

# **MICHAEL'S GUIDE TO ADAPTING FICTIONAL CHARACTERS TO THE HERO SYSTEM**

## **INTRODUCTION**

When I first started playing *Champions* and the *HERO System* (way back in the mid-1980s) I tried to build various fictional characters. If I recall correctly they included Mad Max (specifically the version seen in *Beyond Thunderdome*), Erma Felna (from the comic series *Albedo*), and Marvel Comics' Longshot. The less said about them the better... But, to be honest, I was new to the system and enthusiastic, and hadn't really developed any sort of logic to doing a write-up of a fictional character. Later, while a member of the HERO Mailing List, I saw numerous character sheets submitted, many of them poorly formatted, written, and executed (and often accompanied by replies questioning the validity of the character's stats and powers). Deciding "I can do better than this!", I started to work on my own conversions, picking the M-66 Automatic Infantry Robot from the anime *Black Magic* and Alita/Gally from the anime/manga *Battle Angel*. The character sheets included a brief description of the character, comments on personality and powers, and -- most important of all -- notes stating why certain values were selected when writing up the character's abilities. When I finally posted them to the HERO Mailing List, they were fairly well-received, and I was encouraged to create more. The rest, as they say, was history.

Since those first tentative steps I have gone on to write hundreds, if not thousands, of character adaptations. My sources have included anime, manga, television, movies, books, comics, other role-playing games, and even songs. I have revised my techniques several times, as well as my presentation methods, and readily point to this vast body of work for improving both my overall writing skills as well as my understanding of the *HERO System*. In addition, it certainly was one of the primary reasons I was able to put so much detail into the *Asian Bestiaries*.

This article will talk about how I go about translating fictional characters from their sources into *HERO System* Characteristics, Powers, and Skills. It will describe the steps I undergo, the things I look for, the "techniques" I use, and many other suggestions for adapting your favorite fictional character(s) into the *HERO System*. Hopefully, once you're done, you'll feel more confident about writing up your own characters -- as well as possibly sending me some of your work so I can add it to the *Surbrook's Stuff* character archive! However, let's take a quick look at *why* you'd want to do this in the first place.

**Why Am I Doing This Again?:** Before you even start on converting a favorite fictional character to *HERO*, you might want to consider why you are doing it (or why others might want the conversion). I mean, there's no requirement that you do this! However... there are several good reasons to create a conversion of a character from another source to *HERO*. They are:

- A) You want to use the character in your campaign.
- B) You want to play the character as a PC.
- C) You want to express the character's abilities in *HERO* to see if you can make them work.
- D) You want to learn the *HERO System* by building a known character.
- E) You want to do the conversion because, well, you like doing them.

All of these are valid reasons. I won't debate the pros and cons of using well-known fictional characters as either NPCs or PCs, but then, there is nothing stopping you from altering and editing your conversion in order to hide the character's origins. Besides, just about any conversion, no matter how successful, should help in understanding and learning the system. *HERO*, with its ability to simulate most anything, can be a very complex system to learn, at least from a character building standpoint. By converting something well-known (like, say, Spider-Man), hopefully you can see how it all relates and have a better feel for making your own characters.

**Important Note To The Reader:** Before you go any further, allow me to state a few facts about conversions and working with fictional characters. For starters, no writer is thinking game design when they create their character (I'll mention this point again, further in the article). Concepts such as play-balance or point limits are not their concern, telling a good story is. Thus, you may find your sources for a character contradict each other (a common occurrence in comics), or the character's exact abilities don't remain constant from appearance to appearance.

So what do you do?

My suggestion is to find a decent set of break points and work between them. For example, if you're going to write-up a comic character, you might pick a certain set of issues (such as one story arc), or the first few years of the character's comic run, or a limited series featuring the character. For example, when I wrote up Daredevil, I selected the *Born Again* arc, my plan for Ultimate Spider-Man will be the first 15 volumes or so (about 75 issues), and my revised Longshot character sheet uses just his original limited series appearance. While this means that many powers and the like might be missed, you can at least point to your specific sources and say "This is what

I'm working with." The same goes for characters from books and movies. My Captain Jack Sparrow uses (as of this writing) only material seen in *Curse of the Black Pearl*. If I decide to do another version, I'll specially state "This is from the second movie (*Dead Man's Chest*)" and so on. I did same for Conan, stating the character sheet represented him as of *Beyond the Black River*, and thus allowing myself to ignore any of the stories where he was king of Aquilonia. While this may not allow you to create a 'definitive' version of the character, showing all of his powers and abilities, it will allow you to create one that captures the character at a specific point in time.

Finally, let me remind you of something I mentioned at the start of this little section -- odds are you adaption won't be balanced once you're through. As stated before, the writer wasn't considering what the *HERO* version of his character would look like, he was concerned only with telling his story. You, as the creator if the *HERO* character sheet, need to decide how exact you are going to be. If creating an adaptation simply to present character X in *HERO*, go all out and ignore point limits and the like. If you intend to use the character in your campaign, you'll probably need to make some adjustments.

## **PART I: KNOW YOUR SOURCE**

If you're going to convert a fictional character into the *HERO System* then make sure you know and understand the character. Now this doesn't mean you need to engage in the kind of research one normally associates with doctorates, but at least make sure you have more than a passing familiarity with the character in question. Simply put -- don't do a half-assed job, or it will show. Reread the book or re-watch the movie and take notes. When I get ready to do a conversion, I sit down with the source material and a spiral-bound notebook and go through the book, comic, movie, or what have you, and write down everything I see that I feel is important to the character. This includes descriptions of physical abilities (how strong the character is, how fast, how smart, how beautiful, and so on), any powers they may have (be it extra Running or Swimming, magic spells, supernatural powers, or high-tech gadgets), or skills (Can they pick locks? Do they know a martial art or arts? Is the character a former [or current] detective/police officer/soldier/other profession?). I also make a note of possible Disadvantages, such as Hunteds, Physical Limitations, Psychological Limitations, and so on. In some cases I simply write down "ex-Spetznaz" or "ex-pirate captain" with the intent of filling in the relevant skills later, or I might go so far as to note "Acrobatics," "Breakfall," or "Deduction +1" based on what the character is shown doing.

Along with writing down specific items to be included in the character sheet, I also try to make a note of the character's background and personality. I'll often write down a page number (if possible) along with a note of what's on the page that's so important (*i.e.* "page 86, Conan explains his upbringing"), so that when the time comes, I can go to that page and use it to flesh out the character's Background/History section. I'll also do the same for an important passage detailing the character's personality or, perhaps, a section describing how a character's powers work. It also helps to find a good quote (or two), to put into the Quotes section.

Speaking of Quotes, here's a suggestion for making your final character sheet more fun for the reader. When I sat down to watch *Pirates of the Caribbean*, I turned the subtitles on (mostly so I could see how various names were spelled), and started to copy down many of Jack Sparrow's lines. While working on *Ninja Hero* I had taken the formatting requirement in the DOJ's Writer's Guide to heart and had not only given every Power a special effect, but had even given a few to Skills. With Jack, I felt his lines were a perfect justification for many of his Skills. They helped add color to the character sheet, and served to document why I gave the character certain skills. I have since used this technique for other characters, with my character sheet for Conan probably being the most extreme example, in which most of his Perks, Talents, Skills are given a special effect by using a line taken from one of Robert E. Howard's stories. You can even do this for Disadvantages, although it's a little hard to do in a legible manner, especially when using HERO Designer.

## **PART II: FASTER THAN A SPEEDING BULLET, MORE POWERFUL THAN A LOCOMOTIVE -- CHARACTERISTICS**

Probably the hardest part of the character for you, the writer, to quantify is a character's characteristics. The reason for this is simple -- characteristics are highly relative. For example, Person A may feel that Spider-Man has a 30 DEX, while another may say he has a 36, or a 38, or 43, or... Well, you get the idea. There is no real hard and fast rule for settling on a characteristic value, other than to try to consider how the character relates to his world (and just his world, and not other characters from other series). By that, I mean don't start handing out 30 DEXs just because a character is said to be blinding fast. Take a step back and consider what the character's world is like. Is it filled with mostly normal humans? Then blinding fast might mean a DEX of only 18, or 20, or maybe 21-23. This also holds true for other characteristics as well. In this section I'll briefly look at the standard *HERO* Characteristics and offer suggestions for how to come up with a reasonable *HERO System* value for them.

**STR:** Of all the Characteristics, STR is the easiest to quantify. The reason is simple -- we already know how much most things weigh. If a character picks something up, odds are we can figure out his STR score from that. Myself, I use a formula first presented in the *Fuzion* core rules set: take the max amount the character can lift over his head, double it to find what he can lift to his waist, and then double it again to see what he can lift to around his ankles. While this isn't exactly the same as the lifting formulas given in *The Ultimate Brick*, I like them as they give me nice round numbers and are neatly "cinematic." Sometimes you're lucky enough to be handed this information directly, as happened with Ann O'Brien (of *Monkyman and O'Brien*). There's a comic panel of her lifting a 1,600 pound barbell over her head. Using my formula, you get  $1,600 \times 2 = 3,200 \times 2 = 6,400$  pounds total lift (or a 35 STR). In the case of Mr. Extraordinary (from *PS238*), he is seen lifting a Sturmpanzerwagen AV7 up over his head. A little research shows the AV7 weighs in at 33,500 kg, for a total lifting capacity of 134,000 kg, or a roughly 63 STR. Of course, not every character you want to convert is seen lifting some sort of weight overhead, but it gives you a good rough estimate to work with. Conan, for example, repeatedly wrestles with apes, giant snakes, knocks men out with a single punch, and hurls a massive bench of solid silver at a foe. Giving him a 25 STR just seems "right." Why? Because a 25 will let him pull many of these stunts without needing to either push his STR or Haymaker, meaning he doesn't need to waste time or END to demonstrate his prowess. Just like in the stories.

**DEX:** This is where you, the writer, need to make your first real judgment call. DEX is one of the most relative characteristics and often open to a great deal of debate. My suggestion is to try to relate the character to the world around him. If he gets into a fight, how does he do? How many guys does he tackle at once? Can he hit them all with a single attack? Does he get hit in return? If so, how often? Does the character admit to being slow? (Harry Dresden of *The Dresden Files* does.) Are his actions a blinding flurry of speed? Going back to Conan, he is repeatedly described as being fast, with his speed likened to that of various great cats. Max, from the film *The Road Warrior*, is shown grabbing a venomous snake before it can strike (hence the quote "I never seen a man beat a snake before. Reflexes, that's what you've got. Reflexes."). In these cases, we can look in *The HERO System Bestiary* to get an idea of what sort of DEX score might be appropriate. The great cats are given DEXs in the low 20s, so taking REH literally, I gave Conan a 23 DEX. Max, on the other hand, was given a 17 DEX (to beat the snake's 14 DEX) with +2 Lightning Reflexes to represent his "reflexes." With other characters, think about what they can do and what sort of training they have, and try comparing them to the various sample

Normals found in the 5th Edition rulebook. If the character gets into fights with Talented Normals and comes out okay, then he probably has a DEX (and/or Combat Skill Levels) higher than a Talented Normal. I also recommend looking at the various Package Deals found in different genre books. Some of them, such as the Special Forces packages in *Dark Champions*, or the various Fighter packages in *Fantasy Hero*, include Characteristics bonuses.

**CON:** Much like DEX, CON is a relative Characteristic. However, here one has a slightly better idea for how "tough" a person is and/or should be. A normal human has a CON of 8-10. A slightly "tougher" human has a CON of 12-13, while a Talented Normal has a CON of 14-15. So determining a character's CON is often just a matter of logic. If he sits at a desk all day, a CON of 8-10 is best. If he's at least nominally active, a CON of 10-12. If he's a trained soldier, then a CON of 14-15. An Olympic athlete or professional boxer? CON of 18-20. A superhero? CON of 21+. Also consider how physically durable the character is. Elric (*Elric of Melanibone*) is said to be so weak some days he couldn't lift himself out of bed. This sounds like a CON of 3 to me. Conan, on the other hand is nigh-impossible to stun and tends to shrug-off adverse environmental effects. He has to have a CON of over 20 and I settled on 25, which while high, does fit the virtually superhuman vitality and endurance attributed to him by Robert E. Howard.

**BODY:** This score is treated much like CON. How hard is the character to kill? (Not hurt, that's PD and ED.) Again, keep in mind Joe Normal human has a BODY of 8-10. Larger than normal people should have a few extra points (at least). Action heroes also have extra BODY, and Bruce Willis (or, his *Die Hard* characters anyway) is the poster boy for 20 BODY. Personally, I don't tend to give out high BODY scores unless I feel the character is really that hard to kill. Of course, since most characters you're adapting live through whatever their creator throws at them, one needs to use a little common sense.

**INT:** When selecting a value for this Characteristic, I try to keep in mind that *HERO System* INT reflects how *fast* the character thinks, not how smart they are. Still, people who aren't all that smart (in terms of IQ) tend not to be quick on the uptake, while many super-intelligent people are more methodical thinkers and spend a lot of time considering a problem before resolving it (*i.e.* a person is who "stupid" probably doesn't have a high INT score, while a scientist with an IQ of 180 might only have an effective INT of 10 or so). A few points of INT are suitable for people who react quickly to changing situations, even if they are otherwise of a normal intellectual level. Of course, one shouldn't forget such ideas as "animal cunning" and "insane

genius" allowing a supposedly "dimwitted" character to have an INT far higher than anyone might expect. In addition, don't forget about PER bonuses. Just because a character is intellectually a "moron" doesn't mean they can't have a keen sense of hearing and the over-all wariness to react to an unusual noise. Also don't let preconceived notions about a character fool you. There is a common misconception (thanks to the movies starring Arnold Schwarzenegger) that Conan is just another stupid sword-swinging barbarian. Trust me, anyone who can speak roughly 15 languages is no dummy.

**EGO:** EGO is willpower and self-confidence. Anyone who shows a lot of either (or both) should have a higher than normal EGO. Elric, for example, bargains with demons and gods and in many cases treats them almost like an equal. Both Daffy and Donald Duck have a distinct lack of self-control, with Donald flying off the handle at the slightest provocation. Thus, Elric probably has an EGO of 20 or better, while either of the Ducks have an EGO of 8, or even less. These are, of course, extreme examples, but it lets you know what to look for. Characters who have had some sort of assertiveness training -- such as many martial artists, police officers, and soldiers, should have a few points of EGO, defined as improved self-confidence. Wizards, priests, and others who demonstrate strong self-control should have even higher EGO scores. Gandalf, for example, stands firm before an oncoming Balrog and a Nazagul; giving him an EGO of 30 or so seems about right! Why? Because a 30 EGO is fairly top-end for most published characters of any genre. Also most of the more powerful undead in various published *HERO* books have an EGO of 20, and Gandalf should be more "powerful" than that.

**PRE:** PRE is like EGO -- some people should have more of it almost automatically. Police officers, soldiers (well, commanding officers), and those used to giving orders (and having them obeyed) should have high PRE scores. Captain America is the perfect example of this. He stands firm in the face of adversity (indicating a high EGO), but also can rally others to his cause with just a few words (meaning he has a high natural Presence). Batman is another example -- he terrifies thugs simply by showing up (usually). Both men have PRE scores of at least 20, with Captain American probably having a 30 or so. Batman might have a 40 (in costume), or he might simply always take advantage of having a Reputation and using the environment to get large PRE Attack bonuses. You also need to consider using Limited PRE (such as "Only To Defend Against Presence Attacks" (-1)) for characters who don't impress others well, but also don't get scared easily. Spider-Man for example. He doesn't give many villains pause -- in fact, if he shows up they often sneer and get ready to fight -- but by the same token, he doesn't back down from threats.

**COM:** Unlike almost all other Characteristics, COM is more subjective than relative. As the saying goes, "beauty is in the eye of the beholder," and one person's drop dead gorgeous might just be another's dog ugly. Still, one can often get a good feel for a character's COM by how other characters react to them. Oscar Gordon (*Glory Road*) states he isn't handsome, has a broken nose, and a scarred face. COM? 8 (although Star, Empress of 20 Universes did call him "handsome"). On the other hand, Urd (*Oh, My Goddess!*) is 5'6", curvaceous, with naturally tanned skin and flowing white ankle-length hair. Sexy personified, she easily warrants a COM of 26 or better. James Bond has women fall all over him, and has a certain look to him that women seem to desire. Not only does he have a high PRE score, but a 20 COM to go with it. In setting COM scores for characters I tend to go for a sort of "gut feeling," 8-10 for normal looks, 12-14 for people who are in shape and reasonable fit and attractive, 16-18 for "movie-star/model" looks, and 20+ for those characters who most anyone calls "hot" (Chun Li [*Street Fighter*] for example). Also remember that COM is human-centric. While you and I might think an orc is COM 6 for having rough skin, scraggly hair, tusks, and what not, that might be the height of orcish beauty.

**PD & ED:** Getting a character's defenses right can be a tad tricky. Especially these days, what with *STUN Only* Damage Reduction and Combat Luck. A good rule to work with is to increase a character's base PD and ED by 1.5. So a 10 STR normal who's not a fighter gets a PD of 3, making him a little tougher than a Normal, which is often about right for many cinematic and literary characters. Of course, for characters who get into physical confrontations a lot, as well as trained martial artists and other "tough guys," one should consider doubling the base PD & ED. With superhero conversions, give the character what ever seems right -- if he can bounce bullets easily, then the character needs a PD of around 20 or so (fully resistant). Don't forget to look for clues to the character's toughness in the source material. The description for Superman (circa 1938-39) stats "...and that nothing less than a bursting shell could penetrate his skin!" which sounds like a PD of 25 or so (also fully resistant).

**SPD:** In the early days of *Champions* and the *HERO System* if you wanted to attack more often, you bought more SPD. These days, with Rapid Attack, Rapid Fire, Autofire skills, Sweep, and so on, you can dish out a lot of damage in only one Phase. I try to keep this in mind when selecting a SPD for a character, and have become somewhat conservative in that regard. A SPD of 2 is used for anyone who is obviously totally normal, with no combat training (Janet Bhai from *Black Lagoon* for example). A SPD of 3 is good for police officers, soldiers, and experienced martial artists. A SPD of 4 is used

for highly competent fighters and many (if not all) cinematic action heroes. SPDs of 5 and up are given to those who either A) consistently out maneuver foes, or B) are simply that fast. A prime example of a 6 SPD is Bruce Lee in *Enter The Dragon*. In this film he *constantly* evades and blocks attacks from multiple foes *and* has the chance to strike back. The same goes for Jackie Chan and Jet Li, as well as Deunan Knute from the manga *Appleseed*, who engages in the one prime indicators of a high SPD -- how many comic panels she gets as opposed to everyone else. When dealing with comics characters this is often a good indicator of how fast someone should be -- Deunan, Daredevil, and Spider-Man all are shown doing a lot in either a rapid series of panels, or doing one extended action in just a single panel (usually while obviously slower characters just stand there).

**REC, END, STUN:** These values are probably the least important to capturing the look and feel of a character. I tend to leave these values as figured, although I might round up STUN a bit to the nearest 0 or 5 (*i.e.* a 29 STUN becomes a 30 STUN). On the other hand, if you bump up these stats too much, you might as well as bump up the character's CON. END, however, might get a huge boost, if I feel the character seems to have a lot of energy to expend on powers, but isn't physically much tougher than a normal human (Harry Dresden seems to fit this mold, as he has a great deal magical energy, but isn't much tougher [CON-wise] than anyone else). Of course, this might indicate some sort of END Reserve as well.

### **PART III: POWERS AND ABILITIES FAR BEYOND THOSE OF MORTAL MEN**

Powers are both easy and difficult to create for your adaptation. Easy because you often can see the Power demonstrated right in front of your eyes, difficult because then you're stuck trying to decide what you just saw. Of course, in some cases your source material might go into great detail about how something works (such as the armor the Mobile Infantry uses in *Starship Troopers*), meaning all you need to do is take some notes and translate them to *HERO* game mechanics. In other cases, the powers shown are fairly basic, and easy to work up in *HERO* (such as the super powers seen in *Mystery Men*). It also helps to have the *UNTIL Superpowers Databases* handy, as many of the powers in those books (as well as the *Grimoires* and *Gadgets and Gear*) can be readily adapted and modified to simulate whatever power you're trying to build. A perfect example of this is the character sheet I did for the LV-426 life form (*Alien/Aliens* et al.) The *USPD* has a section on acid powers and rules for building acidic liquids and even has a power defined as "Acidic Blood." A little work and *voila!*, I had the power set I needed for the creature's acidic blood.

Another important point to consider is the simple question of "what is the end result of the power?" In other words, "what is the power's exact effect?" By this, I mean that you often need to look beyond the visuals (or the elaborate explanations) and get right down to the basics of what the power actually *does*. For example, it doesn't matter that Lebia Maverlick is mentally linked to a laser-equipped satellite in low-Earth orbit (well, it might, as she now has a Computer in her power set), what does matter is that said laser can hit anything near her with a massive RKA. So don't worry about building the satellite and an RKA with a range of roughly 26,000 miles (since it stays over Tokyo at all times), just build a 6d6 RKA (or better) with Indirect (straight down). Simple, right?

Okay... maybe not so simple. But it doesn't *have* to be complicated. Just break the power down to its basic element(s) and go from there. Let's look at another example. Mushizo is a character in the anime *Ninja Scroll*. He has a wasp's nest growing out of his back (yes, it looks as nasty as it sounds) which contains thousands and thousands of wasps. How do you build this? Technically, you could write up a wasp and then have Mushizo buy Summon for several thousands wasps, but that's absurd, not to mention a logistical nightmare in combat. A better way would be to build the swarm of wasps as a character and let Mushizo summon *that* (see *The HERO System Bestiary* for more on swarms of insects and the like). Now, how about Fatman (a.k.a. Hiram Worchester) from *Wild Cards*? He can control gravity -- he can make things so heavy you can't lift them, he can make an object light enough to float away, he can make his fist more massive so his punches hurt far more than normal, and so on. *HERO* doesn't have "Gravity Control" as a power, so you might wonder how to simulate this. Well, let's take a look at what the power(s) do -- they allow Hiram to manipulate objects without touching them. He can lift objects (by making them lighter) or hold them in place (by making them heavier). What power allows one to do that in *HERO*? Telekinesis. Of course, TK won't let you do everything I listed for Hiram, which is why you, the designer, need to also think about how to group powers under the common special effect (in this case, "Gravity Control"). Take a look at this power set to see what I mean:

- 83 *Control Local Gravity*: Telekinesis (45 STR), Indirect (from below; +1/4), Invisible to Sight Group (+1/2), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2), Persistent (+1/2); Only To Pull Down, Push Up (-1/2), Affects Whole Object (-1/4), No Knockback (-1/4), Loses Effect Over Time (-1/4)
- 71 *Rapid Gravity Increase*: EB 9d6, Indirect (from below; +1/4), Penetrating (+1/2), Invisible to Sight Group (+1/2), Reduced

- Endurance (0 END; +1/2); Linked (Control Local Gravity; -1/2), No Knockback (-1/4)
- 71 *Severe Gravity Increase*: RKA 3d6, Indirect (from below; +1/4), Invisible to Sight Group (+1/2), Penetrating (+1/2), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2); Linked (Control Local Gravity; -1/2), No Knockback (-1/4)
- 58 *Increased Body Mass*: HA +10d6, Invisible to Sight Group, Source Only (+1/4), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2); Hand-To-Hand Attack (-1/2)
- 17 *Decreased Gravity I*: Flight 5", Ranged (+1/2), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2), Persistent (+1/2), Usable As Attack (+1); Levitation (only negates the effect of gravity -- character can only go up or down, and can only drift with the wind; -1/2), No Noncombat Movement (-1/4), Loses Effect Over Time (-1/4)
- 17 *Decreased Gravity II*: Flight 5", Usable Simultaneously (up to 2 people at once; +1/2), Ranged (+1/2), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2), Persistent (+1/2); Levitation (only negates the effect of gravity -- character can only go up or down, and can only drift with the wind; -1/2), No Noncombat Movement (-1/4)
- 23 *Visualize Local Gravity*: Detect Gravity Waves 14- (Unusual Group), Range, Sense, Targeting

This whole suite of powers does a fairly good job of simulating the effects Hiram has with his control of gravity. His base TK lets him hold objects (and people) in place, or make them light enough that anyone can move them (up to about 12 tons). The two linked powers come into place when he activates a gravity increase in a sudden rush, as opposed to more gradually. The target is pulled to the ground so quickly they suffer from internal ruptures and broken bones. The HA represents his ability to make only a portion of his body more massive than normal, allowing him to deliver crushing blows with his fists. The two Flight powers represent his ability to make himself light enough to virtually float like a balloon, or to make someone else light enough to physically float away (provided there's a breeze).

Now let's take a look at the various HERO power groups and what to look for when adapting powers from the source material to your write-up.

### **Adjustment Powers**

Depending on the Adjustment power, it might be fairly easy for you to define, or really hard to figure out. For example, anyone who can regenerate is usually shown doing so (like Claire the cheerleader in *Heroes*). But how do you figure out if someone is using a Drain? Or a Suppress? This is where you

need to pay attention to what the character is saying and other people are doing. If it's a comic, you might be lucky and the dialogue tells you what's happening (especially in older comics, where exposition was the rule). Otherwise take notes and think things over. If Jackie Chan's character drinks wine and turns into a faster, stronger fighter (as in *Drunken Master II*), then that's probably an Aid to STR and DEX. If a character touches an object and it crumbles into dust, that's probably a Dispel (or a Drain BODY). If the Haitian in *Heroes* looks at someone and their powers stop working... that's Suppress. Actually, this last example brings up a good thing to remember -- when building powers, *any* powers, don't worry about point totals. No one, not Hollywood, the writer of *Spider-Man*, or the guys behind *Heroes*, cares about point totals and the Active Points of a power. They'll have powers do what ever the budget and script allows, even if the end result gives *HERO* gamers fits. For example, ever notice how many 70's-era psychic powers were totally invisible? Because it's cheaper to have the hero look at something, squint, and then have something happen, rather than go to the expense of adding in SFX for eye-beams or whatnot. Of course, that same cost saver on video effects just added a +1/2 to +1 Advantage to the power you're building!

### **Attack Powers**

Without a doubt, Attack Powers are the easiest powers to define. Swords are HKAs, guns are RKAs, and fire blasts are EBs (and so on). About the only question one has is "how powerful?" Once again, take notes and give it a little thought. Excaliber is said to be so sharp it can cut stone. Sounds like Penetrating to me. A weapon that fires a burst of energy bolts as autofire. If a character fires an energy blasts that makes right-angle turns around people and still hits its target? No Range Modifier. A swashbuckling hero who drops a guard with a single sword thrust to the gut every time he hits? Well.... Before 5th Edition, you could do this with a big HKA, STR, and maybe some sort of Fencing martial art, but mostly with a big HKA. These days, you don't need to be so drastic, especially if our hero seems to be just as lethal with a different sword than the one he started with. Look to things like Skill Levels, Martial Arts maneuvers, STR bonuses, the HKA itself, and Deadly Blow (especially Deadly Blow). However, there may come a time when you see an Attack Power in action and simply write down "4d6 RKA" (*Star Wars* blasters, anyone?).

### **Body-Affecting Powers**

These are some of the easiest powers to spot, mainly because almost all of them are so very visual. The trick is to figure out how tall (or how small) a character has become using one of these powers. The best bet is to compare the character who is using Growth (or Shrinking) to objects around

him. Is he as tall as a house? A small as a mouse? I recommend *The Ultimate Metamorph* or *The Ultimate Brick* in cases like this so you can check up on various associated powers the character in question probably has. Don't forget that many (if not all) TV shrinkers have the *Reduced By Shrinking* Limitation/Side Effect. Characters who grow usually have Linked powers -- such as extra movement and increased defenses. Oh, and remember by comment about how special effects costs in the real world can result in powers that cost more under standard *HERO* rules? You'll see that same effect here, as many characters using Desolidification (even ghosts) look just as solid as if they were real (hence the need for Invisible Power effects). About the only power it's not easy to detect in use is Density Increase -- but since that's more of a comic book effect, you usually can tell (or will be told) when such as power is in use.

Duplication is a fairly rare power, so don't get too worked up about it. The most common duplicators are multi-headed animals -- see the *Hero System Bestiary* for more on that. Also pay attention to how many duplicates the character has and if they are even duplicates. The character might just have Images -- especially if his "duplicates" simply mimic his actions and don't act independently. If the character *does* have duplicates, you get to build a new set of characters all over again! (This is where Hero Designer can be a big help.)

### **Defense Powers**

Defensive powers are probably the second easiest power to spot, mainly because so many characters wear armor and other defensive gear. Typically, any Focused protective gear is Armor, although some forms of protective padding are simply Focused PD and ED. Force Fields and Force Walls are usually fairly obvious, but be careful -- often what the characters call a "force field" is a Force *Wall*. Other defensive powers are much harder to figure out, but usually can be determined from educated guess work.

Any character who can withstand a great deal of punishment (such as many Hong Kong martial artists or Hollywood action heroes) probably has some form of Damage Reduction (usually with *STUN Only*). A prime example of this is John McCain from the *Die Hard* films. He undergoes a mountain of abuse, but still keeps going. Similarly any character who can take hits from bullets and blades and not drop has either Damage Resistance or Combat Luck (yes, I know it is a Talent, but it does provide defense). Damage Resistance is often good for more "inhuman" monsters (such as Jason-styled slashers), while Combat Luck often fits the more heroic "swashbuckler" type, who can dodge it all until that one unlucky moment....

Flash, Mental, and Power Defense can be tricky. Okay, wait, Flash Defense is easy -- just look for sunglasses, visors, and tinted faceplates. Mental Defense is a lot tougher. If it is a visual medium, you'll have to make a best guess (for example, I'm fairly sure Darth Vader has Mental Defense, as does Mr. Spock). If a written medium (this includes comics), look for comments about the character having mental shields or training (such Dr. Tachyon in *Wild Cards*). Power Defense is nigh impossible to figure out, since it is so inobvious. Once again, you'll need to draw conclusions based on character actions and reactions to events around him. One problem is that characters who seem immune to drugs and the like (which are often Drains) might have either the proper Life Support *or* Damage Reduction (which affects BODY and STUN Drains!).

As mentioned, Force Fields and Force Walls tend to get mixed up in many fictional sources. A character with a body-hugging protective field might be said to have a "wall of force" around their body, while a device that projects a defensive wall of energy a range might be said to have a "force field projector." As I've said before, don't get distracted by the name of something, pay attention to *what it does*. Devices that project defensive screens create Force Walls, belts that surround the character with a defensive shield create Force Fields. Oh, and don't forget that the creators of fiction aren't limited by Character Points -- many of these Force Field/Wall devices create virtually invisible fields *and* seem to have a zero Endurance cost. Oh, and one last note -- as with Fatman, be aware of the multi-use power. By this I mean the character with a force field belt (such as Brainiac) who can project said force field to englobe others or to move objects (Booster Gold does this as well). You now have an Elemental Control to create, with such powers as Force Field, Force Wall (usually limited to making globes around people), and Telekinesis (which usually can only affect the whole object and can only lift them, not crush or throw). Check books such as *The Ultimate Mentalist* for more on telekinesis tricks (which these are, force fields or no).

Missile Deflection is a fairly easy to spot defensive power. Mainly because if you see someone grab or cut an arrow from the air, it's an excellent clue the character has the power. It is a real-world "power" too -- in Japan samurai were taught to cut arrows out of the air. Realistic Missile Deflection is often Focused though a staff or sword. Cinematic versions use just the bare hands. Don't forget to look for clues to Ranged Deflection or even Reflection. Manhunter was able to deflect a grenade with a thrown shuriken (Ranged Deflection), while most of us should recall Jack Burton grabbing the knife out of the air and throwing it back at Lo Pan.... ("It's all in the reflexes.")

## **Mental Powers**

Here's where we get to have fun. Lots of fun. And we get to say "uhmmm... *what* is he doing?" allot. This is also where you need to understand the context and look at the clues given. Mr. Spock does a mind meld and pulls up information from someone's memory? That's Telepathy. Obi Wan tells the Stormtrooper "You don't need to see any identification"? That's Mind Control. Dr. Orpheus looks for and then contacts someone halfway around the world? Mind Scanning. Deciding what Mental Powers someone is using requires you to look hard at the end result and pay attention to what the power *does*, not what the characters say they are doing.

Mental Powers are also one of the things that will force you to really decide how accurate your adaptation is going to be. Virtually all Mental Powers work better in fiction than in the *HERO System*. It's a fact, face it. Since the powers are writer controlled, they tend to do far more than you'd expect. So you have two choices -- either limit your self to around 60 Active Points and simply state "This is to make the character balance with most settings" or try to approximate the character's real potential and toss in the Reduced Endurance, Invisible to Mental Sense, and as much dice as you need.

You can usually get a feel for how powerful a character's mental powers by what they are seen to do. Using the 5th Edition charts found in the main rulebook (or *The Ultimate Mentalist*), you can usually get a rough idea of how many dice of effect are needed. You also need to pay attention to how the power is used. Spock's mind meld requires skin contact (his hand on your face), Extra Time (at least a Turn, maybe a Minute), and Concentration (0 DCV, Throughout).

## **Movement Powers**

Another nicely visual set of powers. It is usually fairly obvious when a character uses a Movement Power, as well as what power it is. The only question is "how much movement does the character have?" This is another case of matching the character's abilities to his environment. If he runs, what can he catch up to? Or out run? If he leaps, how far? If he flies, any idea how fast? Comics and games often give us hard numbers, other sources less so. Still, if you consistently see Ranma Saotome (*Ranma 1/2*) leap from house roof to house roof, you can be pretty sure he's jumping anywhere from 30 to 50 feet at a stretch -- since he needs to clear the yards between homes. Sometimes you get real lucky and you'll see the motorcycle's speedometer show 60 MPH, right before Sonnet (*Blue Sonnet*) catches it

while running. As with many elements of creating a character adaptation, looking for the little details helps a whole lot. Oh, and let me once again note that fictional characters never saw the *HERO* rulebook. So be prepared to use Megascale in order to simulate some character's movement abilities.

### **Sense-Affecting Powers**

And another set of visual powers! Once again, the typical special effects of these powers make them easy to spot.

Darkness tends to show up as smoke, fog, or pure inky darkness. However, remember the mantra -- *what is the end result?* If the character in question glows so brightly people nearby are blinded, that's not a flash, that's probably a Darkness field defined as bright light. Also be aware of how the Darkness works, and look up similar powers in either the rulebook of the UNTIL database books. Also, make sure it really is Darkness -- a thick fog or mist is probably Change Environment.

Flash is usually bright flashes of light, but it might be sand thrown in the face or deafening claps of thunder. Rarely is Flash going to target just once person -- expect to use Explosion a lot (unless it is the aforementioned face full of sand). Also remember that Flash can affect more than just sight -- there are stink bombs (Smell), sonic blasts (Hearing), and even things like frictionless sprays (Touch). However how effective the Flash *is* can be hard to figure out. Most fictional characters are SPD 4, so figure if they are out for around 12 seconds (not much time really) that's 4d6 right there. My gut says most Flashed characters in TV and the movies are affected for more like 30 seconds, which is 12 Phases at SPD 4. That's 12d6 on average! As I have said before, fictional characters benefit from a writer, who makes sure they get all the best die rolls when they need it.

Images is a tough power, since it can be anything. Light-based holograms, fake noises, radio static, you name it, most of it is considered Images. My advice? Repeat after me "*What does it do?*" Someone who casts an illusion spell probably is creating Sight Images. Unless the illusion can cause harm -- then check out Mental Illusions. To be honest, I am somewhat convinced that some comic illusions are a mix of Mental Illusions and Images -- we all get to see the Images, but only the target is affected by the Mental Illusions (say... that's a pretty cool power idea right there!) Anyway, follow the guidelines I've given -- look at how the power effects others and go from there.

Invisibility... here's one that will give some of us fits. Just remember that 5th Edition Invisibility doesn't cover Focused items. Okay? In my

opinion, anything that's attached to the characters stays invisible when he attacks (this includes claws, fists, and hair whips). Guns, swords, spears -- they all are going to need Invisible Power Effects. Just remind yourself -- the writer wasn't creating an RPG character and didn't have to spend the points. Also pay attention to things like Fringe and the like. The Predator is probably the best example of Fringe you'll ever find, while the Invisible Man had no Fringe (but he did have other issues).

## **Sensory Powers**

Clairsentience and Mind Scan need to be treated like Mental Powers. You need to pay attention to what they do within the context of the setting (okay, Mind Scanning *is* a Mental Power, but you get the idea). Basically, note what the power is used for and go from there. Also look at various *HERO System* sourcebooks and see if they already have a form of Clairsentience close to what you need. Just add (or subtract) Advantages and Limitations until you get what you need. Oh, and be prepared to buy Megascale, since it's a sure bet any fictional crystal ball is going to be able to view things halfway around the world.

Enhanced Senses are both easy spot and hard to figure out. Most alternate forms of vision are fairly easy to pick up on. For example, the Predator sees only in IR (it is a plot point, after all). The Alien doesn't seem to see at all (it has no eyes!), so you might want to buy it Targeting for its Hearing (and maybe 360 Degree Perception). The big problem comes with things like Enhanced Perception and Telescopic. How much do you buy? Sorry, there's no real answer to that. Yet again, I go back to what I said before -- take notes and compare to things we have stats for. In the movie *The Two Towers* Legolas spots the orcs from a far distance. How far, I can't say (mile? more?), but basically he gets some major Telescopic levels with his vision. One method is to figure out roughly how many hexes away his target was (1 mile is about 800 hexes) and see what sort of minus that is to spot (-16). However, a crowd of orcs is roughly a 32 hex object (presuming one orc per hex, two if they are close-packed), so that's +12. So, at a distance of one mile, Legolas has a total of -4 to his Sight PER. Let's say he has a base 14- with his Sight Group. He now has a 10- with modifiers. But in the movie he makes it fairly handily and is able to spot details. So let's give him +4 Telescopic. That means he's now at his 14- again ( $14 - 12 = 2 + 12 = 14$ ). If we give him +6 Telescopic, then he's only a -10 for range, and +12 for size, so he now has a 16- to see the orcs. And so on. Make sense?

## **Size Powers**

This consists of Growth and Shrinking. Allow me to point out Body Affect Powers, above. One thing to remember, however, is that things that

are naturally large or naturally small don't use Growth or Shrinking. You use a mixture of Characteristics, Powers, Skills, Disadvantages to represent a character who is 60' (or 6") all the time. See the rulebook for more.

### **Special Powers**

Most of the Special Powers have been mentioned elsewhere. There rest I'll quickly go over here.

Extra Limbs are easy -- just count them. Don't forget that most Extra Limbs are Inherent, and most tails and the like have Limited Manipulation.

Luck is a very subjective power. Most, if not all fictional characters have a certain degree of luck, defined as the writer's desire to advance the plot. Of course, you can find characters who seem to be even more lucky than that -- such as many of Edgar Rice Burrough's characters, who often, just by sheer coincidence, end up exactly where they need to be, time after time.

### **Standard Powers**

Like the Special Powers, these powers have been mostly mentioned elsewhere.

### **Power Frameworks**

Under the Defensive Powers section I mention that most dreaded of words... "Elemental Control." Let's take a quick look at Power Frameworks, shall we? Power Frameworks can be tricky, especially for people new to the *Hero System*, as figuring out what you can put in them can take some figuring. Let's see if we can makes things a little simpler to understand.

**Elemental Controls:** An Elemental Control (EC for short) usually represents a group of related or connected powers the character can use at *any* time. Classic ECs are often built around the classic four elements -- so you get a suite of fire, air, or water powers (the Human Torch is an excellent example of an EC in action -- he has a fiery damage shield, an energy blast, and flight [among other powers]). You can also have an EC of any other closely related special effect -- such as gravity powers, or telekinesis, sound, or psychic/mental powers. The three important things to remember is that all the powers need to be related (*i.e.* all fire, or water, or telekinesis), all of the powers need to initially cost END, and all the powers can be used at the same time. This latter item is very important, as it's what really sets an EC apart from a Multipower. And speaking of Multipowers....

**Multipower:** A Multipower (MP for short) can represent a suite of powers the character can (usually) use one at a time. A classic Multipower is made up of all Ultra Slots, and a classic example of such a MP in action is Ultra Boy, who had all of the powers of Superboy -- one at a time (*i.e.* super-strength, invulnerability, flight, and so on). A Multipower can be built around anything, and unlike an EC doesn't need a linking special effect (for example, Batman's belt gadgets could be a Multipower). Common MPs are often "all attack," where various forms of EB, RKA, and so on are put together. Another version is the "multi-rifle," which can be set to fire different attacks. The important thing to remember when creating a Multipower is that with most MPs, the powers can only be used one at a time, or, if used with more than one at a time, there's a give-and-take, where if one ability is used at full power, another power must lose some of its effectiveness to compensate. Certain forms of powered armor often demonstrate this, where using the flight pack means the defensive shields must be reduced, or firing an attack means the character must reduce speed (and so on). Of course, don't forget there's nothing wrong with having an MP reserve large enough to let one use two (ore more) slots at once, at full strength!

**Variable Power Pool:** A Variable Power Pool (VPP for short) represents a large of suite of powers the character can use in different combinations. Normally, the character can't use *all* of the powers at once, but should be able to use *any* of the powers when needed. Characters with VPPs are usually those who seem to have far too many powers to make either an EC or MP practical. A sorcerers, for example, who seems to know hundreds of spells, but needs time to call any one up. One of the best examples of a VPP is Dr. Manhattan from *Watchmen*. He is able to manipulate things on an atomic scale, and has an enormous list of powers and abilities. One could set him up with an MP of attack powers, an EC mixing Growth, Desolid, Shrinking (one presumes), and other abilities, but after a while his character sheet would get so long and complex, you might as well say "forget it" and give him a VPP. It's not like he uses (or even *can*) use all of these powers at the same time, and since he switches from one to the other effortlessly, it's a simple matter to give him a "Cosmic" VPP and be done with it. Now, he can do anything you can imagine (within the limits of the VPP).

### **Naked Advantages**

I've come to find Naked Advantages (NA for short) to be fairly useful over the years. Technically they've been around since First Edition -- putting Half END on your STR was a "Naked" Advantage after all. These days you can use an NA to modify the special effects of a power, which can be *very*

useful! For example, when I built the cast of *Black Lagoon* I used a lot of NAs, especially with Revy, as it let me apply a certain Advantage to a certain special effect (usually firearms) without having to buy the RKA the firearm was built out of. Here, let me show you what I mean:

- 60 **Master Gunfighter:** Multipower, 90-point reserve, all slots OIF (any non-Autofire firearm of opportunity; -1/2)
- 3u 1) **"I'm Miss Rebecca. I Have No Equal With A Gun.":** Area Of Effect (up to 12" Radius; +1 1/4), Selective (+1/4) for up to 60 Active Points of any non-Autofire firearm; OIF (any non-Autofire firearm of opportunity; -1/2), Cannot Use Targeting (-1/2), No Range (-1/2), Must Use 1 Charge Per Target Fired At (-1/4)
- 1u 2) **Double Tap:** Autofire (2 shots; +1/4) for up to 60 Active Points of any non-Autofire RKA, Both Shots Must Be At Same Target (+0); OIF (firearm of opportunity; -1/2)
- 1u 3) **Quick Fire:** Autofire (5 shots; +1/2) for up to 60 Active Points of any non-Autofire firearm; OIF (any non-Autofire firearm of opportunity; -1/2), Cannot Use Targeting (-1/2)

There you go, a Multipower of gun tricks made out of Naked Advantages. I could have added in the base 60 points of RKA (*i.e.* 4d6) as well, but then the MP would have probably cost twice as much and still wouldn't have accounted for all the variations of gun she might come across. Besides, I'd already bought her handguns separately, why buy them again?

You can use the same effect for a character's STR, or for HKAs ("Blade Mastery"), or even Movement abilities, especially if the NA represents a variant of the base power (such as Invisible Power Effects on your Running which takes Extra END).

## **PART V: LOOK WHAT I CAN DO!**

Perquisites are one of those things many characters have, but many adapters overlook when creating a character sheet. Just about any major fictional hero has Contacts or a Reputation, not to mention Favors, Followers, Fringe Benefits, and Money. While solo heroes don't usually have Followers, evil masterminds do, and any law enforcement character has any number of Fringe Benefits. Sometimes you'll get lucky and the writer will out-and-out tell you a character has a Perk of some sort (often an old buddy [a Contact], or he might say someone owes him a Favor). Bases and Vehicles can be tricky, however. Few of them really qualify as *HERO System* Bases and Vehicles, since most of the time the character's base and/or vehicle is just his home and/or everyday car. But a few (non-superhero)

characters do have specialized vehicles and the like, so you might find yourself building a Base or Vehicle to accompany the main character.

Talents can be a little tricky. They are "almost powers" and aren't anywhere near as obvious as most of the Powers I mentioned above. However, as with Perks, sometimes you'll be told of a character's Talent -- such as Oscar Gordon (*Glory Road*) who spends about a page mentioning his Bump of Direction. Most of the time you need to pay attention to what the character does and see if a Talent matches that ability. For example: is the character good with his hands and can use either to perform tasks? That's Ambidexterity (as seen in the film *Iron Monkey*, where a character writes with his right and left hands... at the same time!) Combat Sense would be shown anytime a character fights while blinded (such as in the film *Bloodsport*). Of all the Talents, Danger Sense is the most common, as many fictional characters have the writer-given ability to tell that "something is just not right here." Some of the mental Talents, like Absolute Time Sense, Eidetic Memory, Lightning Calculator, and Speed Reading are often made a focal point, even briefly, as a way to make a character stand out in a crowd. They may not be called by these names, but you usually will know it when you see it.

Lightning Reflexes are somewhat special. It's hard to tell if a quick character is quick due to having a really high DEX or from having this Talent. I've found that characters with Lightning Reflexes are the ones who don't seem all that fast *until* the fight starts, at which point they start to keep up with or even outperform people you know are faster. One rule of thumb is if the character seems exceptionally agile or acrobatic, give them a high DEX, if they are only quick in combat, give them Lightning Reflexes.

Lightsleep is often found among those characters "in tune" with nature -- such as Tarzan, Conan, or any of Tolkien's elves (who don't really sleep anyway). Resistance is good for those heroes who can take a beating and not break -- like Clint Eastwood's "Man With No Name" in *A Fistful of Dollars* (or Toshiro Mifune's character in *Yojimbo* or Bruce Willis's in *Last Man Standing*). Simulate Death is fairly rare, but often found in Asian manga, anime, and cinema. Universal Translator is the power of Doug Ramsey (a.k.a. Cypher from the New Mutants) and tends to be a power common to computer-based characters (or magicians with translation spells). Few characters have the full form of Universal Translator by the way, most of them are limited to a certain set of languages.

## **PART V: IT'S NOT WHO YOU KNOW, IT'S WHAT YOU KNOW**

Everyone has Skills. Everyone. It's just some people have more than others. Many fictional characters, especially those who are in a long-running series, often demonstrate an absurd number of skills (sometimes by design -- as is the case with Doc Savage). Fortunately, most skills are fairly easy to spot. Does the character perform perfect back flips? Acrobatics. Do they speak various languages fluently? Languages. Pick locks? Lockpicking. Fire a gun competently? Weapon Familiarity. Just list what you see the character do and match it up with the Skills list in the rulebook.

There is one huge hint I can drop concerning Skills (and Perks): let *HERO* do the work for you. By that I mean don't be afraid to give a character a Package Deal that matches the character's background. For example: in *Black Lagoon*, you have three ex-military characters, one hacker, one (former?) CIA agent, and several Yakuza (among others). *Dark Champions* has military Package Deals, a hacker Package, an espionage field agent Package, gangster Packages, and more. Just match the Package to the character, select the Skills that most fit what you've seen, and you're all set. Sure you might get some extra Skills that don't *quite* seem to fit or that aren't directly demonstrated in the source material, but usually that's okay -- they tend to be logical Skills that help to fill out a character's background. A prime example of this is any military character with skills such as KS: The Military/Mercenary/Terrorist World, or KS: [service branch] History And Customs. Neither are obvious Skills (but then, few Knowledge Skills are), but usually "make sense" for such characters.

## **PART VI: WITH GREAT POWER COMES GREAT HEADACHES**

The ability to select a character's disadvantages really depends on the genre. Naturally, most superhero comic book characters have very easy to determine disadvantages -- usually such common staples as DNPC, Hunted, and Social Limitation: Secret Identity. With other characters you might need to take a broader view of the character's possible Disads, and consider painting them with a wide brush. Such as rotating DNPCs and/or Hunteds, for example.

In this section I'll offer some suggestions on how to pick out Disadvantages from the source material. I won't go into the validity of certain Disads as Disads (much) as that's an argument no one can ever win (*i.e.* YMMV).

**Accidental Change:** First things first. Does the character actually change *into* anything? If not, ignore this. Also, remember that the character needs to change drastically for this Disadvantage to apply. Enraged and

Berserk don't count (although those can be part of it). A final note -- most fictional Accidental Changes are absolute. If the character does X, Y happens. A prime example is virtually any were-beast. If they see the full moon (or if the moon is full), they change, like it or not.

**Age:** Two notes about Age. One -- the character needs to be under Normal Characteristic Maxima for this to apply. So even if your superhero has gray hair and grumbles about getting on in years, odds are he can still lift a car or whatnot, meaning that NCM probably *doesn't* apply. Two -- the ages given for this Disad are recommendations and not absolutes. There are plenty of characters who are well over 40 who act as if they are still in their twenties, or 60 year-olds who seem to be almost as spry as people half their age. One of the few people I can think who should get this Disad is Grimjack -- he was roughly 50 in his series, and acted like it at times, so I'd probably give him the 40+ level. Of course, John Gaunt, even at 50, still has several characteristics over 15 and plenty of Combat Skill Levels, so he's no pushover.

**Dependence:** The 5th Edition version of Dependence, with its Incompetence and Weakness options is perfect for various forms of addictions and the like. Cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, you name it. Of course, there's also the classic Dependences -- such as water for those Aquaman types. Don't confuse food with a Dependence, however. A vampire isn't any more Dependent on blood than a normal human is on regular food. The same goes for things like what the character breathes -- a fish isn't Dependent on water any more than a human is on air. In other words, items that are part of the character's life cycle shouldn't be Disadvantages -- unless they are *very* unique.

**Distinctive Features:** This is one of those "your milage may vary" Disadvantages. In the Champions Universe, walking corpses such as Takafones don't get a DF for being a lich, but do get one for having an evil aura. Neither does the half-human, half-machine Halfjack. On the other hand, VIPER and UNTIL agents get a DF for wearing an easily recognizable uniform. For myself, I tend to lean towards the CU method, if only because it is the 'official' way to hand the issue. That said, you can still hand out DFs for highly distinctive and visible scars (GrimJack), fighting styles (just about anyone in *Dragonball*), tattoos (*Black Lagoon*), speech patterns, consistent personal habits, annoying laughs, and so on.

**DNPC:** How does one tell the difference between a Follower and a DNPC? Well, usually a Follower is especially loyal to the character and has various useful skills and abilities. A DNPC is often far less powerful and tends

to either get into trouble or used as leverage against the hero. The hero also needs to *care* about the DNPC. If he doesn't give one whit as to what happens to them, they aren't Dependent, now are they?

The question may arise of 'can a Follower be a DNPC?' Personally I'm not sure, but I know of a few cases where it seems possible. The classic is Batman and Robin, or Morgaine and Vanye. My personal feeling is that a Follower is someone who the main character tells what to do, while the DNPC acts on their own. Thus, Nick Fury of SHIELD might have dozens of Followers defined as rank-and-file agents, but might also have a DNPC (or two) defined as agents who are close to him in rank and tend to operate on their own. Thus, Robin, who tends to investigate things on his own (and then get captured) is a DNPC. Also, Followers can often be replaced, DNPCs less so.

**Enraged:** Enraged (and Berserk) is a tricky one. The question being -- when does the character go from 'determined' to 'That's it! No more mister nice guy!?' In some cases it's easy. The Hulk is one of the most perfect examples of Berserk you could ever hope to find. He bellows "Hulk Smash!!!" over and over, attacks just about anything moving, crushing everything in his path, and won't hold back in a fight, regularly killing characters in non-canon *What If?* issues, and severely trouncing them in canon. Wolverine had a berserker rage as well, although it was less seen. He mentioned it and it appeared a few times. The other question would be -- does this happen regularly? If you only see the character lose it once, then it's a pretty safe bet he doesn't have Enraged. However, if the character is known to lose himself in battle (like Grimjack), then you might want to consider some form of this Disadvantage.

**Hunted:** For comic conversions this one is easy. I mean, some are so obvious they almost hit you over the head -- Superman and Lex Luthor, Batman and the Joker, Spider-Man and Green Goblin (and so on). Others are logical extensions of the character's origin or background (example -- any police officer has Hunted (Watched) by his police department). Still others might be a little more obscure, and might be less of an individual Hunted as a group -- such as a collection of super villains (the 'Rogues Gallery' common to such characters as the Flash, Batman, Spider-Man, and so on), an enemy nation or organization (criminals Hunted by the police, secret agents by other agents, and so on), or even a rotating Hunted (such as the character's most recent victim in a swindle or the like).

**Normal Characteristic Maxima:** This is a tough one. NCM is normally only used in super hero settings, and even then, there are few

people with NCM in any official products (not even those characters who use powersuits). It also depends on the power level of the character. When I build a character, I tend to use a basic breakdown of 50+50, 75+75, 100+100, 150+150, 200+150 and so on. Anyone built on a 100 point base of *less* is a heroic normal, and gets NCM for free. Anyone built on 150 or more is a superhero. Now, if it so happens that the character is pulp-era masked avenger or a fantasy wizard... then I'll add in NCM. In most cases, however, I'll use a 100 point base for even 400+ point *Dark Champions* characters (such as the cast of *Black Lagoon*), and simply tack on NCM for free.

**Physical Limitation:** This can be nearly anything that hinders the character and can't be overcome with an EGO Roll. Prime examples of physical disabilities (can't walk, missing arm, blind), or physical restrictions (can't cross running water, can't abide the sight of holy objects). Animals have a whole series of Physical Limitations they can take, dealing with Intelligence level, their ability to manipulate objects, their ability to leap, and their size. Also, make sure your Physical Limitation isn't really a Distinctive Feature or a Social Limitation.

**Psychological Limitation:** Some people want Psychological Limitations to severely hinder the PC in some fashion. Some ask how it affects the character in combat. Me? I look at how they define the character's personality and affect interaction with others. Thus, while I'll plug in all of the standard Psychological Limitations like "Casual Killer," "Greedy," and "Code Versus Killing," I'll also look for ones that determine how the character will act in different situations or that define how the character views the world. This is all a matter of taste and play style and how strongly you feel a Psychological Limitation should affect the character (as opposed to being just a guideline for play).

**Reputation:** Something to remember -- Reputation the Perk works *for* the character, Reputation the Disad works *against*. This is an important distinction, and there is no reason why a character can't have both. Superman, for example, has the Reputation Perk of, well... "Superman." He also could have the Disadvantage of "Boy Scout." He tends to play fair, talks before fighting, pull his punches, and often assumes the best about people. Thus, he can be suckered into a trap (and has).

**Rivalry:** This is sort of a like a 'Hunted-Lite.' A Rival is someone who the character tries to best and bother, not someone who bugs the character and annoys him (*that's* a Hunted). Also, the Rivalry is "not-so friendly." One of the classic rivalries is that of Popeye and Bluto for the affections of Olive

Oyl. After a while it turned into a Hunted, as Bluto started to try to eliminate Popeye from the scene. Another classic Rivalry is between Son Goku and Vegeta in *Dragonball*. Vegeta can't stand to being second banana to Son Goku in terms of fighting skill and constantly is pushing himself to be better. It also leads him to pull some pretty boneheaded stunts in combat....

**Social Limitation:** This is a nice catchall disad for all of those unusual quirks in a character you might find. Most comic book characters have the ever classic "Secret ID," while police and military operatives have "Subject to Orders." Dark secrets work here as well -- such as any character who is a closet homosexual (such as Silhouette from *Watchmen*) or one who is a former criminal (Steeljack from *Astro City*). Remember, however, that what might be a Social Limitation in one setting might not be in another. So, for example, while being homosexual is utterly taboo in *Watchmen's* 1940s New York, it's perfectly acceptable in 300's Sparta.

**Susceptibility:** Remember -- a Susceptibility is something the character takes damage from that most people don't. But remember, a fish isn't susceptible to drowning in air any more than a person is susceptible to drowning in water. It needs to be a little more unique than that -- such as the Susceptibility of the ghosts in *A Chinese Ghost Story* to sunlight.

**Unluck:** All characters, and I do mean *all*, suffer from writer-granted Luck and Unluck (As I mentioned above). So, a character needs to be *really* Unlucky to get this. I think Spider-Man might qualify -- since he rarely seems to catch a break. I don't think there's many characters out there with excessive Unluck -- if they have it, it's no more than a die or so. Of course, there are exceptions to this, usually in the form of comic relief characters.

**Vulnerability:** Unlike Susceptibility, this disad means the character takes *more* damage from something that hurts most people anyway (just to be clear). And unless you're in a comic book, it's not always an easy disad to figure out. Sometimes someone might actually come out and say "X kills Y dead," in which case you have a good case for a Vulnerability. And, of course, some times it's obvious -- such as water creatures who are Vulnerable to fire and the like. You can also use this to simulate weak spots -- such as the Horned Ghost's soft spot between it's horns, which was surefire killing spot (this sort of disad is a big help if you're not using Hit Locations, by the way).

## **PART VII: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER**

So, you've reviewed the source material, taken a pile of notes, and are ready to go, now what?

I start by collating my notes. I take a fresh sheet of paper, write the character's name at the top and the standard characteristics down the left side. I then start going down my notes and copying over Powers, Skills, and what-have-you, usually crossing them off of the old sheet once they are written on the new one. Along the way I might write in some special effect names or give numeric values to certain Powers. This copying helps me put similar Skills together, lets me group things like Transport and Weapon Familiarities, as list Martial Arts maneuvers. After this is done, I might break out various genre books, in order to check different package deals and the like to see if I have missed anything (I did this a lot for the cast of *Black Lagoon*). I might even rewrite the character again, if only to clean it up and enter in additional edits. *Then* I start entering the character into Hero Designer (before I had HD I'd start typing the character up on a blank character sheet I'd created with my word processing application). I go down the line, starting with Characteristics, the Powers, then Perks, Talents, and finally Skills. This is where I might pull other books out to check power builds and designs, or to double check certain Skills. Once that is all done, and the character sheet is as complete as I can make it, I'll export it from Hero Designer, import the character sheet into my word processor application, and start on the character's background, personality, quote, and so on. If the character isn't too complex I can do this in around an hour or two. For really complex characters (or for a whole group), it might take me a week or more. I then spellcheck everything and try to proof the final copy for any errors in grammar or the layout. Then I post the character on the HERO Message Boards for feedback and commentary. After sufficient comments and corrections, there will be another round of edits (if needed). After that, the character is posted to my website.

### **What Books Do I Use?**

If you intend to work up a *HERO System* adaptation of a character you're going to need a copy of the core rules. I use *HERO System 5th Edition, Revised* since that is the current rule set and I want my work to be compatible with what the bulk of *HERO System* fans will be playing. I also use a number of supplements, with *The Hero System Bestiary* seeing the most action. Not only does it have the size charts (also found in *Revised*), it also has a number of templates (such as Aquatic, Venomous, or Winter) that allow you to quickly fill out a character sheet. It also has hundreds of prebuilt animals you can use as a basis for whatever it is you are creating. When I did my *World Of Kong* conversions, the *Bestiary* was of great use in deciding what stats to give what creature (it also provided me with dozens of pre-made beasts to modify into Skull Island creatures). After *The Hero System Bestiary* I tend to use the *UNTIL Superpowers Database* for ideas on

how to build certain powers, as well as *Gadgets and Gear*, the *Fantasy Hero Grimoire*, and the *Grimoire II*. I also recommend *The Ultimate Vehicle* and the *Hero System Vehicle Sourcebook* for adapting vehicles of any sort, be it real-world craft or something totally fictional, especially since you can easily modify any of the entries into whatever you are trying to create. As a final note, I would also like to recommend *Hero Designer*. While it isn't perfect, it is a *huge* time-saver, and I am finding it to be an excellent way to build, modify, and edit characters.