

INTRODUCTION TO THE HERO SYSTEM



Welcome to the *HERO System*, a complete set of universal roleplaying rules that lets you create characters for *any* setting or background, from fantasy, to modern-day action heroes, to science fiction, to comic book superheroes. Using the *HERO System* rules, you can create any spell, technology, power, weapon, ability, or other effect you can imagine. This volume provides you with all the rules you need to create characters and campaigns set in any time, place, or genre. Even if you don't want to use the *HERO System* rules to run your games, you can still use them to create things for use in other RPGs.

Many of you are already familiar with the *HERO System*; after all, it's been about 20 years since it was first published as *Champions*, and about ten years since the last edition of the *HERO System*, the Fourth, was released. This Fifth Edition expands, revises, and clarifies the rules from the Fourth Edition. The result is a game system which is more fun and flexible than ever.

Those of you who are new to the *HERO System* should read *If You Aren't Familiar With The HERO System* immediately following this section. It provides a brief glimpse of what the *HERO System* is and does, and shows how you can use it to create some of the most enjoyable roleplaying games you've ever played in. After that you can dive into character creation or whatever other subject catches your fancy. If you get confused by any of the terms (like all game systems, this one has a lot of its own "gamespeak"), look them up in the Glossary (page 6) or in the Index.

If you're a reader who's used the *HERO System* before, skip on down to *If You're Familiar With The HERO System*, below. That will serve as a good introduction to the Fifth Edition for you.

IF YOU AREN'T FAMILIAR WITH THE HERO SYSTEM

The *HERO System* seems complex at first glance, but don't worry, it's easier than it looks. Unlike many game systems, which have different types of rules for different parts of their games (combat, magic, character creation, or what have you), the *HERO System* has a lot of consistency and internal logic. Once you learn the important parts, it becomes easy to figure out how other parts of the system work. You can always refer to the Glossary if you can't remember what a particular term means or how to do something in the system.

Basic Rules And Concepts

The *HERO System* uses six-sided dice (d6) to resolve combat, the use of Skills, and similar situations. The number before the "d6" notation indicates how many dice to roll; for example, 12d6 means 12 dice; 2d6+1 means roll two dice and add one point to the total.

Most dice-rolling in the *HERO System* requires you to roll 3d6 and get a result equal to or less than some number. This is written in the text by a minus sign (-) following the number. Thus, a Skill which your character can perform successfully on an 11 or less roll is written 11-.

Whenever you attempt any 3d6 roll — whether an Attack Roll, Skill Roll, Characteristic Roll, Perception Roll, or other roll — a result of 3 (three ones) always hits or succeeds; a result of 18 (three sixes) always misses or fails. The Game-master (GM) should consider giving a character some advantage when his player rolls a 3 (perhaps some extra dice of damage), and some disadvantage for rolling an 18 (perhaps reducing the character's DCV for a Segment or two).

In the *HERO System*, you use *Character Points* (see below) to purchase all of your character's abilities and powers. Sometimes this requires calculations involving division or multiplication. When calculating the cost of something, always round off to the next whole number in favor of the player character. Numbers from .1 to .4 round down; numbers from .6 to .9 round up; and .5 rounds up or down depending upon what's best for the character. The only exception to this rule is calculating SPD — SPD *always* rounds down. A SPD of 2.9 is still a SPD of 2, not a SPD of 3. If a calculation involves two or more separate parts (such as REC, which is STR/5 plus CON/5), round up at each separate step of the calculation. Thus, a character with BODY 10, STR 15, and CON 15 has a STUN of 26 (BODY; plus STR/2 = 7.5, rounds to 8; plus CON/2 = 7.5, rounds to 8; 10+8+8=26). However, the minimum cost of anything is 1 point; a character cannot get a single point of END or COM "for free" because it would round to a cost of 0, for example.

Movement and maps in the *HERO System* use hex-shaped *inches* which, despite their name, are 2 meters (approximately 6.5 feet) wide. The text often refers to "hexes" or "inches" interchangeably; inches are written 1", 2", and so forth.

Character Creation

The heart of the *HERO System* is its rules for character creation. Using them, you can create any type of character, power, gadget, or ability you want, subject to the GM's campaign restrictions.

You build *HERO System* characters with *Character Points*. Everything the character can do, from his ability to lift heavy objects to his ability to use magic or superpowers, is purchased with Character Points.

Your GM will tell you how many points you have to build your character with; the more points, the more powerful the character, generally. Some of your Character Points are "free" (given to you by the GM); you acquire others by taking *Disadvantages*, or complications for, your character. The main purpose of Disadvantages is to simulate character conception, but they are also worth extra Character Points. For example, your character might be Hunted by an old enemy, or adhere to a Code Of Honor, or be missing one eye. Each of these Disadvantages give you extra Character Points to build your character with.

There are five things that can be bought with Character Points: *Characteristics*, *Skills*, *Perks*, *Talents*, and *Powers*.

CHARACTERISTICS

All characters have eight Primary Characteristics (such as Strength and Intelligence), which represent physical and mental capabilities; and six Figured Characteristics (such as Physical Defense or Stun), which are mainly used in combat. The text beginning on page 19 defines these Characteristics for you. An average human has Primary Characteristics of about 8-10.

Primary Characteristics all have *Characteristic Rolls* equal to $9 + (\text{Characteristic}/5)$ or less. For example, a character with a DEX of 20 has a DEX Roll of 13- ($9 + (20/5)=13$). When the GM asks you to make a Characteristic Roll (such as a DEX Roll to walk along a narrow beam), you roll 3d6 like normal. The more you make (or fail) the roll by, the greater your degree of success (or failure). The GM imposes negative modifiers on the Characteristic Roll when you attempt particularly difficult feats, making it harder to succeed.

SKILLS

A character's Skills represent specialized knowledge or training he possesses. This includes such things as knowing how to fly a plane, investigate a crime scene, or fire a blaster pistol, or the character's in-depth knowledge about any subject you can think of (physics, Fire Demons, Great Britain, alien races...). Skills are listed and described beginning on page 26.

A character can try to get information, perform a task, or gain other benefits from knowing a Skill by making a *Skill Roll*. Each Skill has a Skill Roll, typically between 8- and 18- (the higher, the better). Most Skills are based on a Characteristic, just like Characteristic Rolls, and all of them are rolled the same way: roll 3d6; if the total on the

dice is less than or equal to your Skill Roll, your character succeeds; if it is higher than the Skill Roll, he fails.

PERKS

Perks are special resources a character has access to — money or property (like a really fast car or headquarters), contacts, permits or licenses, and the like. The Perks which a character can purchase are listed and described beginning on page 55.

TALENTS

Talents are unusual abilities or attributes a character possesses. They are usually better than Skills, but not quite as powerful as Powers — in fact, they're sort of a cross or "middle ground" between the two. They include things like a natural sense of direction, a "sixth sense" for danger, having extremely fast reflexes, or being able to speed read. Some of them involve rolls similar to Skill Rolls; others function automatically. They are described beginning on page 61.

POWERS

Powers are abilities possessed by some characters. Typically they are abilities "beyond those of normal men," though Powers can also be used to create many abilities and devices which are perfectly appropriate for characters who are "normal men." Each Power costs a certain amount of Character Points, depending upon how powerful or useful it tends to be. Some Powers have an incremental cost, such as 5 Character Points per d6 of effect. They are described starting on page 67.

You can create any ability you can think of — flying, becoming invisible or intangible, changing shape, firing energy bolts or mental blasts — using Powers. They can simulate a superhero's powers, a wizard's spells, or a vigilante's super-skills, just to name a few. You also use Powers to construct equipment and weapons.

POWER FRAMEWORKS

Sometimes Powers are bought through *Power Frameworks* — ways to group Powers so they cost fewer points. However, this savings entails some restrictions on when and how the character can use the Powers in his Framework. There are three types of Frameworks — Elemental Controls, Multipowers, and Variable Power Pools — which are explained in detail on pages 203-210.

Combat

HERO System combat offers your character the chance to do just about anything you can think of. The rules provide lots of options, but you don't have to learn them all at once. Instead, start out with the basics, and learn the details as you play. The basics are:

INITIATIVE

Two of a character's Characteristics — Dexterity (DEX) and Speed (SPD) — determine when he acts in combat, and how often. The rules divide combat time into 12-second *Turns*, with each second referred

to as a *Segment*. The character's SPD indicates which Segments he can take an Action in; these Segments are his *Phases*. Thus, a character with 5 SPD has 5 Phases — five times each Turn when he can act. The *Speed Chart* (page 232) indicates the Phases for each SPD.

In each Segment, several characters may have a Phase — for example, characters with SPD 3 and SPD 6 both act in Segment 4. All characters who can act in a Phase act in order of DEX, from highest to lowest. Thus, a character with DEX 20 acts before one with DEX 18; however, a character may Hold his Action and act later in the Phase if he wants.

ACTIONS

A character may take an Action in each of his Phases. His Actions may include *Full Moves* (which require his entire Phase) or *Half Moves*, which require only half of his Phase (in other words, he can perform two Half Moves per Phase). Full Moves include using more than half of your inches of movement or recovering from being Stunned. Half Moves include using up to half your inches of movement.

Attacks are a special type of Action. A character may make a Half Move and then attack; in that case, the attack is considered a Half Move, too. But if a character makes an attack before making any Half Moves, the attack is considered a Full Move. In other words, once you make an attack, that's all you can do that Phase.

Some Actions take so little time to perform that they are *Zero-Phase Actions*. Characters can perform Zero-Phase Actions at the beginning of a Phase or after making a Half Move, but not after making an attack. Zero-Phase Actions include turning a Power on or off.

Some Actions take *no* time at all, and can be performed whenever a character wishes, even if he doesn't have a Phase or has already acted in a Phase. No time Actions include making a Presence Attack, speaking, or making a roll when the GM asks you to.

See pages 233-237 for more information.

ATTACKS

A character's *Combat Value*, or CV, determines his chance to hit targets in combat, and to avoid being hit. A character's CV is equal to his (DEX/3). Thus, a character with DEX 20 has a CV of 7 ($20/3=7$).

CV is divided into two subcategories, *Offensive Combat Value* (OCV) and *Defensive Combat Value* (DCV). OCV and DCV are both equal to CV. Thus, a character with a CV of 7 has OCV 7, DCV 7. Various Combat Maneuvers, Combat Skill Levels, and other factors may modify a character's OCV or DCV.

To attack, roll 3d6. To hit, you need to roll less than or equal to a number calculated with this formula: $11 + \text{Attacker's OCV} - \text{Defender's DCV}$. Thus, if the attacker has OCV 6, and the defender has DCV 4, the attacker must roll ($11+6-4=13$) 13 or less to hit.

Mental Attacks are slightly different. They use *Ego Combat Value* (ECV), equal to (EGO/3). Otherwise, making a Mental Attack is basically the same as making any other kind of attack.

See pages 243-246 for more information.

DOING AND TAKING DAMAGE

If your character hits his target with an attack, the attack does damage. There are two basic types of damage in the *HERO System*: STUN damage and BODY damage. Taking STUN damage decreases your character's STUN and can knock you out; taking BODY damage decreases your BODY, which causes injuries and can kill your character. All types of attacks cause one or both types of damage. Some, such as Drains or Ego Attacks, only cause STUN damage. Most, such as Energy Blasts, punches, guns, and knives, cause both STUN and BODY.

Another important distinction is between *Normal Damage* attacks and *Killing Damage* attacks. Most attacks do Normal Damage, but Killing Attacks do Killing Damage (which, as its name implies, is deadlier). Normal Damage and Killing Damage are calculated differently and applied to defenses differently. See page 273 for more information.

Characters have defenses which protect them against damage. All characters have *Physical Defense*, or PD (which protects against physical attacks like punches and clubs) and *Energy Defense*, or ED (which protects against energy attacks like energy bolts or fire). PD and ED are *Normal Defenses*; they protect against Normal Damage. The character subtracts his defenses from the STUN and BODY damage done



to him, and applies the remainder (if any) to his STUN and BODY. If a character hit with a 22 STUN, 6 BODY physical attack has 10 PD, he takes 12 STUN (22-10) and 0 BODY (6-10). But Normal Defenses offer no protection against Killing Damage; for that, characters need *Resistant Defenses*, such as Armor or a Force Field. See page 273 for more information.

THE EFFECTS OF DAMAGE

If a character loses more STUN from a single attack than he has points of CON, he becomes *Stunned* (dazed and unable to act). In the above example, if the character has a CON of 12 or higher, he won't be Stunned by that attack; if his CON is 11 or less, he's Stunned. A Stunned character must spend a Phase to recover from being Stunned before he can act again.

If a character loses all of his STUN from one or more attacks, he's Knocked Out (unconscious) and completely unable to act. However, he wakes up when he regains STUN. Characters regain lost STUN by taking *Recoveries*. For each Recovery taken, the character gets back his Recovery Characteristic (REC) worth of STUN and END.

If a character loses BODY, he's injured — he suffers burns, cuts, bleeding wounds, broken bones, and so forth. If he loses all of his BODY (down to 0 BODY), he begins to bleed to death. When he reaches his negative BODY (for example, -10 BODY for someone who normally has 10 BODY), he dies. Characters heal BODY damage at the rate of REC in BODY per month.

See pages 273-275 for more information.

What Else You Need To Play

The *HERO System Rulebook, 5th Edition* contains everything you need to create characters and settings for a roleplaying campaign. All you need is paper to write your character down on and some dice. If you're the GM, you'll either have to create a setting and adventures for your campaign, or use published ones.

The Ultimate Gamer's Toolkit

Maybe you're used to playing other game systems. We hope you'll switch over to using the *HERO System*, but even if you don't want to do that, you can still use the *HERO System* to improve your other game.

The *HERO System* is the ultimate gamer's toolkit. It can be used to build *anything*, from characters, to weapons, to spells, to vehicles, to whatever else you can think of. Because of the system's internal rules and logic, characters, spells, and other game elements which have the same or similar point cost have the same or similar effectiveness or power, all other things being equal. This makes it easy to determine whether a new item, spell, or power is unusually powerful and effective before you use it in game play. Few game systems provide this sort of resource. GMs and players who want to create something new typically have to "guesstimate" whether it will be effective and balanced, or unusually powerful (and thus unbalancing within the campaign).

With the *HERO System*, you can be more precise. Figure out how to create your new item or spell using the *HERO System*, then create a similar item or spell from that other game and compare the two. This will give you a good idea of whether your new creation works well as-is, or needs some adjustment. Once your new creation is effective and balanced, simply convert it over to the other rule system, and you're set!

Go Out And Be A HERO!

Those are the basics. Now you can start designing your first character and get ready to play your first game!

IF YOU'RE FAMILIAR WITH THE HERO SYSTEM

You've waited for it a long time, and here it is: the Fifth Edition. You've been helping us playtest it for ten years, and it's taken months to pull together our notes and your suggestions and write it. It reflects an additional decade's worth of experience with the system, and incorporates new rules from *Dark Champions*, the *Ultimate* series, the *HERO System Almanacs*, and other products published during that time. We think the new *HERO System* rules are at once the most comprehensive and streamlined ever — the best we've yet produced — and we hope you'll agree.

Where'd It Go?

You'll find that some Skills, Talents, Powers, or rules have moved. For example, Fast Draw is now a Skill, Find Weakness and Luck are Powers, and Instant Change has been eliminated as a separate Power (it's now a type of Transform). If you have trouble finding something, just consult the Index.

Converting Fourth Edition Characters

Many of you have run or played in *HERO System* games for so long that you've got dozens, maybe even hundreds, of characters. You'll probably want to convert them over to Fifth Edition. In most cases, no substantial changes are needed. That was our intention; we didn't want to make changes which were marginally useful but would require the revision of thousands of characters.

If the cost or nature of some of a character's abilities has changed, the GM can use several approaches to resolve the situation. Guide yourself by what the player wants to do, what's most appropriate for the character, and what fits the character's concept the best.

In some cases, such as Flash, the change is really only cosmetic. In that case, you simply double the number of dice of Flash you have, since the cost has been changed, but so has the way the Power works — you don't have to buy more, or fewer, dice to achieve the effect you were already achieving. Just change the

number on the character sheet and move on.

However, there are cases, such as Aid, where the cost of a Power has increased, but the effectiveness has stayed the same. In short, a Fourth Edition character with, say, an 8d6 Aid now can only buy a 4d6 Aid for the same points. Several options are available. The fairest one is for the GM to “grandfather” the character, giving him the additional Character Points he needs to keep the character at the same level of power for free. It’s not very equitable to cut a character’s power in half just because the rules have changed; if the character was doing 8d6 Aid before, he probably ought to continue doing 8d6 Aid. Penalizing the character because of a change in the game system isn’t just. Sidebars throughout this book provide specific notes on grandfathering characters.

However, in some situations, many GMs would rather not “grandfather” characters this way for reasons of campaign balance or fairness between characters. In that case, players will just have to reduce

their characters’ level of power. At his option, the GM might give them some free Character Points to buy some other abilities or powers to make up for the loss, or eliminate a Disadvantage or two.

Sometimes the Fifth Edition rules provide a way to do something easily which was difficult under the Fourth Edition rules. For example, a character might have bought Summon with a Linked Mind Control effect to guarantee that his summoned creatures would obey him. Now Summon can do that by itself. The character should reconfigure his power according to the new rules. If the new power costs more, the GM should consider “grandfathering” him, as discussed above.

In any case where a change in the *HERO System* rules saves your character points, congratulations! You have some additional points you can spend (perhaps on new abilities from this book). GMs should not deprive characters of saved points just because a change in the rules makes something cheaper.

