

mutants and masterminds

I picked up Mutants and Masterminds because I like superhero games, it was getting good buzz, and I got it for 37% off and with free shipping from buy.com. I am not cheap, but I am picky. I am less picky at \$20.75 than I am at \$32.95. I do not want to do a full review because there are enough of these on the web, but I do want to say a few things.

M&M is 137 pages of hardcover gloss with a pretty color graphics. It is pretty, but I still prefer soft cover with non-gloss pages. The layout has a few glitches, the worst of which is a formula that shows a “-“ where a “=” should have been. The section headers do not stand off as well as they should, but the majority of page references are correct and the index is wonderful.

Those who like a good text-to-dollar ratio may want to stay away from M&M. Each chapter begins with a full-page graphic and another page with simply the chapter title. This is not so bad, but two of the first three chapters are only 2(!) pages long. In the back, they include a summary of all the important tables, full color paper character stand-up counters and a character sheet. The latter two are available in PDF on the website and frankly are just a waste of space in the book. Plus, since M&M only provides rules and no settings, GMs wanting a canned superhero campaign will have to wait for the Freedom City sourcebook.

Though it uses the base mechanics of a d20 game, Green Ronin chose not to go with the d20 logo and actually include rules for character creation and advancement. That means you do not have to shell out another \$20+ for WotC book you might not want. If Green Ronin had not gone this route, I would not have bought the game.

Though based on d20, M&M is not much different from Champions, SAS, or other point-based superhero system. M&M has no classes and the character’s power level is really just a measure of the number of power points (pp) a character has. Abilities, combat bonuses, feats, skills, and powers are bought with points with the character level acting as a cap.

What I like most is that character creation is streamlined compared to SAS. All skills cost the

same. All powers use the same progression (no “Slow/Medium/Fast”). Building an attack using M&M is easier than using SAS’s cumbersome Special Attack. There are no PMVs. Plus, M&M has a rudimentary meta-power system for creating new powers and effects that is sorely missing from SAS, Champions, and other rpgs.

I really want to like this game more than I do. There are some goofy bits (like Strength adding to melee attack bonus) that I am willing to overlook or ignore, as they mostly come from using rules designed for D&D. There are power balance issues (like 1 rank of the Clinging power costing the same as 1 rank of Climbing skill or Force Field with Deflection costing the same as Deflection bought separately) that are not insurmountable with reasonable players and a watchful GM, but they are annoying. While I think M&M works “out of the box,” and would not mind playing an M&M campaign, I do not think anyone would run the game without instituting some house rules and this is what keeps me from committing whole-heartedly to the game.

ignorable theme

player versus pc knowledge

I like to think that my fellow players and I are mature enough to not let player knowledge influence character actions. However, there is something to be said for surprises and with this in mind, it is fun to keep players in the dark until their characters find out as well. You have to balance the fun of surprise against the hassle of keeping information secret.

Of course, if the players are taking on narrative roles and create their own “secret” information, that is a different situation.

comments

#329

robert a dushay phd & jonathan nicholas

Whenever a GM as me as a player “How long will you work at this?” I typically answer, “As long as it takes.” Unless there is a definitive deadline involved, people are not going to succeed or fail based on their estimate of the time needed to complete the task. If that were true, I would never get new software releases out of engineering. :) Besides, I would hate to

rely on player knowledge (how long it should take) for a character-based skill.

lee gold

Yes, I meant “complex” as “time consuming with many steps.”

spike y jones

I have also grown to disrespect GOO’s handling of their SAS marketing. Basically, they seem so damned full of themselves. On the Pyramid discussion groups, I called their “Superhero Showdown” with Hero games “self-indulgent claptrap,” and I stand by that, even if no one agrees with me.¹

A “well-designed” system cannot deal with the situational variances of the campaign. Characters can find themselves in situations in which they are considerably weaker or stronger than other characters. It will always be up to the GM to balance the campaign to suit the abilities of the characters whether or not the game system tells them they should have equal power. A well-designed, balanced game system is a good first step, but it is never enough.

What is the name of the game system that d20-based OGL games, like M&M use? These are not “d20” games but you cannot call them “OGL” because that term can be applied to any (non d20-based) system that uses the OGL.

joshua kronengold

Of course Indiana Jones is a Rogue. Was there another choice?

I distinguished between simple and complex to show how mechanics used to model one type of activity do not necessary feel right for modeling something different. Of course, there is not a hard split between them and that telling the difference can be nigh impossible.

I am not sure how your favorite magic system (“no system”) is that much different than BESM’s v1 magic system.

lisa padol

The wicket that has been sticking for me is that what is considered “ordinary” and “normal conditions” differs based on ability and training and how this should be formalized in the system.

robert rees

I have not yet had a chance to play Ironclaw, but a review is on my website nonetheless: <http://www.xenongames.com/ironclaw.htm>

As a player, I am happy with games that have no story or a GM who refuse to explain everything. I am also happy to listen to a GM who wants to explain everything as it adds to the experience is a behind-the-scenes kind of way.

eugene reynolds

I take the even more simplistic view that fiction is a creative enterprise. Authors can make literary choices based on other factors such as aesthetics, authenticity (the way it happened in real life), emotions (to create a specific reaction in the reader), novelty (doing something different), economics (what sells), etc. without endorsing the moral implications of those choices. Ultimately, literary analysis that attempts to divine what the author is saying says more about the reader than about the author. If you think all fiction is a moral enterprise, then you find moral statements in all fiction.

brian rogers

Having characters “falling on the same broad ability tier of 1st level” is not enough for the game to be fun, depending on the nature of the campaign. See my comments to Spike, above.

Having a unique shtick is great, unless you never have a chance to use it or if you become a “one-trick pony.”

Equality comes from the GM and players, not the game system. I think point-based systems created an illusion that equality is provided by the system. V&V always impressed with its acknowledgement that characters would not be equal and they could be tweaked as necessary.

jonathan tweet

While I appreciate you not wanting disarming, tripping, etc. to be too viable, a simple negative modifier (like what is done with two-weapon fighting) would have the same deterring effect as Attacks of Opportunity. While they address issues of movement well (you cannot run past or around the opposition without leaving yourself open for attack), they feel misplaced when applied to these other combat maneuvers.

Sorry to see you go. Come back soon.

¹ Where is my Bitter Gamer badge??