

"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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