Characteristics of Epic Heroes

Most epic heroes possess most or all of 7 general characteristics you can use to help you decide if a character is, indeed, an epic hero or heroine.

Trait 1: A Noble Birth
- ❖ Most epic heroes will have an above average station in life.
- ❖ They will be kings, princes, or nobles of some sort.
- ❖ Commoners usually do no become epic heroes.

Trait 2: Capable of deeds of great strength and courage
- ❖ Basically, this means the hero has the potential for great deeds.
- ❖ The magnitude of these actions are well above and beyond what the commoner does.
- ❖ While most epic heroes are good, not all are.

Trait 3: Great Warrior
- ❖ Before the hero of an epic does his business in the epic, he has usually established himself in combat during a war.
- ❖ Sometimes, as in *The Iliad*, we see the hero at war.
- ❖ In most, like *Beowulf* and *The Odyssey*, the hero has spent much time in battle.

Trait 4: Travels Over a Vast Setting
- ❖ Simply put, you cannot be an epic hero if you stay in your village your whole life.
- ❖ The more countries or areas traveled to, the better. The farther away from your own country, the better.
- ❖ Distance makes the hero's actions greater because they aren't selfish; they are for another country or people.

Trait 5: National Heroism
- ❖ Before a hero can be celebrated by countries the world over, he must first be recognized in his home country as a great and heroic person.

Trait 6: Humility
- ❖ Even as the rest of the world recognizes the great deeds of the hero, he is never a braggart or even willing to take applause.
- ❖ He commits his deeds because he knows they need doing, and the fame and rewards that he receives are only a matter of course, not the reason for completing his quests.

Trait 7: Faces Supernatural Foes and/or Receives Supernatural Help
- ❖ Most epic heroes either receive aid from a god or goddess or battle some superhuman enemy.
- ❖ This is what makes a hero's action epic: they fight something mere mortals cannot battle. Beowulf has his Grendel; Odysseus his Cyclops.
- ❖ For each hero, the enemy is unique. You won't see two heroes battling the same foe.