

Character Creation Handbook

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The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

The Upside:

The Character Creation Handbook is an assistant to creating a Hero System Character. Character Creation is one of the more time consuming, and some might say complicated, aspects of the Hero System. Once the game starts your Character Sheet contains just about everything you need to know to play - the trick is getting from the generic rules to the Character.

This book includes Chapter One of the Fifth Edition Revised Rules plus elements from several other books Hero Games has put out. These include Power Advantages, Power Limitations, Talents and other ideas introduced in The Ultimate Series of books, Champions, Fantasy Hero, Star Hero, Pulp Hero, and other information from the Online Rules FAQ at Hero Games' web site. By combining a lot of these abilities into one reference it helps a Player or Group create a character without needing to reference multiple books.

Before the book gets to actual Character Creation it goes over the Basic Rules And Concepts of the Hero System, making it useful to give to a novice player to start them on the road to learning Hero. This allows a group to have both books at the table during Character Creation or looking up the effects of Powers, Skills and other game elements.

The book breaks down into each of the major sections of Chapter One from the Revised Rules, This division by chapter gives the process a more organized feel. I'll cover the major additions to each section from the Revised Rules instead of going into everything in the book.

Chapter One - Character Creation Basics. This chapter starts with Character Points, which are the core of the System, and how they work in Hero. It discusses the major differences between Heroic and Superheroic game styles. Character Conception is the next major section, starting with Inspiration for your Character and places to find some should you come up short.

The various tables for Point Guidelines are mostly helpful to any GM looking to set up a campaign and deciding the power level and overall feel the game. The ability guidelines will be useful to Players who are looking for the average ranges of characteristics at a given point total. The Design Guidelines are also a help to Players looking for some idea of how to divide their points between the different aspects of a Character (Characteristics, Skills, Perks, Talents, and Powers). Keeping in mind these are rough guidelines and not actual rules they can be a good aide. Package Deals are mostly a GM provided tool to help create a uniform expectations for various Professions, Races and even Cultures. A few examples are provided and some guidelines on creating them finish out Chapter One.

Chapter Two - Characteristics. Chapter two goes into where most people will start building their Character from the ground up. Starting with the physical and mental attributes that are Hero System Characteristics. Hero has nine Primary Characteristics, Six Figured Characteristics and Three Movement Powers that all Player Characters start with. The Figured are derived from the values of the Primary Characteristics. The chapter explains what each one does, and how it can be used. The Increased Strength Differentiation from Ultimate Brick is included here to give an example of greater granularity of Damage from Strength.

Chapter Three - Skills. Each of the Sixty-Seven Skills used in a Hero game are described. The chapter opens, as the main rules do, with a basic discussion on using Skills in Hero; Skill Rolls, Skill Versus Skill contests, Complementary Skills, Skill Modifiers based on time and other factors, and Skill Period (such as how Paramedics differs in a Western game versus a Modern game). Everyman Skills are also listed, as well as how Hero divides the Skills based on which Characteristic they use to determine their base Roll. The rest of the chapter is the Skill Descriptions themselves. Not much on extra information is provided, a few clarifications. None of the Optional Skills from The Ultimate Skill are here.

Chapter Four - Perks And Talents. Perks are used as Roleplaying aspects that are beneficial, such as Followers, Money, Military Ranks and the like. The ones in this book are directly from the main rules, no additional information is provided. Talents are described as unusual abilities, these are basically Powers that are best described as Super Skills. All the talents from the Revised Rules are here, plus some additional ones from other source books. Animal Friendship (from Fantasy Hero) and Hotshot Pilot (from Star Hero and Pulp Hero).

Chapter Five - Powers. Powers are the meat of a Hero Character, they are used to buy Equipment, Superhero Powers, Magic Spells, and the like. First is the general discussion on basic rules of Powers and how they work in a general sense. How they break down into Categories (Attack, Defense, Adjustment, Movement, etc) and how those interact. For the most part this repeats the information in the Revised Rules. A few notable additions that some may find to their liking: Under Adjustment Powers is Healing Via Adjustment which introduces the Healing Effect Advantage (from Ultimate Energy Projector). Under Mental Power an expanded look at Establishing Line Of Sight, and Increased Differentiation Effect Rolls (both from Ultimate Mentalist). A Powers Summary Table is added and gives a very brief description of what each Power does, which is great for those who aren't quite sure and need a quick reference to look over to find the right Power for the Effect they want. Below is information on some of the major additions to the Powers, and their original source in parenthesis. Along with these are numerous other clarifications and examples.

The Characteristics Power has information on Limited Speed (Ultimate Speedster). Clinging In Combat (Online Rules FAQ). The Density Increase Limitation 'No Defense Increase' (Ultimate Metamorph). The Desolidification Advantage 'Selective Desolidification' (Ultimate Metamorph). Energy Blast has an Increased Damage Differentiation table and Increased STUN Damage Advantage (Ultimate Energy Projector). Entangle has more information on 'Anchoring The Barrier' (Ultimate Energy Projector). The Faster Than Light table is expanded to twice the size of the main rules' table and has the Instant Lightspeed Adder (Ultimate Speedster). Long Term Flashes Advantage (Ultimate Energy Projector). Flight Limitation 'Cannot Hover' (Ultimate Speedster). Adjustable Force Field Advantage (Ultimate Energy Projector). Attacking Through A Force Wall (Online FAQ and Other Sources). Killing Attacks also get Damage Differentiation Tables (Ultimate Energy Projector). Mind Control Advantage 'Long-Term Control' (Ultimate Mentalist). Shrinking Advantage 'Normal Mass' (Ultimate Metamorph). Using Telekineses on Liquids, Gases and Energy (Ultimate Energy Projector). Transfer Advantage 'Transfer To Other' (Ultimate Energy Projector).

Chapter Six - Power Advantages. This section covers the positive abilities that can be applied to Powers. Area Of Effect gets several expansions and clarifications to how it can be used. It adds several Types of Area Of Effect from Ultimate Speedster and Ultimate Energy Projector; Small Explosion, Trail, Fixed Shape for the Any Area Type. Additionally the options for Cage, Sight Range, and Voice Range are included. Indirect takes the Bypass Barriers option from Ultimate Energy Projector. Usable On Others includes the 'Usable Simultaneously (Carried)' option from Ultimate Speedster. Beyond that there are few more examples and notes on how various Advantages interact with each other.

Chapter Seven - Power Limitations. This covers the negative aspects that Powers can take on. Endurance Limitations includes the 'Costs Half Endurance' option from Ultimate Energy Projector. Gradual Effect has extra information on applying it to Constant or Continuous Powers. Innacurate finally makes it into a Rules Supplement, a version of Concentration for offensive abilities (taken from UNTIL Superpowers Database and Gadgets And Gear books).

Chapter Eight - Power Frameworks. The general rules and discussion on Power Frameworks has some more examples and a few clarifications from the Online FAQ. Otherwise the text matches the Revised Rules.

Chapter Nine - Character Disadvantages. Disadvantages finishes out the act of Character Creation in the system. The expanded Accidental Change table from Ultimate Metamorph has been added. The Proximity option for Susceptibility from Ultimate Energy Projector is included. Otherwise the information is the same as the Revised Rules.

The last part of the book is Example Characters. Starting, helpfully enough, with the creation of a Character for Pulp Hero. After that is a collection of NPCs at all the various point totals. These are the same characters in the Revised Rules. And the last two pages are a Character Sheet to photocopy and use.

The Downside:

There were a few elements from other books I felt could have been included. Most specifically an addition to Package Deals about creating Cultural Package Deals, as it simply focuses on Profession and Racial ones. And the expanded section on Powers Point Of Origin from the Ultimate Energy Projector.

Beyond that, either you'll need, or want, an additional text with the Character Creation Rules or you won't.

The Otherside:

The book is helpful in several ways, most importantly is combines a lot of elements from several source books into one reference. Gathering the many Advantages and Limitations and the like that have been thought up since Fifth Edition came out is a boon to anyone looking for a quick reference. Second, it allows a group to cheaply have two sets of the majority of the rules people reference constantly - and at a much smaller price than the full Revised Rules run. If you get one Rulebook to play and one (or two) copies of the Character Creation Handbook for reference at the table you can save some time (and money).

Another aside, this book is softcover and about one-hundred and eighty pages smaller than the main rules, making it a little easier to carry around if all you want is a book to reference Power, Skills and the like. Whether or not this is a good investment depends on how many times your group wished it had a few more rules books to pass around the table to find out exactly how a Power worked.

Personally I find this to be a useful addition to my collection, doubly so as a PDF.

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