

## "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 look for some particular resource, or study 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.

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