-government factions, who simply refuse to listen to what "The Man" has to say, or otherwise assume the character is a dupe or pawn. Likewise, blind-spots in an organization's training or procedures might cause increased difficulty for characters in some circumstances.
- **Lost Panel:** This type of trouble tends to represent a distraction or some kind, in this case related to the organization. It could be a "handler" or "control" who is in constant radio contact, or an insistent incoming communication from headquarters (particularly if it's something beamed directly into the character's mind). A lost panel might also represent an internal struggle, where the character hesitates, torn between duty and a sense of what's right, for example, or confronted with the disturbing possibility that the organization is not what it appears to be.

FUN WITH ACRONYMS

Organizations in superhero settings have a tendency towards elaborate acronyms: long names were the first letter of each word, taken together, spells out another word (like ULTRA or POWER, for example). Government agencies also tend to go in for abbreviations, whether they are acronyms or not, such as the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) or the CBO (Congressional Budget Office) and you can be sure that government-run agencies involving superheroes will be the same. While a comprehensive acronym generator is beyond the scope of this chapter, consider some fun-sounding acronyms for organizations in your own **ICONS** game to add comic book style to them.

ORGANIZATION ABILITIES

Organizations can also be quantified much like characters in their own right, with various attribute levels they use for tests, and perhaps qualities of their own.

ORGANIZATION ATTRIBUTES

The attributes defining organizations are different from those that define characters. An organization has three attributes: Influence, Resources, and Security:

Influence measures the organization's ability to get things done, both overtly and behind the scenes. An Average organization has relatively little influence, primarily in a local area, whereas a Supreme organization could potentially rule the world (if it doesn't already do so).

Resources reflect the organization's material and personnel resources, from sheer wealth to things like property and equipment. See **"W" is for "Wealth"** for additional guidelines.

Security measures both the organization's resistance to outside influences and infiltration as well as the overall physical security of its facilities and resources. It is used as a general resistance attribute for tests against the organization.

ORGANIZATION SPECIALTIES

At the GM's option, you can further refine an organization by assigning specialties to its attributes. For example, an organization might have Good Influence but also be a Master of Covert Operations, giving it Fantastic Influence in that area. Another organization with Fair Resources could be an Expert in Military Operations, giving it Great Resources there, and so forth.

ORGANIZATION QUALITIES

An organization can have its own qualities, just like characters do, which can be activated for advantage and to cause trouble. This can range from "Hidden Alien Conspiracy" to "Devoted to the Ideal of the American Dream" or "Defeat One of Us, and Two More Will Take His Place." As with other qualities in **ICONS**, the GM approves qualities assigned to organizations, and may wish to limit the number to three or less, although larger and older organizations may accumulate more, just as characters do through achievement and change.

"P" IS FOR "PETS"



For almost as long as there have been superheroes, there have been faithful animal sidekicks and “super-pets” to serve as companions, allies, and (occasionally) comic relief for their heroic friends. While the notion of “super-pets” has gone from virtually every hero seeming to have one to a fairly rare concept in the modern-day comics, there are plenty of options for including pets and animal allies in your own **ICONS** game, including handling them as qualities of characters, servant or supporting characters, or even heroes and villains in their own right.

This **A to Z** chapter makes use of the various stock creatures found in the **Creatures** section of the **Game Mastering** chapter of the **Assembled Edition** of **ICONS**. You may find it useful to have that section on-hand for reference when using the options described here.

PETS AS QUALITIES

The simplest means of handling pets and other allied creatures is by treating them as qualities of their associated hero, such as “Spangle, the American Eagle” or “Crowley, Black Cat Familiar,” which can be activated for advantage or to cause trouble, just like any other quality in the game.

ADVANTAGE

Sometimes the hero gains an advantage from the pet, such as the benefit of improved effort (often a kind of combined effort), insight from the pet’s senses, knowledge or ability to serve as a scout, or a stunt reflecting one of the pet’s powers or abilities. Pet qualities are great for last-second rescues or getting messages to allies (“What’s that Spangle? All-American Girl has been *captured*? You want us to follow you?”).

TROUBLE

Similarly, a pet quality can cause trouble for the hero from time to time, as a curious pet goes off on its own, gets captured, used as bait, or chases cars in the downtown area, but with the ability to tear off bumpers or lift entire sedans into the air! Loving and well-meaning super-pets may also not be able to tell the difference between a hero’s costumed and secret identities. As with all instances of trouble, the hero earns Determination Points when these things happen.

PETS AS SERVANTS

Pets and other animal allies may be a reflection of the Servant power, either summoned by the hero as-needed, or effectively permanent always-present servants, meaning the hero never needs to summon them or maintain the power, nor can it be nullified or turned off, but the hero can be deprived of the pets or servants if they are not close by. The latter is a variant of Servant with effectively no modifier, as the benefits and drawbacks tend to even out.

Animal servants are created just like others called upon by the power: a pool of (power level x 4) points allocated to the servant’s abilities. Although servants have no mental abilities by default, the GM can choose to assign animal levels of ability for free, typically Weak (1) Intelligence, and Average (3) Awareness and Willpower, with the option of spending some of the servant’s pool of points to improve those abilities. The Multiple Servants option allows for groups or packs of animal servants and the Enhanced and Sensory Link extras are common for characters who summon animal servants.

ANIMAL SIZE

Animals range in size from almost microscopic to massive creatures weighing tons. **ICONS** Game Masters can use the Growth and Shrinking powers as a rough guideline for determining an animal's overall physical abilities based on size, as well as a relevant modifier to defense and tests to go unnoticed, essentially assigning the animal permanent levels in either power. Note that while the Shrinking power does not affect Strength level by default, small animals tend to have low Strength levels, and the GM will want to take this into account when creating them.

ANIMAL SIDEKICKS

If you are using the optional sidekick rules from **ICONS Team-Up** (published by Adamant Entertainment), you can choose to treat super-pets and animal companions as sidekicks, creating them according to the same guidelines. To determine this randomly, roll 1d6: on a roll of 1, the sidekick is actually an animal sidekick rather than a person. Otherwise, animal sidekicks follow all of the guidelines given in **Team-Up**, including being based on two-thirds of the hero's point total (using the optional point-based hero creation rules) as well as the guidelines given in **Pets as Characters** (following).

PETS AS CHARACTERS

If the players are creating animals as characters for them to play, or you just want to come up with a random super-pet, add the following roll for type of animal before the initial roll for origin using the rules from the **Hero Creation** chapter of **ICONS**:

2d6 roll	Animal Type
2	Aquatic
3-4	Avian
5-6	Rural
7-9	Domestic
10-11	Rodent
12	Exotic

Aquatic animals include amphibians and aquatic mammals as well as fish. Roll 1d6 for additional type: 1 = fish, 2 = frog, 3 = turtle, 4 = dolphin, 5 = octopus (or squid), 6 = crustacean (crab or lobster). The animal has the Aquatic power in addition to any rolled powers and may take a movement power of the player’s choice in place of a rolled power.

Avian animals include birds of all kinds as well as bats and can include domestic birds like chickens, turkeys, and common pets like parrots as well as species of wild birds like hawks, eagles, and owls.

Rural animals are common barnyard species found on farms. Roll 1d6 for additional type: 1 = goat, 2 = sheep, 3 = pig, 4 = cow, 5 = horse, 6 = donkey.

Domestic animals are the most common species kept as house-pets. Roll 1d6 for additional type: 1-3 = cat, 4-6 = dog.

Rodent includes animals properly part of the order *Rodentia* as well as small, often domesticated, animals like ferrets. Roll 1d6 for additional type: 1 = rabbit or hare, 2 = rat, 3 = mouse (also hamsters), 4 = squirrel, 5 = beaver, 6 = ferret or weasel.

Exotic animals are everything else, including domesticated reptiles (snakes and lizards), apes and monkeys, and strange creatures ranging from alien blobs to tiny dragons.

In addition to any power modifications due to species and origin and any randomly rolled powers, animals have an appropriate level of permanent Growth or Shrinking according to their size (see **Animal Size** and the following table). Adjust for the animal’s actual size; a “giant” mouse, for example, might be as big as a dog, having only Shrinking 3. Animals able to change their size apply levels of Growth or Shrinking on top of their innate, permanent levels, so an enlarging mouse, for example, would need Growth 6 to grow to human-sized (negating its naturally tiny size).

Power Level	Sample Animals
Shrinking 6	Mouse, hamster, goldfish
Shrinking 5	Rat, squirrel, small bird
Shrinking 4	Cat, ferret, bird, small dog, turtle
Shrinking 3	Dog, monkey, octopus
—	Most animals larger than 3 feet but smaller than 9 feet
Growth 1	Horse

THE SUPER-PETS SERIES

With animals as characters, you can use **ICONS** to run an entire series based around “super-pet” characters and their exploits, often going on behind the scenes of a regular comic book universe.

ANIMAL COMMUNICATION

In a super-pets series, where the heroes (and often the villains) are all different sorts of animals, the default assumption is that animals can all “talk” to each other somehow, communicating verbally through whatever vocalizations, sounds, or gestures they make and comprehending each other, but that animals cannot communicate directly with humans lacking some version of Telepathy or the Comprehend Languages Super-Sense (see the **Great Power** sourcebook). The Game Master is free to decide if different animal species have their own “languages” as best suits the series (see **Languages** in the **Taking Action** chapter of the **Assembled Edition** of **ICONS**).

HUMANS

Humans in a super-pets series tend to take on a more distant role. In some, humans may be little more than background color, showing up only to introduce a situation before stepping “off-stage” for the rest of the story. For example, many super-pets stories start with the animals’ human friends bidding them farewell for a while while the humans go off to do something. The animals proceed to have their own adventure, and the humans only show back up at the end of the story, idly wondering what their pets have been doing while they were away. At the most extreme level, humans are not only barely present, they’re almost completely unintelligible, with animals comprehending only bits of their speech (like “Good boy!” and “treat”) with the rest becoming just white noise.

In other stories, humans may play a more direct or active role, albeit with the focus on the animals, kind of a reverse of the usual “super-pets” style, where the it is the humans, rather than the animals, who are the companions and even sidekicks. With this approach, the GM may even want to reverse the roles from this chapter, making the human characters into qualities or sidekicks for the animals!

The primary exception to the guidelines about humans is human children: Pre-adolescents in super-pets stories are often able to communicate with and understand super-pets in ways that adults cannot, and serve as allies or supporting characters, particularly providing access to the human world, albeit limited due to their status as children.

THE SUPER-ANIMAL ONE-SHOT

Rather than an entire series, you can also use the information in this chapter to run the classic comic book plot where the heroes are transformed into animals for one adventure (or a mini-series) and have to deal with the trouble brought on by their animal qualities in addition to whatever villainous scheme they must thwart. Examples include heroes transformed by a magical spell or transmutation ray, mind-switched into the bodies of animals (perhaps even their own animal companions), or visiting a dream or fairy-tale reality where they take on the forms of animals. The effect that transforms the heroes may turn them all into the same type of animal or several different types.

The transformed heroes may or may not have full versions of their regular powers in animal form and they all acquire the temporary “Animal Form” quality, which the GM can activate to cause trouble ranging from the inability to perform certain tasks requiring human hands or speech to animalistic behavior encroaching on the heroes’ minds, imposing a deadline before their personalities fade entirely, turning them into ordinary beasts!

SUPER-PET NAMES

Although some super-pets have fairly typical-sounding pet names, like “Spot” or “Ace,” others have names given to them by their human friends, either reflecting the pet’s origin or association with a character, or reflecting the pet’s own personality or powers, much like any other hero.

The following are some potential super-pet names to inspire ideas for your own **ICONS** series. Feel free to use them as you see fit. If all else fails, you can always tack a superlative—like Cosmic, Hyper, Power, or Super—onto the animal’s species, often going for alliteration, such as Cosmic Cat, Power Pig, Hyper Hamster, and Super Dog.

Alley (or Ally) Cat, American Eagle, Atom-Ant, the Bantam Stranger, Bear Minimum, Bookworm, Brass Monkey, Composite Cow, Dark Bunny, Dark Cow, Doctor Snail, Dogstar, the Dread Hamster, Duck Savage, the Familiar, Future Flea, General Gau’s Chicken, Glamour Puss, Good Dog, the Grouper, Gummy (or Gum E.) Bear, Hell Cat (or Hound), Hog Wild, Hot Dog, Jackalope, Jack Rabbit, Jet Chimp, Joe Camel, Leagle Eagle, Lionheart, Mach Turtle, March Hare, Monkey Shine, Mysto-Flees, Night Owl, Nyan Cat, Pig Iron, Polly-Morph, Purr-Fect, Red Rooster, Ricochet Rabbit, Rubber Duck, Screaming Eagle, Sick Puppy, Warhorse.

"Q" IS FOR "QUALITIES"



Most of the abilities in **ICONS** are quantitative, measured on the 1-to-10 scale, with objective values and one level clearly higher or lower than another. This is the case for attributes, powers, even specialties, which have three levels of their own and modify attributes. But there are also qualitative abilities in the game: **qualities**, which describe, not degrees of how much or how little, but instead things about characters (and places, things, or even events) that make them who and what they are.

Qualities are a key part of what makes **ICONS** work, and also one of the system's less understood elements. This chapter looks at qualities in more detail and offers additional guidelines and ideas for handling them in play.

CREATING QUALITIES

The first use of qualities in Icons is creating some for the heroes (and villains) you create. The default number of qualities for starting heroes is three, although Game Master characters can have as many as desired. Still, keeping the number of qualities under a half-dozen or so helps to keep them focused and manageable, whereas a larger number of qualities are less likely to show up in play, and therefore have less value.

WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE QUALITY?

Creating qualities is far more art than science, since qualities both need to describe things and be useful in terms of advantage and trouble when they're activated. The following are some things to consider when creating qualities for your heroes (and villains):

Focused: A good quality is focused rather than generic, including descriptive modifiers. For example, "Avenger" is a rather vague quality, but "Hell-Spawned Avenger of the Innocent" has focus and depth. "Billionaire" is pretty clear, but "Billionaire Playboy" presents a different focus than "Billionaire Inventor" or "Billionaire Corporate Executive".

Flexible: Remember that qualities can be activated for both advantage *and* to cause trouble, so the best qualities are flexible enough to be seen as potentially good or bad, depending on the situation. Thus "Defender of the Innocent" can inspire a hero to greatness, but can also cause trouble when the innocent are threatened and the hero feels compelled to drop everything to help. "Secret Sorceress of the Sixth Sun" may imply certain duties, responsibilities, and even inherited enemies that come with the role, to say nothing of the trouble caused by keeping the quality secret.

Faceted: The more facets or depth a quality has, the more situations where you can activate it. "Robot" is certainly a potential quality but "Secretly a Robot" has additional depth, implying both advantages and trouble that might come from the quality. Likewise, "Alien" is a quality, but "Exiled Alien Royalty" provides a lot more to work with when it comes to activations.

In order to keep qualities flexible, you may want to avoid strictly positive or negative qualities, instead trying to find ways to incorporate them into broader, more multi-faceted ones. For example, a hero might have a disability such as blindness, deafness, or paralysis. While you can certainly make any of these things into qualities, and such challenges have been known to inspire people to greatness, they might be more effective and interesting in play if included as a part of something else, such as "Blind Agent of Justice" or "Paraplegic Inventor"

SUPPORTIVE QUALITIES

Supporting characters, assistants, sidekicks, and the like can all be handled as qualities in **ICONS**, or as advantages or trouble provided by other qualities, such as headquarters, connections to organizations, or particular titles (see **“H” is for “Headquarters”** and **“O” is for “Organizations”**). For example, if a hero is the “Ultimate Enchanter” in the setting, that title may come with occasional assistance from an order of mystic monks who have served the Ultimate Enchanter throughout history. Likewise, a hero who is an “Agent of ARROW.” can potentially call on the organization for equipment, information, safe-houses, and so forth by activating that quality for advantage (while the GM is busy activating it to cause trouble in the form of bureaucratic red-tape and the agency’s various enemies). Supportive characters may also be “attached” as part of a headquarters quality belonging to a team, shared in common by all of its members.

CHANGING & REMOVING QUALITIES

Applied qualities (see the following) are, by their nature, temporary, but most qualities are fairly innate and last until something significantly changes about the nature of the subject. As detailed under **Changes** in the **Game Mastering** chapter of **ICONS**, a moderate change (earned through achievements) can either replace one of a character’s existing qualities with another, or add a new quality altogether.

It’s up to the GM as to whether or not there is a maximum number of qualities a character can have at once. This tends to be self-limiting, as the greater the number of qualities, the less likely any one of them will be activated in a given situation.

It’s likewise left to the GM’s discretion whether or not a moderate change can simply *remove* a quality without replacing it with another. Generally, **ICONS** characters should have at least two qualities, so long as qualities are being used in the game at all (see the **Does Icons Need Qualities?** sidebar for details).

Lastly, you may want to apply the guidelines from the **Qualities On-the-Fly** option from the **Hero Creation** chapter of **ICONS** to the first few issues of the game, allowing players to tweak and modify their heroes’ qualities to ensure a good “fit” and incorporate better ideas that come up in play before “setting” them as innate qualities requiring achievement to change.

WHAT THINGS HAVE QUALITIES?

Potentially *anything* can have a quality in **ICONS**, although most things are relatively unimportant to the story and so their qualities are largely irrelevant. That said, characters, objects, places, and even events can have qualities assigned to them, either by the Game Master, or as a result of the players learning or applying qualities (see the following).

Assigning (or seeking to learn) a quality about something is a way of saying “this thing should be important in some way” to the game, making it a good cue for the Game Master to include that thing (and its qualities) in the story in some way.

LEARNING QUALITIES

It's one thing to activate one of your hero's own qualities, which you know quite well, and another to activate the qualities of an opponent, situation, or object which are not already known. In order to activate a quality—for either advantage or trouble—you first must know it exists. There are three primary ways of learning about an existing quality:

Perception: First, you can simply notice an obvious or apparent quality. Essentially, the GM outright tells the players that one exists. It's best in these situations to have some indication or token of the obvious quality so there's clear communication. Writing the quality on a sticky note or token, for example, and putting it on the table face-up in front of the players is a good option. Having perceived the quality, characters can attempt to activate it normally.

Interaction: Similarly, anyone who knows of the existence of a quality—regardless of how they found out about it—can simply tell you about it as an interaction. You then know the quality exists and can attempt to activate it normally.

Test: The previous two options are essentially automatic. More often, characters learn qualities through some amount of effort, essentially making a test of some type to learn about the quality. This is covered in the **Learning & Creating Qualities** section of **The Basics** in **ICONS**. The appropriate ability for the test and the ability for the difficulty, are determined by the GM based on the player's description and the nature of the quality being sought. Common examples include Awareness or Intellect to pick up on most kinds of qualities, Willpower to ferret out qualities through interaction (perhaps even tricking or forcing someone into telling you about one), or various sensory powers to pick up on things beyond most people's awareness. Specialties may apply to the test to learn a quality, if they are appropriate.

Guesswork: Lastly, you can simply *guess* at an existing quality, essentially gambling on your attempt to activate the quality. If you're right, you not only learn the quality, but your attempt to activate it may be successful. If you're wrong, then you waste the attempt to activate it and do not learn anything other than that the quality you guessed does not apply.

In cases of guesswork, the GM should be kind and allow for "close enough" guesses. For example, if a player guesses that a villain is obsessed with circuses due to his clown-based motif and the villain is really obsessed solely with clowns, give the player a break and count that as a successful guess. On the other hand, if the player guesses that a foe with the "Living Vampire" quality is an actual undead vampire vulnerable to religious artifacts, the hero is out of luck, since that is not a part of the villain's actual quality.

APPLYING QUALITIES

If a character does not have and cannot find a suitable quality, there is always the potential to create qualities in order to activate them. This is covered under the **Learning & Creating Qualities** section of **The Basics** in **ICONS**. Characters either create qualities using a test of an appropriate ability against the target's ability or a difficulty chosen by the GM (as with learning an existing quality) or by using a power that creates and applies certain qualities. Degrees of success above marginal provide free activations of that quality, which the character can share with teammates.

The applied quality usually lasts until the end of the chapter or until someone else takes an action and performs a test to remove it, as detailed under the **Removing Qualities** section of **The Basics** in **ICONS**. Some qualities applied by powers have a duration specified in the power's description. For example, the "Controlled" quality applied by Mind Control lasts as long as the character concentrates and degree of success determines how often the target gets a Willpower test to remove the quality.

ACTIVATING QUALITIES

Bringing qualities into play requires activating them, using the quality to create an advantage or cause trouble for someone. There are four ways in which characters can activate qualities:

Determination Points: A player can spend a Determination Point in order to activate a known quality. Similarly, the GM can activate a known quality any time at will, but if the activation affects a player character, then that character is awarded a Determination Point. In essence, the GM has an

unlimited “pool” of DP to spend, but the players get whatever the GM spends against them.

Maneuvers: A character can take an action and perform a maneuver, a test with an appropriate ability, to activate a known quality. Additional degrees of success allow the character to activate the quality additional times for free. See **Maneuvering** in the **Taking Action** chapter of **ICONS** for details.

Tactics: Characters can choose to cause trouble for themselves in order to activate a quality, essentially immediately using the DP they would otherwise gain for trouble to activate a quality. At the GM’s option, tactics can also be used to create a quality and activate it once to grant an advantage, even if the character doesn’t have a suitable quality otherwise.

Free: A few qualities can be activated for “free” in certain circumstances, meaning all players have to do is declare they are activating the quality. Free activations are effectively a kind of interaction with the quality (see **Interactions** in the **Taking Action** chapter of **ICONS**), taking no time, but the GM should feel free to set reasonable limits on free activations per page to keep game playing flowing.

The most common free activations are from applied qualities: high degrees of success in applying a quality grant a number of free activations of it, while some powers that apply qualities grant free uses of them for a time.

DOES **ICONS** NEED QUALITIES?

No, not really. Although qualities add an interesting non-quantitative element to the game mechanics, they’re not strictly speaking necessary, and you can play Icons without them. Instead of activating qualities, work directly with gaining advantage and creating trouble using all the means normally used to activate a quality to do the same: namely spending Determination Points and performing maneuvers.

This approach frees players and the GM from having to come up with the quality to activate in order to do those things, and offers a broader and easier “gateway” to advantage and trouble, at the cost of perhaps making those things too accessible, and down-playing certain unique elements about characters and situations. It can be more interesting if a hero gains advantage (or faces trouble) because of something intrinsic about the character, but if you find qualities too complex or that they are inhibiting rather than enabling creativity and roleplaying at your game-table then, by all means, try doing without them and seeing how it goes.

"R" IS FOR "RESCUE"



"Help! Save me!" is one of the primal calls of the superhero to action. While RPGs—and superhero media—often focus on the role of heroes in fighting villains (or each other) one of their primary responsibilities is in rescuing people from danger. Indeed, in some of the more restrictive media presentations of superheroes, where violence is all but forbidden, rescues are *all* that heroes do, saving people from disasters from fires to being lost in the wilderness.

This chapter looks at different types of rescue scenarios and how to include them in your **ICONS** game, from occasional challenges and chapters to an entire series based around rescue operations. It also looks at handling rescues in game terms and making them as exciting and interesting as possible.

DANGERS & DISASTERS

The **Disasters** section of the **Game Mastering** chapter of **ICONS** covers the essentials of handling various dangers and disasters. This section expands on those basic concepts and mechanics with more specific examples.

PLANES, TRAINS & AUTOMOBILES

Vehicular crashes can result from operator error, mechanical failure, or circumstances such as bad weather or complications from another disaster. The **Vehicles** section of the **Powers** chapter of **ICONS** covers the essential mechanics of what happens in a crash: the vehicle goes out of control due to a failed Handling test and hits an object or obstacle.

If heroes have time, they can attempt to prevent the crash by bringing the vehicle back under control, bringing it to stop, or changing its course so it is no longer in immediate danger of collision with an obstacle:

- **Under Control:** The first option is a matter of making a new Handling test for the vehicle, either with direct access to its controls or indirect access using powers like Interface or Telekinesis, for examples.
- **Full Stop:** Bringing an out of control vehicle to a stop requires countering its momentum, meaning a test against a difficulty based on the higher of the vehicle's Speed or overall mass; naturally a slow-moving car is easier to deal with than a jumbo-jet flying at just below the speed of sound! This might be a matter of Strength or an appropriate power, and can be handled as a timed pyramid test, requiring sufficient successes to stop the vehicle before it hits something, with lesser degrees of success reducing the effective level of the crash, if it is not prevented altogether.
- **Change Course:** Rather than bringing the out of control vehicle to a stop, the heroes might redirect it away from collisions. This is similar to a Handling test (previously), except using more brute force methods to push or pull the vehicle in the right direction and can buy additional time for a proper Handling test to regain control of the vehicle or completion of a pyramid test to stop it.

If the heroes cannot prevent a crash, they have to deal with the aftermath, including rescuing people from the wreckage, preventing or dealing with **Fire** from burning fuel and looking out for **Innocent Bystanders** and **Collateral Damage**. A significant vehicular crash or one that happens in an isolated area may turn into a **Search and Rescue** operation.

INNOCENT BYSTANDERS

The first priority for heroes in dealing with disaster is getting innocent people out of harm's way, if at all possible, after which they can deal with the disaster itself. Rescuing innocent bystanders may be a simple matter of taking the time to do so, with each hero describing a panel of actions wherein they help to rescue people, or the Gamemaster can call for a test for the heroes to accomplish this, being aware of the possibility they might fail. The rescue of a large number of people might be a pyramid test, usually timed, and sometimes escalating. The test could be costly if there's an ongoing threat or danger to the heroes during the rescue operation.

Endangered innocent bystanders make a common challenge for heroes when the GM is looking to create trouble: super-battles and disasters can create dangerous conditions, and villains often take advantage of heroes looking to safeguard innocent lives as a means of distraction or escape, or to otherwise gain an advantage.

THE RESCUE PANEL

A quick and easy way for players to “recharge” their supply of Determination Points, for Gamemaster's to give them the opportunity to do so, and for players who are unsure of exactly what to do or how to help when their turn comes is the “Rescue Panel” — essentially, the player describes how the hero aids or rescues some innocent bystander(s) for that panel, rather than taking any other action, and the GM, in turn, awards the player a DP. It's the functional equivalent of Lost Panel trouble, but more heroic than the character getting clobbered or just standing around doing nothing for a turn.

FIRE!

Fires, from building fires to forest and prairie fires, offer heroes opportunities to rescue those trapped and endangered by the flames as well as looking for ways to put out the fire itself. An out-of-control fire may range in intensity from Fair (4) to Amazing (8) inflicting that amount of heat damage to anyone exposed to it each page. Even areas within a close distance not actively on fire expose characters to choking clouds of smoke, an Affliction with the same level as the fire, affecting those needing to breathe so long as they remain in the area.

Putting out a fire is a fragile costly pyramid test, with the fire's intensity acting as opposition, both for test difficulty and removing accumulated successes as the fire grows and spreads. The cost of the test is exposure to

the smoke, with fire damage on a failed test as well, if the hero is within close distance of the fire. If the pyramid test to extinguish a burning structure is a failure, it may transition into a **Collapsing Structure** disaster.

COLLAPSING STRUCTURE

Whether blown up by terrorists, damaged by a disaster, or torn asunder by a giant monster or super-battle, a broken or collapsing structure like a building or bridge presents a considerable challenge for heroes. Their goal is to clear as many people out as they can and to prevent the collapse, if at all possible. Getting people away from a collapsing structure in time may be a contingent pyramid test (see sidebar).

Stopping the collapse of a structure of any significant size is difficult: a collapsing or timed pyramid test with a difficulty of 7 or more, depending on the structure's size. Heroes may be able to contribute to the test by either holding the structure together or shoring up its support, using powers to repair, weld, or replace damaged parts, for example.

CONTINGENT PYRAMID TESTS

Similar to collapsing or timed tests, a contingent pyramid test is timed based on the outcome of another pyramid test: If the initial test ends in failure, then the contingent test does so as well. If the initial test succeeds, then the contingent test either automatically succeeds as well, or continues and *may* succeed. At the GM's option, a failure of the initial test may allow the contingent test one final last-ditch attempt at success.

An example of this is a pyramid test to hold together a collapsing structure and a contingent test to evacuate everyone from it: If the initial test fails, the structure collapses and the evacuation fails as well (or only partially succeeds with the degree of success that it has). If the test to stabilize the structure succeeds, then the evacuation test likely does so as well, unless the stabilization is especially temporary.

MEDICAL EMERGENCIES

Medical emergencies tend to break down into rushing those in need of medical attention to hospital facilities, or working to overcome a threat to public health like a disease outbreak. In the first case, heroes sometimes have to first locate those in need before getting them medical attention (see **Search & Rescue**, following), such as a lost hiker suffering from an injury or a kidnap victim who has run out of vital medication.

- **Emergency Evacuation:** Getting people in need to the medical facilities and personnel able to help them is usually an issue of movement powers, which can allow heroes to overcome traffic jams and damage to infrastructure like roads and rails. Again, moving a large number of victims might be a timed pyramid test involving the heroes' movement power levels and any other abilities the players apply to the test.
- **Health Crisis:** Dealing with a public health crisis is usually more of a matter of research, a pyramid test to find a cure or other solution. The test might be collapsing or escalating, depending on how quickly the problem spreads, and long or wide for threats requiring considerable time and resources to solve. It may even involve two tests: one to come up with a solution and another to successfully implement it, depending on how difficult that is, such as developing an antidote and then rapidly distributing it.
- **Field Medicine:** A final type of medical emergency is when a hero is forced by circumstances to deliver medical care to a victim in the field. If the hero has the Medicine speciality, this is a regular test or pyramid test, potentially complicated by the conditions. If the hero does *not* have the Medicine specialty, then this may be a pyramid test where someone who does have the specialty guides the hero through the treatment process. This could be another hero, a supporting character, or even the patient!

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Sometimes, before the heroes can provide aid, they first need to find those in need. Disasters often result in people lost and trapped, beneath landslides and avalanches, buried in the rubble of buildings, trapped inside damaged vehicles, and so forth. Locating the victims is critical to helping them in time.

Heroes can aid the search using both sensory and movement powers, as well as other abilities allowing them to more easily bypass obstacles; a Phasing hero, for example, can pass through wreckage to search for victims, while a hero with Life Support can move through choking smoke or other hazardous conditions. Powers like Burrowing, Flight, and Super-Speed let heroes search larger and more difficult areas quickly, while sensory powers can more easily overcome barriers (using things like X-ray vision) or locate victims directly with powers like Detection, ESP, or Telepathy.

A search and rescue operation may be a single pyramid test using sensory, movement, and other abilities, or a test to locate the victim(s) and a separate one to deal with their evacuation once they're found.

IN THE NICK OF TIME

One key thing about rescue scenarios is the heroes having the opportunity to intervene in time to prevent (or at least mitigate) the disaster. How do they do that? Usually, it's a matter of adventure design and Game Mastering, using the heroes' available resources in the setting to create opportunities for them to get advance warning and take action, such as:

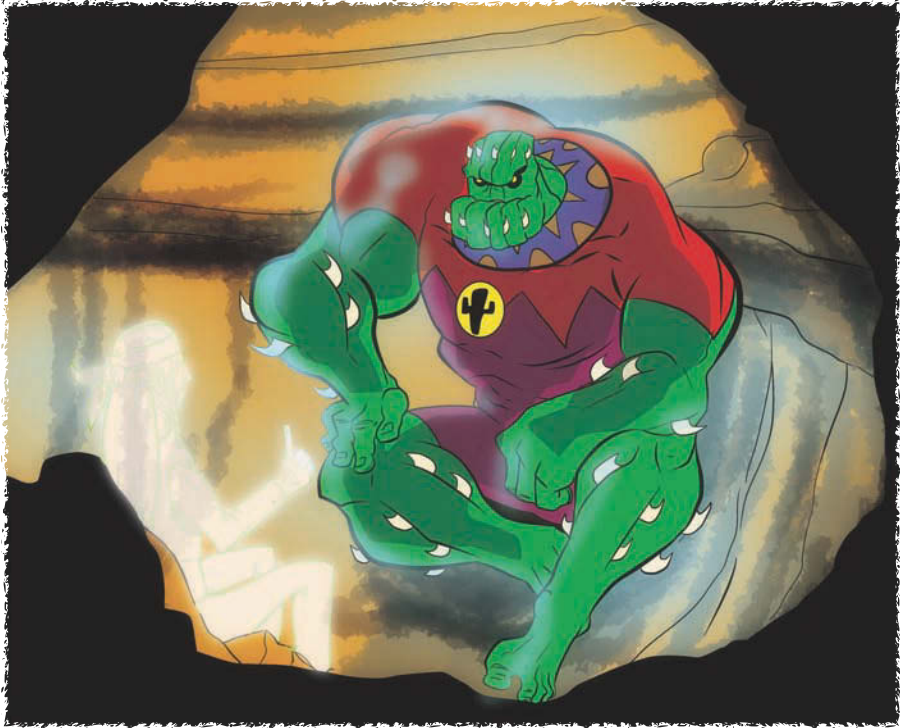
- **Early Warning:** Anything that gives the heroes advance warning of an impending disaster, from Precognition to Super-Senses, can provide enough time for them to take action. Feel free as GM to use these capabilities as story hooks, and don't overlook the potential of providing free activations of appropriate qualities for insight into the impending danger ("Miss Tikal, the Council of Skulls sends you a psychic message, a vision of impending disaster!").
- **Alert Systems:** Other early warning and detection systems might warn heroes able to act about things like natural disasters and similar crises. It's easy to put the heroes into action with an emergency call on the "red phone" or similar hotline. Established hero teams might even have advanced call-centers or online monitoring systems to alert and deploy them to where they're most needed at any given time, and "monitor duty" of such systems is a common work-rotation for a hero team.
- **Rapid Deployment:** The faster the heroes get to the disaster site, the better, so take character and team movement powers into account. A hero team might have something like a fast vehicle or even a teleportation network to "beam" aid to an emergency or disaster site instantly. If not a device, then perhaps the team has access to a someone with the Teleport power and the Passengers or Gate extras.

See "**S** is for **Support**" for some additional ideas of supporting cast characters and organizations able to aid heroes in reaching disasters in time to make a difference.

THE RESCUE SERIES

While the typical super-team is made up of "all-purpose heroes" who fight crime, stop alien invasions, and go on rescue missions, you can also create an **ICONS** series focused on heroes who specifically handle rescues, leaving all of the other stuff to other heroes or authorities, except when circumstances require them to intervene. A team of rescuers need not be as combat oriented or optimized as most superheroes, allowing for some interesting and unusual character concepts, and providing some challenges on the occasions when circumstances require them to go into combat.

"S" IS FOR "SUPPORT"



Being a super hero protecting the world from evil can be hard work! Super heroes can use some help keeping the world safe and handling the fallout from yet another super-battle downtown. A setting can provide a network of support services for super heroes to call upon in times of need. If you are playing in an **ICONS** setting of your own creation, use this as inspiration to create your own “support network” for your heroes.

HELP AT HEADQUARTERS

First off, heroes may need some help around the old headquarters. After all, the heroes are busy fighting evil, they don't always have time to do light dusting or take out the trash. Headquarters help keeps things running smoothly while the heroes handle the important things (in other words, the

fun stuff). They also make great hostages when the GM is looking to create trouble. Some of the classic headquarters help includes:

THE FAITHFUL BUTLER

The ultimate heroic helper. The faithful butler is a true gentleman's gentleman who takes care of the heroes' headquarters and handles everything from greeting aliens at the door to serving dinner to a collection of mutants, robots, space-gods and other weirdoes without batting an eye. The faithful butler often has hidden talents and may even be the sole support-staff for a hero team; wearing many hats, but handling everything behind the scenes with ease and grace.

THE HANDYMAN

While the faithful butler is the soul of decorum, the handyman is often a little rough around the edges. He (or she) takes care of the base itself, making sure everything is running properly and keeping the equipment in top-condition. One or more of the heroes themselves may be very handy with machinery, but having a handyman around is useful if the heroes aren't overly mechanically inclined themselves, or if the gadgeteer heroes are too busy to maintain all of the base's equipment.

THE MECHANIC

A mechanic is a specialized type of handyman who mainly takes care of vehicles: building them, maintaining them and fixing them when heroes inevitably wreck them. Generally, only very large or specialized hero teams have a mechanic, but that's not always the case.

THE PILOT

Occasionally heroes have someone to drive (or fly) them around to get to trouble-spots quickly. Most of the time heroes get places under their own power, or use their own vehicles, but some teams may qualify for their own pilot.

RESERVE HEROES

It's pretty much inevitable for heroes to get captured, injured, lose their powers or otherwise get taken out of action. When that happens, the team can call in the reserve heroes to lend a hand. They might be part-time members of the team, or heroes who agree to be "on call" in case of emergencies, or they may be team members in training, only called upon in times of crisis. Reserve heroes provide the opportunity for players to have additional hero characters "in reserve," allowing them to play a different hero if their regular character is out of the game for some reason.

SPECIALISTS

Super heroes often need to call on the help of scientists and other specialists to solve a particularly tricky problem or get a special piece of gadgetry they need to defeat a particular super-villain. Even if the team includes some super-scientists, heroes might need to consult a specialist in a particular field.

COSTUMING

One particular area of specialty often overlooked in the comics is: Who designs and makes all those superhero costumes? Super-powers don't necessarily come with skills in fashion design (as made clear by some heroes' sartorial choices). Are there special considerations for super-suits ("No capes!")? Certainly, they have to accommodate the wearer's powers, perhaps using special materials. Teams might have a more unified look, or common costume elements and "fashion plate" heroes might change costumes at the drop of a cape or gauntlet. For that matter, who makes the costumes for *villains*?

INFORMATION

The main thing heroes are going to need is information, whether it is getting something analyzed, studying new powers, or investigating alien artifacts. The gamemaster can pass this information on to the players through a character like a scientist, either independent or part of an organization.

MEDICINE

Heroes can get injured in super-battles and the unusual biology of many super heroes makes treating them difficult. A team may retain the services of a doctor specialized in super-medicine. A scientific organization might also offer help to heroes with unusual biologies or to heroes like robots, androids and aliens. A team might even retain a staff psychologist to maintain the members' mental health!

TECHNOLOGY

Access to advanced and experimental technology is a tricky issue. Oftentimes an organization may be in a position to offer a piece of technology to the heroes to help them out, but gamemasters have to be careful to keep the organization from becoming a source of quick-fixes. Usually the technology is highly experimental and only good for that particular situation. It may not work in all situations. If it does, the

gamemaster should consider the impact of adding the technology to the game world.

OCCULT

Science isn't the only area heroes may need information. Super heroes often encounter magical forces and beings from other dimensions, which may lead to a need for occult information. Unless the team includes a mage or occult character, the heroes will need to consult an expert. There is usually a good reason why the consultant cannot take a direct hand in matters, but there's nothing wrong with an occasional team-up story where the occultist helps the heroes overcome a magical menace.

THE LAW

Even if they are shadowy vigilantes, sooner or later super heroes have to cooperate with law-enforcement. Heroes are well-advised to cultivate a good working relationship with local law-enforcement.

POLICE SPECIAL FORCES

If super-criminals have been around for any length of time, the authorities will have come up with ways to deal with them on their own, special forces outfitted to handle super-villains. Generally, these forces still need help from the heroes, which may be welcome or resented by the cops on the squad. Police special forces make a good back-up for heroes and provide logistical support for smaller hero teams.

THE SUPER-AGENCY

Beyond the police special forces is the super-agency, an organization that handles threats world-wide. A super-agency has the best agents, resources and equipment money can buy and they usually have a lot to offer a group of heroes. In fact, a hero team could easily work for the agency as their "super-agents." Otherwise, the agency is likely to maintain good relations with public hero teams. They pass information on to them and call on the heroes in times of need. Of course, the agency might also covertly keep tabs on the heroes, in the interest of world-security. After all, heroes *have* been known to go bad...

THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Unless the heroes are the type who take the law into their own hands, once the villains are caught, they're in the hands of the justice system. The local District Attorney, Public Defenders and judges are all likely characters to show up now and again. Heroes may also find themselves caught up in legal issues from time to time. Take a look at a **"J" is for "Justice"** for

additional ideas on including elements of the justice system in your **ICONS** games.

INFORMANTS

The informant is the street-level hero's best ally for keeping up to date on what is going on in the underworld. Some informants are willing helpers, passing information on to the hero out of a desire to help out, improve the neighborhood or get revenge on criminals. Other informants are less altruistic, they help out because of money or because the hero has something to threaten them with (usually some crime the hero caught them at, but is willing to overlook so long as the informant keeps passing on information).

THE MEDIA

Ever since mild-mannered reporters and great metropolitan newspapers, super heroes have been linked to the media. Certainly the high-profile activities of a super-team attract all kinds of media attention.

REPORTERS

Reporters all want the inside scoop on what the heroes are up to. Serious journalists are looking for up-to-the-minute news about the latest crisis, or exclusive interviews with heroes. Tabloids want sensational photos and stories that dig up the dirt about the heroes, or even create some if there is none to be found. Heroes may need to deal with the paparazzi as much (or even more) than other celebrities. A nosy reporter might find out something about a hero best left unrevealed (like a hero's secret identity) and a reporter with a grudge against a group of heroes can do a lot of damage with a few well-placed stories. Of course, reporters can also uncover villainous plots and provide valuable leads for the heroes from time to time (usually requiring the heroes to save the intrepid reporter in the process).

PR AGENT

Of course, there's nothing that says the heroes can't have someone who handles the press and the media to make the heroes look good (or at least make sure they look bad as little as possible). A PR agent can issue press statements, handle press conferences and generally maintain the group's public image. Of course, PR agents can often be a little (or even a lot) sleazy, looking for opportunities to improve the group's image in less than honest ways.

PUBLISHERS

Media publishers and editors are important characters. They interact with reporters (including heroes who are reporters in their secret identities) and write editorials praising or condemning the actions of the heroes. A Game Master looking for a way to point out a mistake on the part of the heroes can always use an angry editorial to get the point across.

SUPPORT FOR VILLAINS

Why should heroes have all the fun? If anything, being a super-villain is *more* work, so villains need a helping hand themselves. Naturally, there are those willing to provide them services ... for the right price.

THE CRIME DOCTOR

This guy is pretty much the same as a doctor who works for super heroes, except the crime doctor helps out villains; patching up the occasional gunshot wound, treating injuries and not asking any questions. The crime doctor may be a disgraced member of the medical profession driven to crime, or a famous physician who likes to help criminals because of the thrill or walking on “the dark side” and getting away with it. Some crime doctors only handle medical treatment, while others specialize in treating super-humans, mutants or more criminal activities like designer drugs or even torture. As long as heroes keep beating up their opponents, the crime doctor always has work to do.

THE TOY-MAKER

Where do villains get all of their wonderful toys? Some villains build their own, but others may turn to the toy-maker to supply them. The toy-maker creates advanced devices from criminal clients with no questions asked. A toy-maker can turn an otherwise weak criminal into a dangerous super-villain with the right devices, while a criminal entrepreneur can outfit a virtual army of super-criminals. Toy-makers are always on the lookout for interesting technology they can acquire and duplicate for their clients, some of which may belong to the heroes.

MERCENARIES

No master villain is complete without henchmen, and even a minor-league villain might be in need of a gang to help pull off a job or two. The underworld supplies these criminals with their goons, small-time muscle for heroes to plow through on their way towards the main villain of the story. A super-villain might even run a “school” to train henchmen for other criminals, or a “temp agency” to hire them out.

"T" IS FOR "TEAMS"



“Banded together to battle forces no one hero can withstand alone...” The comic book superhero team is the foundation of the superhero roleplaying experience. Indeed, the propensity superheroes have for banding together into teams makes superhero RPGs one of the most naturally group-oriented genres around.

Still, there remain many different ways in which heroes can form and maintain a team, and many different options for types and styles of teams. This chapter looks at some of those options in **ICONS** terms, including how to define teams with qualities and how to bring the concepts of team dynamics and teamwork into game play, expanding on the basic team material found in the **Assembled Edition** of the game.

TEAM BENEFITS

What are the benefits (and drawbacks) of being in a team in **ICONS** terms? They're found in various places of the **Assembled Edition**, but spelled out are essentially:

- **Share Activations:** Members of the team can share free activations of qualities amongst each other, used particularly for teamwork (see **Teams in Action**, following).
- **Leadership:** Members of the team gain access to extra Determination Points if led by a character with the Leadership specialty.
- **Team Qualities:** Members of the team share certain team qualities they can all activate for advantage or to cause trouble (see **Team Qualities**, following).
- **Team Resources:** Members of the team may have access to certain team resources (without activating qualities) by default.

It's up to the GM and the players what needs to happen for a character to "officially" qualify as a member of a team. It could be as simply as the other members agreeing that the new character is "in" or there could be a complex process of application, testing, and approval before that happens.

In either case, just like the option for Qualities-on-the-Fly in the **Hero Creation** chapter of **ICONS**, the GM may wish to allow a "Team-Up" option whereby certain guest stars are accorded temporary team member status for the duration of a story, allowing them to access some or all of the benefits of being on the team, even if they are not regular members.

TEAM DETERMINATION?

Long-time players of **ICONS** may recall the concept of "Team Determination" from the original edition of the game. Note that the concept of a Team Determination "pool" of points no longer exists in the **Assembled Edition**, largely replaced by the ability of team members to share activations of qualities (however they gain them) and the benefits of Leadership. Likewise, Determination Points awarded for the activation of team qualities to cause trouble go to the individual heroes affected, rather than into a common pool, since awarding the heroes Team Determination tended to actually *limit* the amount of DP they got from belonging to a team, making it the less beneficial option.

TEAM QUALITIES

Just as individual heroes and villains have qualities, so do teams. The default in **ICONS** is for teams to have three qualities, just like characters, but the GM should feel free to vary this as best suits the game. The **Achievements & Changes** rules from the **Game Mastering** chapter of **ICONS** can be used to modify team qualities as well, although changes to a team's qualities must be unanimously agreed upon by all of the members.

NAME

The simplest catch-all team quality is just the team's name, perhaps followed by a modifier or an epithet describing them, such as "The Searchers of the Multiverse, Explorers of the Strange and the Unknown!" The epithet can easily be split off into a separate quality, if desired, although keeping them together increases the potential uses of the quality while only taking up one of the team's total qualities.

COMMON ELEMENT

The members of the team all have some common element to that ties them together. They might all be mutants, teenagers, mystics, military (or ex-military) service members, aliens, techies, or attend the same school, to name just a few. Essentially, there's a character-defining quality—from "Not From Around Here" to "Powers High School Student" that all members of the team share in common, making it more of a team quality than worth taking up one of the heroes' individual qualities.

ENEMY

The team shares a common arch-enemy, usually one capable of taking them on as an entire group. This enemy may also have some common ties to the team, such as a team of aliens working together to defeat a greater alien menace, and the enemy may be actively working against the team as much (if not more) than they are against their common foe. An example is a government or military organization devoted to hunting aliens going after an all-alien team, even if they claim to be working for Earth's benefit.

FAMILY

The team members are an extended family, related either by blood, marriage, or choice. Their family and relationship status may related to another common element about the characters (such as a family of super-powered mutants or mystics) as well as their origin or a secret. They draw upon their family ties for strength (and advantage) in times of need, but are

sometimes also entangled in them, causing trouble, including **Dissent in the Ranks** (see **Teams in Action**).

GOAL

The team shares a strong common goal, from protecting their city, country or world from danger to exploring the universe, achieving equality and acceptance for their kind (whatever it might be), or protecting the environment. Not all the members may agree on how to go about achieving their goal—a possible source of dissent and trouble—but everyone in the group agrees that the goal is important.

MENTOR

The team has a guide, mentor, or patron, who may have initially brought them together and still offers guidance and support. Team members can activate the mentor's quality to gain aid and assistance, ranging from insight or a retcon to improved effort, pushing an ability, or a stunt explained as the benefit of the mentor's training, guidance, or inspiration, even if the mentor is not actually present. In fact, this same quality can go for an inspiration for the team who is no longer around, such as heroes carrying on the legacy of a previous hero or team.

ORIGIN

A team might share the same origin, either in hero creation terms, where they are all Trained, Transformed, or the like, or as part of their background, even though their origins in game-terms differ. For example, one hero team might all be Transformed by the same incident, or have the same Birthright (perhaps because they are **Family** – see the previous). Another might have different, but connected, origins, such as one hero being a Birthright with a half-alien heritage, another a Gimmick using technology from the same alien civilization, and a third an Uearthly hero sent to find the Birthright character, who carries the royal bloodline, and so on, giving their team the “Otherworldly Outcasts” quality.

RESOURCES

As described in previous **A to Z** chapters, a team might have resources like its headquarters, supporting cast, connections, or the like as qualities, or as advantage or trouble from activating team qualities. The **Team Devices** section of the **Powers** chapter of **ICONS** recommends asking a player to activate a team quality if the use of a team resource is anything other than a convenient plot device or bit of background color (in which case it should be a free activation).

SECRET

Lastly, a team might share a secret as one of their qualities (or an aspect of a quality), such as concealing they are actually aliens, mutants, super-criminals, robots, or what have you. This is a **Common Element** (previously) with the added twist that part of the trouble the team encounters is safeguarding their secret. It can result in qualities ranging from “Secretly Empowered by a Top-Secret Experiment” (both a secret and a shared origin) to “World’s Most-Wanted,” about the team being infamous criminals masquerading as popular heroes.

TEAMS IN ACTION

With team qualities established, players can use them during the game to give their heroes advantages, or to cause them trouble, and the GM can do the same (particularly the causing trouble part).

TEAMWORK

Team qualities and sharing activations of qualities with teammates are the two primary components of teamwork, allowing heroes to pool their resources and achieve greater effectiveness together than they can individually. During a game, players can:

Create or Activate a Quality, either by performing a maneuver, using a tactic, or spending Determination Points (see **Activating Qualities in The Basics** chapter of **ICONS**).

Share the Activation with someone else on their team. This particularly allows characters performing maneuvers to take their panel to do so, then “hand-off” the benefit to a teammate to follow through that same page.

Examples: *Here are just a few examples of teamwork using qualities and activations in action:*

“Don’t give up! You can do this!” All-Star calls out to All-American Girl. His player performs a Willpower maneuver to activate her “I Can Handle This!” quality to give her a recover advantage. Alternately, All-Star’s player might just spend a DP for the activation and take another action on his turn, like punching a villain.

“There must be something!” Hangman says. “You’re the Sorceress of the Sixth Sun! You must know its weakness!” Hangman’s player activated Miss Tikal’s quality to give her insight into the threat they’re facing, giving the GM a knowing look.

*“Atomic Roach! Hit me with all of the radiation you can put out!”
“But...” “Just do it!” Dr. Punch is calling on Atomic Roach to perform a*

maneuver to create an “Energized” quality for his technology, giving him one or more free activations of it (or, failing that, using his own DPs to activate it) to enhance his powers using Roach’s Amazing Radiation Control level for a stunt advantage.

“Hey, ugly! Over here!” Saguaro calls, waving his arms at the sea monster. He takes the increased difficulty trouble on his next defense test to put a “Distracted” quality on the monster in hopes that his teammates will use the opening to get the passengers of the cruise ship to safety.

VILLAIN TEAMWORK

Villains can use teamwork, too, although many of them are not what you’d call “team players.” Still, a strong leader or the discipline of professional mercenaries can give a group of villains teamwork as good as the heroes. When villains use teamwork, it is generally through maneuvers and tactics, the same as heroes. On the occasions when villains would spend Determination Points, it’s considered trouble for the heroes, so they earn DP, just the same as when other trouble comes up.

DISSENT IN THE RANKS

One way players can activate qualities to create trouble for the team or their heroes, as well as interesting roleplaying opportunities, is by playing out moments of dissent or conflict within the team, a classic comic book element. In these cases, the Game Master may wish to treat certain qualities as trouble not only for the particular hero but for that hero’s teammates as well.

For example, if one hero has the “Berserker” quality and activates it for an advantage while also choosing the trouble of the hero going out of control and potentially endangering lives, the GM can consider this trouble for the hero’s teammates as well, when they have to decide to either try and rein-in the berserk hero’s violent tendencies or deal with the consequences.

This is basically a variation on the “Rescue Panel” kind of trouble from **“R” is for Rescue**. Similarly, if a hero has the “Prepared for Every Contingency” quality, the GM might activate it to cause trouble for the whole team by revealing one of the contingencies for which the hero prepared was planning to take out the rest of the team if they were co-opted, controlled, or simply went rogue, a contingency plan now in the hands of one of their arch-enemies....

"U" IS FOR "UNIVERSE"



The creation of a super-heroic universe is part of the fun of a long-lasting **ICONS** game: watching new and amazing elements of the setting unfold from the creative imaginations of the players and the Game Master. **The Assembled Edition** already has a basic system for **Universe Creation** in the **Game Mastering** chapter. This chapter looks at ways to expand upon that basic approach. It expands the steps of universe creation to:

- **Theme:** What the overall setting is about.
- **Scale:** The overall scope of the setting.
- **Heroes:** The setting's various important heroes.
- **Villains:** The setting's important villains.
- **Features:** The setting's most notable features.
- **Places:** The setting's important places, connected to its heroes.
- **Characters:** The setting's supporting cast, connected to the heroes.

The Heroes, Villains, Features, and Characters (Supporting Cast) steps work just like outlined in **The Assembled Edition**, particularly if you plan to play “universe style,” as described in the **Game Mastering** chapter. The additional steps are explained here.

Note that elements of these concepts first appeared in the **Stark City** setting from Fainting Goat Games, an excellent example of a fully-realized **ICONS** setting making use of these elements.

THEME

A setting’s **theme** can be thought of as the phrase or idea 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, 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 that 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?

IS THE THEME A QUALITY?

Generally, it's best to *not* consider a setting's theme a quality, like characters and places have qualities, simply because theme is all-pervasive, and therefore it may be tempting to activate it all the time. On the other hand, Game Masters looking to really emphasize a setting's theme can allow it as a quality, encouraging players to be on the lookout for opportunities to take actions in accordance with the theme so they can activate it for advantage.

For example, if the theme is "Helping Keep the World a Strange Place" making it a quality 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 qualities, because they focus on a particular kind of actions.

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

SCALE

An important element for a superhero game like **ICONS** is **scale**. The default assumption is the group is creating a setting together, but they could scale things so they're creating a country or world and each of the places are individual cities or even individual planets in a star-spanning setting. Likewise, you can scale down and create a city, neighborhood, town, or district.

NEIGHBORHOOD

At the neighborhood scale, places are fairly intimate, since no two of them are likely to be more than a few blocks away from each other. 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 when it comes to places in the setting: 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 a park, mall, plaza, or monument. 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, some of whom may be qualities for the hero. The cities could be real-world places or entirely fictional, each with their own character and flavor. The “local” hero gets a “home field advantage” from knowing the different qualities of the place and being able to take full advantage of them, and perhaps even having the place as a quality, such as “Defender of Silver City” or the like.

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 (whether their governments want the heroes there or not perhaps).

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 may face trouble occasionally where her homeland is concerned, but knows its qualities 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 in international waters or Antarctica, or accorded special status like an embassy, allowing them to exist inside another nation's territory.

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 “Capitol World”. Planetary places are painted with a wide brush, and qualities like “Desert World,” “Ice Planet,” and “Water World” are common.

Unless the heroes are all from the same world, one of the places each player should be responsible for is creating their 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.

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 broadest 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 subatomic 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 qualities associated with her home.

SCALE AND THE SCALE

The scale of the setting can influence the scale used to measure abilities as well. 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.

A grander, more “cosmic” scale may shift things, 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 are capability are almost irrelevant. See **“C” is for “Cosmic”** for this approach.

Conversely, a neighborhood or “street-level” scale could shift things in the other direction, perhaps bumping the human “maximum” up to 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.

PLACES

Each player provides at least one significant place or location, along with that place’s concept, connection to the overall theme of the setting, and at least one quality, which can be activated in play (see **“Q” is for “Qualities”** for additional information on place qualities). You can do as many rounds of creating places as you and the players wish, much the same with features.

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 fits into the series and offers something interesting or useful. This can range from a local hangout or workplace environment to a potential battleground or target for villainous schemes.

"V" IS FOR "VARIANTS"



As the **Introduction** to **ICONS** points out, there isn't "one true game." A lot of tabletop roleplaying is a matter of different styles or approaches to game rules that suit players or groups. As the **Introduction** also points out, game designers—and gamers—like to tinker, so **ICONS** has its share of different ways of doing things. This chapter looks at some of the more popular ones.

You may want to try out the game rules "as written" at least once to get a sense of how they work in play before you decide to modify them. It's possible what you think is going to be a problem is not once you have had a chance to actually it see in action. If it is, then you can certainly modify it. Likewise, consider rules variants carefully, since changing one part of the game can have unforeseen effects on other parts. That said, **ICONS** is *your* game, and you should feel free to modify, customize, and tailor it to your hearts' content!

ABILITY VARIANTS

The six basic abilities in **ICONS** cover a lot of ground in terms of defining characters. However, some may prefer an even simpler set of abilities by dropping one or two of the existing six and subsuming their uses into other abilities. The three easiest abilities to remove from the game are Prowess, Awareness, and Willpower.

DROPPING PROWESS

Prowess is a bit of an odd duck in terms of abilities, since it is the one most involving an amount of skill or training: close combat ability. Few characters are going to have a Prowess level higher than 4 without some degree of training or experience, and Prowess 6+ characters can be expected to have considerable amounts of both. So why is Prowess an “ability” at all?

Primarily because of the ability most likely to subsume its uses: Coordination. Coordination is already used for dodging and ranged combat, along with all other physical actions not involving sheer Strength. Eliminating Prowess makes Coordination the be-all “physical action” ability. It also makes it more difficult to model the highly-coordinated hero who is *not* necessarily a master of all forms of close combat. Still, you can drop Prowess from the game and shift all of its uses to Coordination, making it easier to view Coordination and Strength and an “acting” and “effect” pair of physical abilities. Be aware, however, that having a high Coordination becomes even more attractive!

DROPPING AWARENESS

Awareness is differentiated from Intellect as the ability to notice and pick up on things, from simple sensory awareness to gut feelings, instinct, and intuition. It makes it easier to model both the “absent-minded professor” who is highly intelligent, but not overly aware, and the hero with the sharp senses and instincts who is not necessarily any smarter than anyone else.

Intellect is the ability most likely to take over the functions of Awareness. The sharp-eyed character is of average Intellect, with an appropriate Specialty in noticing things. The absent-minded professor is a bit more difficult, but still workable with a lower Intellect and more levels in Specialties like Science.

DROPPING WILLPOWER

Lastly, Willpower represents mental “strength” and resilience, as well as “force of personality”. It is separate from the logic and quick-thinking of Intellect and the instinct of Awareness, but could be subsumed into either if

Willpower was removed from the game. You could even make some Willpower tests with the higher (or the lower) of the two remaining mental abilities, if you wished, making Willpower a kind of “figured” ability.

The personality aspects of Willpower tend to work better with Awareness, which is also focused on dealing with one’s surroundings, and tends to work in with the idea that willful comic book heroes (often focused on mental or mystical powers) tend to be some of the most aware.

STAMINA VARIANTS

Stamina is intended as a simple means of tracking whether a character is up or down in a fight and how many hits a character can be expected to take of a certain damage level. The default calculations for Stamina take into account that some characters get taken out of fights fairly quickly but Strength and Willpower are the prime factors to hanging in there, and Determination (for recovery) plays a role. The following variants shift around some of these assumptions to better fit different views of what Stamina should be.

For a *completely* different “Stamina” variant, see **“N” is for “Narrative Abilities”**.

VARIANT STAMINA BASE

Rather than basing Stamina off of the sum of Strength and Willpower levels, you can choose to base it off of any two abilities, assuming they all play different roles in keeping a hero going in a fight (or lessening the severity of damage from attacks). These may be two set abilities—such as Strength and Coordination, or Intellect and Willpower—or two abilities determined on a case-by-case basis, such as each character’s two highest abilities, whatever they may be. The latter case tends to mean more characters will have higher, similar Stamina levels, given the two high abilities will tend to be in a narrower range.

INCREASED STAMINA

If you find Stamina values too low in your game, causing conflicts to end too quickly (even in spite of using Determination Points for recovery), you may simply wish to increase everyone’s starting Stamina value. Start by doubling the higher of Strength or Willpower and then adding the lower ability to it. So a hero with Strength 4 and Willpower 6 would have 16 Stamina: Double level 6 for Willpower (12) plus level 4 Strength. If that isn’t sufficient, double both ability levels before adding them together. In this case the aforementioned hero would have 20 Stamina (Strength 4 + Willpower 6 = 10, doubled to 20).

If you're using a Variant Stamina Base, you can combine it with Increased Stamina, for example using three different abilities (Strength + Coordination + Willpower or Prowess + Coordination + Strength, for examples). You can make Stamina a summation of characters' physical or mental abilities, or even all six, although that can lead to *greatly* inflated Stamina levels.

FIXED STAMINA

Rather than basing Stamina off of abilities, every character has the same amount, say 10, 15, or 20 points, depending on how long you want most fights to last. This option obviously benefits characters with lower abilities, who get more Stamina out of it. It works best in conjunction with an option like Innate Resistance (following), where another factor determines characters' resistance to most damage.

INNATE RESISTANCE

With this variant, all characters have Resistance to Bashing and Blasting Damage equal to half their Strength level, rounded down. This means really strong characters, in addition to having more Stamina, can also stand up to more punishment that's not a Slashing or Shooting attack. A brute with Great (6) Strength is essentially immune to the puny punches of an Average (3) Strength attacker, having Resistance 3, but still needs to be worried about even a Poor (2) damage blade or shot (no Resistance).

This innate Resistance does not count as a power, regardless of its level (since high-level Strength already counts as a power). If a character has Damage Resistance limited to Bashing and Blasting, its level is at least 1 higher than the character's innate Resistance based on Strength.

FREE RECOVERY

If you want to give heroes a bit more of an edge, allow free uses of the recover option of advantage so they can get back more Stamina during conflicts. That is, the character can recover without activating a quality to do so. You can limit free recovery in the following ways. Choose the ones that work best for your game and group, but choose at least one, since otherwise the heroes get unlimited free recoveries any time they want!

- Heroes get a limited number of free recoveries per conflict, from just one to a set amount (two or more) to a value based on one of the hero's abilities or something like Determination (so a hero with Determination 1 gets one free recovery, but the hero with Determination 4 gets four).
- Using a free recovery takes up the hero's action for that page. This is similar to using a maneuver in order to gain advantage and recover.

DICE VARIANTS

The following are some variants for die-rolling and handling die-rolls for tests in **ICONS**.

DICE POOL

For some, it's not "super" unless it involves a handful of dice, rather than just rolling one puny six-sider. You can convert **ICONS** to a dice pool system using the following guidelines:

When a test is called for, roll a number of six-sided dice equal to the acting ability's level (so a level 6 ability is six dice, for example). Each die that comes up 2-6 adds one to the effort of the test (starting from 0). Dice that come up 1 do not add anything. Each die that comes up 6 adds one and is also re-rolled and its result added to the effort (+0 on a 1, +1 on 2-6) with further 6s re-rolled and added, until no further 6s are rolled. Compare the effort against an opposing ability or a difficulty set by the GM.

Example: The Hangman throws a punch. He has Prowess 6 and the Martial Arts specialty, giving him an effective ability level of 7, so his player rolls 7 dice, getting: 1, 2, 2, 3, 4, 6, 6. The 1 result doesn't add anything, while the remaining dice add up to 6. The player re-rolls the two 6s, getting 1 and 6. Again the 1 doesn't add but the 6 adds +1, for a total effort of 7 and is re-rolled again, coming up 5. That adds a final +1, for a total effort of 8, and no further rolling (since the die didn't come up 6). The GM compared that effort against the Prowess or Coordination of the Hangman's target to determine the outcome.

This approach involves more die-rolling and counting up numbers, but tends to have a probability curve somewhat like that of regular **ICONS** play, albeit a bit flatter and wider, since there's theoretically no limit to the number of re-rolls.

For added complexity and variability, roll the difficulty of the action in the same way to determine the final difficulty level. In the previous example, rather than using the target's Prowess or Coordination as a fixed value, the GM would roll dice equal to that ability's level and count up their value in the same way to figure the difficulty, including the possibility of 1s and 6s shifting the difficulty lower or higher.

FUDGE DICE

An "ancestor" of **ICONS** is the **Fudge** RPG System (www.fudgerpg.com) which uses a set of four six-sided dice (called "Fudge dice") marked on each of two sides with a plus (+), a minus (-), and a blank or zero face.

Rolled together, the four dice (abbreviated “4dF”) give a value from +4 to -4 by adding up all of the top-facing sides.

You can use a set of Fudge dice to play **ICONS** with some modifications: note that Fudge dice produce a “steeper” bell curve than the 2d6 system of **ICONS**, weighted more towards the middle or “0” result. Obviously, Fudge dice also do not produce +5 or -5 results, limiting the range of modifiers slightly. This approach may suit more realistic **ICONS** games where a more reliable middle is sought while also limiting the more extreme results on either end of the spectrum.

ADVANTAGE & DISADVANTAGE DICE

Rather than the standard Improved Effort and Increasing Difficulty modifiers from **ICONS**, you can use the following idea of advantage and disadvantage dice.

With an advantage die, you roll two dice for effort and take the higher of the two. With a disadvantage die, the GM rolls two dice for difficulty and takes the higher of the two. This approach tends to result in a net bonus or penalty, but the potential range of outcomes remains bounded; characters can’t do better than their “personal best,” but they tend to do better (or worse) than average. Because of this, advantage and disadvantage dice work well for settings with less “swing” to their outcomes.

FREEFORM QUALITIES

The **Qualities On-the-Fly** option from the **Hero Creation** chapter of **ICONS** offers the opportunity to leave characters’ qualities “fluid” and undefined for a time, coming up with them during game play before eventually settling on a fixed list. This variant takes that concept a step further: qualities are *never* a fixed list, but always remain fluid and changing. Essentially, characters have no set qualities, but can come up with them at any time during play.

You may wish to set a limit on how many qualities players can choose for their characters for “free,” that is, without a cost like a maneuver. Three seems a good number, equal to the usual number of set qualities heroes have. After that point in each game session, players need to take a maneuver for their hero or spend a Determination Point in order to come up with a new quality. Also note, this only applies to inventing qualities for their own heroes! Discovering or imposing qualities on other characters still follows the usual maneuver rules from **ICONS**.

"W" IS FOR "WEALTH"



Although some say “money is the root of all evil,” many heroes with considerable wealth and resources find ways to put it to work for the greater good. After all, being a superhero can get expensive: all those uniforms, high-tech headquarters, fancy gadgets, and advanced vehicles don’t come cheap, and “superhero” is rarely a high-paying job when it comes to covering expenses, unless there’s someone else with deep pockets bankrolling the whole thing.

So the question is often not “Where does he get all those wonderful toys?” but “Who is paying for all of those toys, and how?” The independently wealthy or heavily-invested superhero is a major archetype of the genre, as are the down-on-their-luck heroes struggling to make ends meet while also trying to do the right thing. As the **Great Power** sourcebook points out in its **Devices** chapter, **ICONS** generally doesn’t worry about where the toys come from, beyond possibly something like a “Wealthy Inventor” quality, but if you want to consider financial and material resources a factor in your games, this chapter looks at ways you can do so.

RESOURCES AS QUALITIES

The default approach of **ICONS** is to treat access to resources as a quality. This is obvious in terms of qualities like “Independently Wealthy,” “Billionaire Industrialist,” or “Financial Wizard” but may be implied in many other qualities, from “Corporate CEO” to “Four-Star General” and “Crown Princess of the Hidden Realms” or even “All-American Hero” who might be able to call in favors from the right people to provide resources when they’re needed. Not every quality provides access to the same type or amount of resources, but many can and their activation and use is situational, like all qualities in the game.

RESOURCE ADVANTAGES

Players can activate a resource quality for an advantage just like any other. A retcon to have something the character didn’t have before is by far the most common, essentially “buying” something useful with the advantage, from a cell phone to a car or plane ticket (or even a plane!) so long as the item falls within the description of the resource quality.

That is by no means the only possible advantage granted by resources, however. Consider the following possibilities:

- **Improved Effort:** Some problems *can* be solved by throwing money at them, or at least you can improve your chances of solving them. Having access to wealth or resources may justify an improved effort bonus on a test, ranging from tracking down information through access to expensive or difficult-to-get sources to convincing someone to cooperate through outright bribery. Players can even justify improved effort on tests through resources with things like lessons or access to experts or teachers: “Because I’m *Heir to the Empire*, I’ve naturally studied extensively, giving me *improved effort* on this Awareness test for the proper etiquette.”
- **Insight:** Similarly, resources can give characters extensive past experiences to draw upon for insights, or open doors that are closed to less resourceful (and generous) people, providing characters with access to information and knowledge they might otherwise lack.
- **Push Ability:** Probably the most difficult advantage to justify with resources, characters may still be able to push certain abilities by having devices or techniques they have acquired using their resources that allow them to do so. “Because I’m the *World’s Best Barista*, I’m able to come up with a drink to *push my Strength* when it comes to tests to stay awake and power through the time it takes to get this done.”

- **Recover:** Resources can give characters access to facilities, treatments, experts, and other means to help them recover quickly, or retcon having such means on-hand to help with a quick recovery.
- **Retcon:** This is the broadest and most useful advantage for resources, since it deals with pretty much anything characters might acquire, own, or use that isn't covered by any of the other categories. It includes everything from a home (or safe-house) in every major city, access to a private jet or other vehicles, membership in exclusive clubs, having just the right gadget or piece of equipment on-hand, or knowing just the right person to talk to in order to get something done, to name a few.
- **Stunt:** While activating a resource quality might add a whole new meaning to “buying a stunt,” it can mean things like prior training or experience, access to equipment or techniques that make the stunt possible, or ownership of certain items, including other devices or catalysts for a stunt, such as a trophy room of purloined super-science or a library full of rare volumes of arcana.

In some cases, advantages from activating a resource quality might actually be associated with a character's relative *lack* of resources, from the need to push an ability to putting in improved effort to make up for resources that just are not there to things the character learned or acquired in the “school of hard knocks” when times have been difficult.

RESOURCE TROUBLE

Of course, resources are not always advantageous. Players and the GM can also activate a resource quality to cause trouble for a character as well. Even seemingly advantageous qualities like “Billionaire Inventor” or “Captain of Industry” have their potential down-sides that can crop up from time to time.

Resource trouble may also stem from a lack of resources, activating qualities reflecting that, such as “Under a Dark Cloud” or “Struggling to Make It”. Even otherwise stable jobs or lives might have periods of financial difficulty or strain, and heroes often have to juggle the problems of their mundane lives alongside their costumed exploits. Examples of resource trouble include:

- **Challenge:** The catch-all category for trouble arising related to the character's resources. Resourceful characters might have enemies, from business rivals to family foes, causing them trouble, or debts, with someone coming to collect.
- **Compulsion:** Duty calls, even for the billionaire jet-setter. Resourceful characters often have responsibilities to shareholders, employees, family,

or others who depend on them. While a hero might want to pursue leads in an investigation, she might also have a meeting of the board of directors to prepare for and attend. Another hero has to balance the role of crime-fighter against his fledging law practice, keeping him and his partner (and their employees) in business, and so forth.

- **Disability:** While it's relatively rare for a character to lose a personal ability due to trouble with resources, it's entirely possible for heroes to lose access to devices or resources that grant them certain abilities: an armored hero might not own her armor and find it repossessed, while a hero wielding a powerful talisman might have it taken away by a higher power. Hero teams get evicted from their headquarters or lose air-space rights over a city, forcing them to place their transportation outside the city limits, and so forth. In cases where a hero's life depends on a resource, its loss could be a far more serious matter, from losing the device that allows a blind hero to see to an artificial hero being declared someone else's property.
- **Increased Difficulty:** Sometimes being amongst the "haves" makes things more difficult rather than less. Resource qualities may result in some blind spots in a character's background or experience, or cause others to prejudge them. You might activate a "Royal Heir" quality for increased difficulty to reflect that the character has little experience with "the common people" and some anti-monarchists are not well-disposed to royalty (increasing the difficulty of persuading them, for example). Characters lacking in resources may certainly face increased difficulty in others areas, particularly where money talks, and the character literally has nothing worth saying.
- **Lost Panel:** While this kind of trouble doesn't seem like it would come up often, having to pay attention to resources, or things related to them, can be a distraction, from the hero who spends a page rushing about to catch valuable knick-knacks before they can smash on the floor to the one who has to pause for a moment to make sure her remote camera is catching all of the action so she can upload the video to her online patrons later.

RESOURCES AS AN ABILITY

Access to resources (or lack thereof) can also be handled as an ability of its own, called **Resources**, much like Strength or Intellect or any other ability. It represents a quantitative measure of a character's resources, as shown on the **Resources Benchmark Table**.

Level	Description	Examples
1	Weak	Unemployed, on a limited fixed income
2	Poor	Lower middle class, freelance, student
3	Average	Middle class, average day job
4	Fair	Middle class, professional or salaried employment
5	Good	Upper middle class, successful small business, small inheritance
6	Great	Upper class, successful business or chain of businesses, trust fund
7	Incredible	Millionaire, corporation
8	Amazing	Large corporation, small nation, minor branch of a large government
9	Fantastic	Billionaire, multi-national corporation, major branch of a large government
10	Supreme	Mega-corporation or large nation

A hero's Resources are generated just like any other ability: a roll on the **Level Determination** table, potentially modified by the hero's origin. Rather than increasing a mental ability, a Gimmick can choose to increase Resources by +2. An Unearthly hero can also choose Resources as one of the abilities to increase by +2. If creating heroes via the point-based option, increase the total number of points available to 50 to start, having Resources cost the same as any other ability: 1 point per level.

RESOURCES TESTS

When characters want to acquire or use something from their Resources, players make Resources tests. These are just like other tests in **ICONS**: a roll of a die plus the Resources level against a roll of a die plus a difficulty level chosen by the GM.

Difficulty: The difficulty level for the Resources test is based on the expense of what the character wants, using the **Resources Benchmark Table** as a guideline. Generally, expenses considered "routine" for that level of resources should be one or two levels lower in difficulty: buying a meal is Weak (1) difficulty, for example. Greater expenditures are higher level.

Buying a new car is a Great (6) difficulty, while a new house is Incredible (7).

Success and Failure: If the resource test succeeds, then the character acquires the resource, item, or service in question. If it fails, the character doesn't have the available cash or credit to manage the purchase at this time. How soon the character can try again is up to the GM, but it should be at least a chapter, and may entail the character making additional arrangements, from visiting an ATM to calling a bank or broker.

Automatic Success: Any Resources test with a difficulty five or more levels lower than the character's resources is an automatic success, a trivial expense for a character at that level. A character with Fantastic (9) Resources can make Fair (4) or lesser expenditures all day long without any impact, for example. The GM may wish to extend this to Resources tests with difficulty four or more levels less than the character's resources, given the rarity of failure at that level.

Loans and Credit: Characters attempting a Resources test with a difficulty level higher than their Resources are leveraging their available credit and collateral in order to acquire the necessary resources. If the test succeeds, the character must make an additional Resources test each month for a number of months equal to the level of the purchase (so seven months for an Incredible level purchase, for example), with a difficulty two less than the original purchase, in order to pay off the accumulated debt. Alternately, the GM may simply reduce the character's effective Resources by one level for the duration to reflect resources "tied-up" in paying off the new purchase.

Advantage and Trouble: Tests using the Resources ability are subject to advantage and trouble just like any other tests, and the advice from the **Resources as Qualities** section can apply to activating qualities for advantage or trouble on these tests, including improved effort, increased difficulty, or pushing the Resources ability an additional rank for those expensive acquisitions.

RESOURCES PYRAMID TESTS

Two or more characters may participate in a Resources pyramid test to represent a long-term investment of resources or a more complicated purchase, such as a corporate takeover attempt. This works just like any other pyramid test, and the GM may wish to apply pyramid test modifiers appropriate to the situation, such as competitive (for two or more sides looking to acquire the same thing), costly (where each attempt has a cost in resources), or escalating (where the longer the test goes on, the most expensive things become long-term).

"X" IS FOR "X-FACTORS"



One of the fun elements of tabletop roleplaying games is the element of randomness, the unexpected, that challenges our creativity and encourages both players and Game Masters to think in different directions. Part of the reason why random hero generation is the default option in **ICONS** is precisely that: the challenge of taking an otherwise random collection of abilities and building a story around them. Many players have created **ICONS** heroes and said, "I never would have come up with this on my own, if the dice hadn't moved things in this direction!"

Similarly, **ICONS** Game Masters can sometimes use some help when it comes to creating adventures, or just filling-in some "dead space" in between chapters or issues of an ongoing series. Maybe you need to shake things up a bit, or your players decide to have their heroes head out on patrol "just to see what's happening" and you need to come up with something. Maybe you're trying out **ICONS** for the first time, your players have created heroes and they want to play something *now*. In these cases, the tables in this chapter may be of some help.

RANDOM EVENTS

First, roll on the **Event** table to determine the type of event, then roll on the appropriate sub-table to find out the specific event. Modify as desired to suit the characters and anything else going on in the series. You might want to customize these tables to suit your own **ICONS** game, excluding options you don't like or that can't occur, and adding others in their place.

d6	Event
1	Crime Wave!
2	Disaster Strikes!
3	It's Personal
4	Out of This World
5	Strange Tales
6	Super-Science

CRIME WAVE!

Criminals are on the loose and it's up to the heroes to stop them. As an optional extra, you can roll a die: 1-2 = petty criminals, 3-4 = organized crime, 5 = alien or super-science, 6 = supernatural.

d6	Event
1	Assassination: Criminals target someone for death: 1d6, 1-2 = politician, 3-4 = business executive, 5-6 = ordinary citizen.
2	Chase: Police chase criminals through the area, either in vehicles or on foot.
3	Robbery: 1d6, 1-4 = Criminals rob a bank or other business and try to escape with their ill-gotten gains, 5-6 = Ordinary citizens are mugged or robbed.
4	Riot: A public event or protest turns into a violent riot.
5	Shootout: A violent confrontation between one or more groups of criminals, and possibly the authorities.
6	Terrorism: Criminals stage a terrorist act of destruction for intimidation or extortion purposes.

DISASTER STRIKES!

A disaster occurs and the heroes either hear about it or are called upon to stop it. Place the disaster somewhere the heroes can reach in time—they're not going to be called upon to stop or deal with an earthquake on the other side of the globe unless they can be there instantly, for example.

As an optional extra, roll a die: on a 1-3 the disaster is naturally-occurring. On a 4, the disaster is caused by otherworldly forces. On a 5, the disaster is supernatural in origin and, on a 6, the disaster is caused by some type of technology or super-science.

d6	Event
1	Earthquake
2	Fire (forest, grass, or urban)
3	Flood or tsunami
4	Severe Weather (blizzard, hurricane, tornado, etc.)
5	Spill (oil or chemical)
6	Structural Collapse

IT'S PERSONAL

Something happens that affects one or more of the heroes personally. These are often complications involving a hero's qualities, so the GM may wish to award Determination Points when such situations arise.

d6	Event
1	Authority figures give the heroes trouble, from questioning their motives to threatening to jail them.
2	Bad Press: The media hounds the heroes, causing trouble.
3	Framed! Someone is setting the heroes up to look guilty.
4	Frenemies: Other heroes cause trouble, out of a sense of rivalry, misunderstanding, or outside influence.
5	Friends & Family: A family member or loved one has a crisis and needs help, often at an inopportune time.
6	Secrets: A hero's secrets are threatened, including possibly a character's secret identity (if any).

OUT OF THIS WORLD

The event originates from somewhere (or even somewhen) beyond present-day Earth, usually an alien world or dimension.

d6 Event

- 1 **Alien Artifacts** turn up and potentially cause trouble, either by accidental activation, becoming targets for theft, or triggering origins or other events.
- 2 **Earthfall:** An otherworldly threat—such as an asteroid impact or solar flare—is headed for Earth, unless the heroes can stop it.
- 3 **Invasion!** Beings from another world or dimension invade Earth.
- 4 **Other Worlds:** The heroes are transported to another world or dimension, or discover a portal or other means of passage.
- 5 **Prelude:** One or more scouts from another world visit Earth to gather information.
- 6 **Strange Visitors:** An otherworldly visitor ends up on Earth, possibly by accident, and potentially confused or frightened.

STRANGE TALES

The event is something...strange, very likely supernatural or magical in origin, although in some cases it may just *seem* supernatural. Roll a die: on a 1, the event is not actually supernatural, but turns out to have a mundane or scientific explanation.

d6 Event

- 1 **Arcane Artifacts** turn up, often in a museum, archeological dig, or private collection, causing potential trouble,
- 2 **Creatures** appear in the area, looking for victims or furthering their own schemes.
- 3 **Cults** look to expand their power or achieve goals on behalf of their otherworldly patron(s).
- 4 **Deviltry** caused by wish-granting imps or actual demons.
- 5 **Gateway:** A portal to a supernatural realm opens.
- 6 **Haunting:** A ghost, curse, or other supernatural force haunts a person or place.

SUPER-SCIENCE

The event concerns advanced science or technology beyond most in the modern world.

d6 Event

- 1 **Funding Problems** involve thefts, either of cash and valuables or of rare materials or technical components to carry out research or the construction of prototypes.
- 2 **Inviting Disaster:** A scientific experiment or discovery threatens to provoke disaster if left unchecked, such as an uncontrolled energy source or dimensional portal, or a new life form, from an artificial intelligence to a bio-engineered organism.
- 3 **Lab Rats:** An experiment or technology produces dangerous “test subjects” that escape, ranging from rampaging monsters to potential new supervillains.
- 4 **Research Subjects:** One or more of the heroes are targeted as potential research subjects, either to find out more about how the hero’s physiology or powers work, or because the hero is the ideal test subject for a new technology.
- 5 **They Called Me Mad!** A frustrated scientist aims to prove a pet theory or invention to all those who dismissed it, often at the price of blackmailing the local population.
- 6 **The Wrong Hands:** A new invention ends up in the wrong hands, either stolen or covertly funded by criminals who intend to misuse it for their own ends.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

For **Disaster Strikes!** events, you may find “**R** is for **Rescue**” helpful once you’ve figured out what the disaster is. For **Out of This World** events, consult “**A** is for **Aliens**” and “**C** is for **Cosmic**” for additional information, while for **Strange Tales** events, you may find “**D** is for **Demons**” and “**M** is for **Magic**” helpful.

The **Crime Wave** table is useful for occasions when heroes are just generally “out on patrol” looking for signs of trouble in their city, although you can occasionally expand patrol events to include the whole random events table and its sub-tables, particularly for an **ICONS** setting where a lot of strange things happen all the time.

AND YOU ARE...?

Heroes encounter a lot of people and sometimes, in the midst of an adventure certain details about those people may suddenly matter. When that's the case, consult the following steps to help inspire you:

Gender: Roll a die: 1-3 = Female, 4-6 = Male. If you wish, you can treat a 6 as roll again with the same results, except on a 1, the individual is transgendered or intersex.

Age: Roll a die: 1 = Child, 2 = Teen, 3-5 = Adult, 6 = Elderly.

Super-Names: Create random names for superheroes and supervillains by rolling on the first table (one die for column another for row) and on the second table and combining or modifying the two name elements in a way that works.

d6	1-3	4-6
1	Aristocratic Title (baron, duke, king, queen, etc.)	Metal (gold, iron, silver, steel, etc.)
2	Color (anything on the spectrum)	Celestial Body (planet, star, sun, nebula, etc.)
3	Gender (man, woman, lad, lass, boy, girl, etc.)	Weather Condition (cloud, rain, storm, lightning, thunder, etc.)
4	Honorific (mister, miss, mrs., ms., master or mistress)	Military rank (particularly captain, major, and general)
5	Pronoun (he, she, it, or the)	Word for "unusual"
6	Degree (doctor, professor, reverend, etc.)	Word for "amazing"

d6	1-3	4-6
1	Animal	Major Arcana Tarot Card
2	Insect (or Arachnid)	Natural Disaster
3	Geopolitical Locale	Mythical Creature
4	Greek Letter (particularly Alpha and Omega)	Elemental (chemical or mythic)
5	Playing Card (face or suit)	Body Part (including bones)
6	Chess Piece	Weapon

"Y" IS FOR "YOUTH"



Ah, the impetuosity of youth! In the very early years of superhero comics, publishers created teen sidekick characters to work with adult heroes as a means of giving young readers someone with whom they could easily identify, inserting themselves into the story. Ever since, teenaged heroes (and even villains) have been a staple of the genre, creating a sub-genre all their own. Indeed, some of the most popular comics have featured the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of teenaged heroes, whether defending a world that hates and fears them, trying to move out from under the shadow of their mentors, or learning the lesson that with great power, also comes great responsibility.

TEEN HEROES

You can create teen heroes in **ICONS** just like regular heroes. Indeed, there's nothing requiring a newly-created hero in the game be an adult (or of a particular race, gender, or background), but some of the following elements can help to ground your heroes more firmly in the teen hero genre and style.

ORIGINS

All the origins from the **Assembled Edition** of **ICONS** apply to teen heroes, but you may wish to add the following additional step to the origin process: Roll once on the following table to determine the hero's teen origin, combining it with the standard rolled origin from the **Creation Creation** chapter of **ICONS**.

d6 Origin

- 1 **Original:** You're an original act. Although a teen, your origin isn't connected directly to another hero or villain. While this tends to make you your own person, it also means you don't necessarily have the same kind of support network as more connected young heroes.
- 2 **Legacy:** You've inherited the legacy of a previous hero (or villain). This can range from their entire schtick—name, costume, powers, and all—to just an element of their legacy, such as the name or powers. Your predecessor may be a relative, such as a parent, or there might be no connection between you other than your legacy.
- 3 **Sidekick:** You are a sidekick (or ex-sidekick) to an adult hero. Your abilities and theme may be similar, or quite different. You should also decide if you are still your mentor's sidekick or have struck out on your own.
- 4 **Wayward:** You are (or were) a troubled teen. You strayed from the straight and narrow, or circumstances cast you in the role of the bad guy. You might be related to a villain, or maybe you initially used your abilities irresponsibly. You might operate under a dark cloud or a sinister destiny. Now is your chance to make it right and prove you're a true hero.
- 5 **Orphan:** You're alone in the world, at least so far as family goes. You might have lost your parents, your whole family, or even your entire world. Whatever left you on your own may also be what motivates you, and you have opportunities to create a new family, if you can let people in to do it.
- 6 **Oddity:** You're only ostensibly a teen. You might be an ageless spirit inhabiting a teenager's body, an alien with a different life-cycle, or an adult de-aged to relive your teen years, or some other oddity that technically makes you a teen, but also makes you different from your "peers."

ABILITIES

Teen heroes can have the same level determination for abilities, although the GM may wish to have the **Level Determination** table top out at Incredible (7), treating a roll of 12 the same as an 11. Teen heroes could still have abilities above 7 by applying bonuses from origins, limits, and the Ability Increase power, unless the GM restricts these as well.

Likewise, teen heroes can have any specialties or powers not specifically prohibited by the Game Master. While it is probably more realistic to limit teens in terms of how many specialties they can have, and how many levels in each, that depends on whether or not realism is at all a concern in a setting where teenagers can also fly, lift trucks, and throw energy blasts. Plenty of teen heroes are high-Intellect geniuses who are Technology Masters, for example.

QUALITIES

When choosing qualities for your teen hero, consider the following questions, in addition to those in the **Phase 6: Qualities** section of the **Hero Creation** chapter of Icons.

- **Where do you come from?** This question includes the secondary teen origin described previously, since several of them imply potential qualities. For example, a Legacy hero might have “Upholds the Legacy of...” as a quality while a Sidekick could have “Sidekick of...” or “Trained by...” as a quality. Similarly, a Wayward could have a quality associated with setbacks to overcome, ranging from “Daughter of the Devil” to “Reformed Student of the Mastermind,” and an Orphan can have a quality about that status, like “Last...” or “Sole Survivor”. Beyond just origin, where a teen character comes from often defines things like cliques and social groups that are so important at that age.
- **What are you rebelling against?** Related to origin is, what is the teen hero trying to rebel against or change? “Nothing” is a valid answer, in which case this quality doesn’t really apply, but many teens are looking to define themselves in opposition to something, often some element of their past or upbringing, or some thing they feel everyone believes about them. A former sidekick might be looking to reinvent herself as independent of her mentor, for example, while a teen hero who is a legacy of an infamous villain may be looking to redeem the name.
- **What do you aspire towards?** Teen heroes are also in the process of becoming adults and realizing their full potential, so they need goals, role-models, and ideals to aspire towards. Sometimes it starts out with what they do *not* want to become as part of what they’re rebelling

against, but qualities may also include the teen hero's hopes and aspirations, from "Be Worthy of the Family Name" to "Make Up for My Past Mistakes" or even just "Seeks to Live a Normal Life".

Your group may also want to consider whether or not some version of "teen" or "young" should be considered a quality for individual characters, or if it is quality for the series as a whole. See "**U** is for Universe" for a discussion of series themes as qualities (and why you generally *don't* want to include them as such).

TEEN TROUBLE

The "T" for "teen" also stands for "trouble," which is an important element of the teen hero genre. What kind of trouble do teens face?

Secrets: "Nobody can understand" is a common refrain involving the variety of things teens keep bottled-up inside, secrets involving how they feel, about their experiences, and about their increasing awareness of themselves as individuals. For teen heroes, this is only compounded by things like maintaining a secret identity, or secrets about their powers or abilities. Oftentimes, the biggest trouble teen heroes have is not the actual problems themselves, but the impulse to keep them secret and deal with them on their own, out of fear or judgment, abandonment, or embarrassment.

Relationships: For teen heroes, life is a whirlwind of friends, rivals, social cliques, and who has a crush on or is dating whom. Plus there are relationships with adult authority figures like parents, teachers, and mentors, as teen heroes struggle to be more independent. All of these relationships are complicated but issues of trust, secrets, and who knows what. Do you tell your parents you have super-powers and fight crime? Do you tell that special someone you have a crush on them? Do you share a secret entrusted to you by a friend, even when you know you shouldn't?

No Control: Sometimes it feels like you have no control over anything, especially when you're still legally a minor, under the pressures of attending school, and saddled with powers you may not fully understand. Many of the compulsions of teen trouble come from being obligated to do things, whether you want to or not.

Doing It All: Then there's juggling school and homework, extra-circulars (like band, sports, or clubs), having a part-time job, friends and family, oh, and having super-powers and fighting crime, not to mention considering what you're going to do with your life after school and ... well, it can be a lot to juggle, and some teen heroes can feel a bit overwhelmed at times, as other aspects of life intrude upon their costumed good deeds.

SCHOOL DAYS

A big element of the teen heroes genre is the experience of having to attend school, both as a regular student and as a young super-hero. The big question is: What kind of school?

Mainstream School: Whether public or private, some super-teens attend a mainstream school where the vast majority of the student body *doesn't* have super-powers. This usually necessitates maintaining a secret identity, or at least keeping those selfsame powers secret, given the potential danger it brings to the school.

Super-School: Other super-teens attend a “school for gifted students” intended to specifically teach those with super-powers. It might be open to all kinds of students and powers, or just to those with particular origins or powers, such as a school for mutants or other birthrights or an academy of magic. The school may be intended to train students into potential superheroes, or just responsible citizens able to control their special abilities.

Training Sessions: Regardless of the school they attend, at least part of the super-teen’s education is power usage and control, and training may also include everything a potential superhero needs to know. Training sessions make great “warm-ups” and practice opportunities for a regular game, along with a chance for the players to pit their heroes against each other in friendly competition.

GLORY DAYS

While many teen hero teams are like the junior varsity to their adult counterparts, in some settings, teen heroes are pretty much it. They are the heroes the world calls upon in times of need. The reasons for this might be manifold, and are something you can choose to best suit your own series:

Coming of Age: Super-powers show up at puberty, so new super-heroes are most likely to be teens (new super-villains, too, for that matter) and most in need of guidance and help in managing their newfound powers.

Aging Out: Super-powers tend to fade with physical (and psychological) maturity, meaning most people lose them after their teens, and most definitely by their mid-20s.

Major Minors: Adult superhumans face certain legal restrictions. For example, international (interplanetary, what have you) treaties may specify that adults with super powers cannot function in a para-military or law enforcement context, but super-powered teens provide a loophole in this

agreement, allowing them to do so. Likewise, all costumed vigilantes might be illegal, but minors can get away with it because they're less likely to be charged and tried as adults.

Super-Kids Clubhouse: The teens have banded together to form their own organization, and one of the rules is, once you reach a certain age (20 or 21, most likely), you're out. This might be due to something like the aging out effect, or just teens wanting to keep their "club" exclusive. They might have adult advisors, mentors, or the like, but membership in the club is teens-only.

Mandatory Attendance: As minors, super-powered teens may be legally required to attend a super-school or training academy to help them learn to manage their powers. The academy may or may not be looking to turn them into super-heroes, but the kids could have other ideas regardless, forming informal teams and sneaking out to go on "missions" of their own without their instructors knowledge. If there are multiple academies in different states, nations, or even on different planets, then the schools might be rivals, ranging from super-powered sporting competitions to super-battles between their student bodies.

BYGONE YOUTH

Even if you don't plan to run a teen heroes series for Icons, there are still plenty of ways you can incorporate teen hero elements into your regular series for an adventure or two:

- **De-Aging:** Something—whether a scientific or magical accident or the actions of a villain—transforms some or all of the heroes to teenagers temporarily, giving them the opportunity to experience teen troubles and possibly have to deal with things like school while also remaining superheroes and finding a way to restore their normal selves.
- **The Substitute:** If your setting features a Super-School, then one or more of the heroes might be tapped as a substitute teacher or guest lecturer for the students, perhaps focused on the heroes' individual specialties. Naturally, that's when something either goes wrong at the school or the heroes enemies choose that opportunity to strike.
- **Teen World:** Some effect displaces everyone in the world over the age of 21, including most of the heroes and villains, so the players get to take on the roles of some of the teen heroes left behind to deal with the crisis and find a way to restore things to normal.

"Z" IS FOR "ZOMBIES"



Zombies. The Walking Dead. They have been a staple of the comics since the beginning, from servants of villainous necromancers to mad science menaces and even unlikely heroes. This chapter looks at a variety of different types of zombies you can include in your **ICONS** games.

TYPES OF ZOMBIES

The basic concept of an animate, shambling corpse has spawned (so to speak) a wide variety of different kinds of “zombies” in comics and roleplaying games, many of them suitable for use in **ICONS**.

ANIMATED CORPSE

This is the “classic” zombie given as an example in the **Assembled Edition** of **Icons**: a shambling, animated human corpse. They’re not much in the

abilities department but, being dead, have supreme resistance to the concerns of living beings. See **Zombie Abilities** for more on this.

While most zombie corpses are animated by supernatural means, one variant is the “necrobot,” a corpse reanimated as a zombie through technological means, such as cybernetics or nanotechnology. In addition to the basic zombie abilities, necrobots may have built-in devices, including armor, sensors, and weapons. See the **Devices** section of the **Powers** chapter of **ICONS** for ideas.

VIRAL ZOMBIE

Modern horror fiction has posited non-magical causes of zombies, particularly contagious diseases (often created in a lab) or strange chemicals or radiation (often unearthly in origin). These “viral zombies” tend to be otherwise like their occult cousins, save that they also tend to be contagious: Those killed by them, sometimes even those only wounded, bitten, or even *touched* by them, also become zombies of the same type, either immediately or slowly over time, like the progress of a disease. Viral zombies are animated, shambling plagues that can potentially overrun the entire world, making them the focus of apocalyptic scenarios (see **Earth-Z** for additional information).

HUNGRY ZOMBIE

Hungry zombies, in addition to their other qualities, must “eat,” usually by consuming the flesh of humans or other living creatures or specific parts of living creatures, such as the heart or brain. It is possible for hungry zombies to “starve,” although the process usually just drives them into an ever greater feeding frenzy to find what they are driven to eat, and eventually only causes them to become sluggish and dormant until a new food source comes along.

INTELLIGENT ZOMBIE

While zombies are generally all but mindless, with just enough Awareness of their surroundings to move and attack, some zombies have greater, even normal levels of Intellect and Willpower. Depending on their physical condition and appearance, these zombies may even be able to pass for living people under the right circumstances. While it’s possible to interact with intelligent zombies, they are not necessarily sane or moral creatures, given their condition, especially if they are driven by unnatural hungers or a need to pass on their affliction.

PROMETHEAN ZOMBIE

Named for the “modern Prometheus” of Mary Shelly’s novel *Frankenstein*, the Promethean zombie is a once-living person returned to a kind of pseudo-life by mad science, forbidden sorcery, or some combination of the two. Like Frankenstein’s creature from the novel, it may be a composite being of many parts, or an essentially whole but transformed individual. Promethean zombies are often intelligent to at least some degree and may have enhanced physical abilities, although they sometimes also have diminished undead resistances, being more “life-like” than their counterparts. For example, a Promethean zombie might need to eat and drink, even if it doesn’t breathe or sleep.

REVENANT

Not strictly a “zombie,” a common sort of undead creature in the comics is the revenant, an intelligent, animated corpse driven by a need for vengeance, either against those responsible for its death, or a similar class of individuals, such as all criminals, law-enforcement, or costumed heroes, for examples. Revenants are sometimes tragic dark heroes, walking the line between hero and outlaw, while others are villains out for blood and terrible retribution. Either way, they tend to be **Relentless**, as described under **Zombie Abilities**.

SUPER-ZOMBIE

Generally speaking, most zombies lack the abilities their bodies had in life, not just skills and mental abilities, but often physical ones as well, including most, if not all physical powers. However, some zombies, particularly viral ones, retain some or all of the powers they had in life, making them that much more dangerous. These “super-zombies” have all of the abilities of undead of their type (see **Zombie Abilities**) along with the powers of a superhero or supervillain!

ZUVEMBIES?

When the Comics Code was instituted in the 1950s, one of the things it banned was “occult” elements and monsters, including zombies, deemed too disturbing for young minds. The concept was—appropriately enough—entirely too good to stay dead, however and superhero comic book publishers found ways around the restrictions, particularly having zombies in their comics, but calling them something else, such as “zuvembies,” a term Marvel Comics used until 1989, when the Code was revised to allow zombies.

ZOMBIE ABILITIES

Zombies share certain traits in common, giving them particular powers and abilities. The following is a standard zombie archetype and discussion of some of the common zombie abilities in **ICONS** terms you can use to modify the archetype to represent different types of zombies.

ZOMBIE

PROWESS	COORD.	STRENGTH	INTELLECT	AWARENESS	WILLPOWER	STAMINA
2	2	3	0	1	0	6

Powers: Life Support 10, Resistance to Ability, Mental, and Sensory Attacks 10

Qualities: Zombie

UNDEAD

First and foremost, zombies are not living creatures, at least not as we know them. While they may be animate, they are more akin to constructs than any form of life. At the least, this means zombies have Supreme (10) Life Support and Resistance to Ability Attacks, since they ignore living concerns like breathing, disease, toxins, and the like. They may also have Resistance to Mental and Sensory Attacks, although whether or not that comes from their undead state or by virtue of zombies being essentially mindless is up to the GM's interpretation.

For some zombies, their undead state simply makes them tireless and immune to pain and fatigue, amongst other things. For others, it actually makes them more physically powerful, increasing their Strength (even to superhuman levels) and providing levels of Damage Resistance as well. This is most common with Promethean zombies.

MINDLESS

The default zombie archetype is essentially mindless, having no Intellect or Willpower, and only a Weak (1) Awareness. The zombie's Stamina is based on twice its Strength, as it has no Willpower. Some Game Masters may wish to simply give zombies Stamina 3 or use the optional minion rule for damage, where any successful attack that overcome's a zombie's Resistance (if any) reduces it to 0 Stamina.

Mindless zombies are immune to mental attacks and interaction, or anything else reliant on having a mind, thoughts, or emotions. While some

mindless zombies are able to vocalize, it is usually only to moan, wail, or repeat some word or phrase over and over (like, “braaaaaains!”).

RELENTLESS

One of the most frightful aspects of zombies is they are relentless foes: incapable of feeling pain, or fear, tireless and unwavering in pursuit of their prey. It is usually only the fact that zombies tends to be slow and mindless that gives people any chance against them at all. Some zombies have additional powers that enhance their unstoppable nature, including:

Animated Parts: The zombie’s severed body parts don’t stop moving, retaining the same unnatural animation as the rest of the creature. The zombie has the Anatomic Separation extra of Duplication from Great Power with the Extra Only Limit and an Only When Damaged Limit; the level of the power determines how many functional parts the zombie can split into. Defeating such zombies may require reducing them to ash or their component atoms to stop them.

Immortality: While most zombies are “killed” when reduced to 0 Stamina, some possess the Immortality power, allowing them to recover from virtually anything short of the aforementioned disintegration. Truly immortal zombies are also usually at least somewhat intelligent—Promethean zombies or revenants, for example.

Regeneration: Some zombies are not only animate, but constantly repairing or renewing damage, such that nothing short or complete destruction puts them down for long before they get back up again, even reattaching severed body parts with the Regrowth extra. Some—particularly hungry zombies—are limited to regenerating only immediately after they have fed, while others just go on repairing indefinitely. Regenerations is one of the signature powers of revenants and may also be an ability of necrobots, especially those created or sustained by nanotechnology.

INFECTIOUS

Viral zombies are infectious, able to turn over creatures into zombies. This is essentially an Affliction as a Secondary Effect of the zombie’s attacks, such as scratches or bites. Once the target is killed or reduced to 0 Stamina, they rise as another zombie of the type that infected them. Zombie Afflictions are usually limited to Slow Effect, if they work on living creatures, progressing like a slow disease. Otherwise, they are limited to only creatures that die after being reduced to 0 Stamina. The former type of zombie infection may be curable, or there may be no hope for the infected creature, save for the possibility of a quick and clean death.

NON-HUMAN ZOMBIES

Theoretically, any once-living creature could be reanimated as a zombie, depending on how it all works. If this is an option, you can just apply the same modifications used with any of the human zombies in this chapter to the basic abilities of a non-human creature to create other zombies.

For example, the basic animated corpse zombie is -1 level of Prowess and Coordination, with Intellect and Willpower 0 and Awareness 1, and the listed powers of Life Support and Resistance, along with the “Zombie” quality. You can apply that to a bear, crocodile (great minions for Egyptian mummy villains), or even a tyrannosaurus rex (Z-rex?) to make an unusual zombie.

EARTH-Z

While you might not want to expose your own **ICONS** setting to a zombie apocalypse, given its potential to truly end the world, that doesn't mean you can use one as an element in your series. The easiest means of doing so is by using an alternate world dealing with a massive zombie outbreak, what we can call “Earth-Z.”

Earth-Z might be a true alternate Earth, a parallel reality where a zombie apocalypse is either imminent, underway, or has already happened, leaving virtually no living people (or no living creatures, for that matter) behind. The heroes may visit Earth-Z through the usual comic book means of dimensional travel, particularly by accident. They have to struggle to find a way back home while surviving the deadly zombie onslaught and being careful not to risk infecting their own world—even if it means never returning. They can face the horror of encountering zombie parallels of their friends, loved ones, enemies—even themselves!

Earth-Z might also come to the heroes' world, either by the accidental opening of a dimensional portal, or through deliberate effort on either side: A necromantic villain on Earth looking to summon minions from an entire world of zombies, or a world of hungry zombies desperate for new prey to feed upon and spread their disease.

Alternately, “Earth-Z” might be a temporary transformation of the heroes' world, either through powerful magic or reality warping. The key is that the heroes can potentially undo the transformation and restore things to normal before Earth is doomed to become a dead, zombified world forever.

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