
Cyberspace Heroes



**Playing-by-Email
using M&M Superlink**



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Playing by E-mail using M&M Superlink by Simon Burley

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350 NW 87th Terrace
Plantation, FL 33324 USA
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M&M Superlink version of "Kendo" kindly provided by "Paul J."

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Introduction

Welcome to a great new way to enjoy your favourite Superhero Role-playing game.

Through this book you will discover how many Referees and Players have been able to have even more exciting and enjoyable adventures together.

You see, M&M is a “tabletop” role-playing game. Unlike – for example – computer role-playing games, it is played by a group of players sitting around a table with a Referee controlling the action. Campaign activity is acted out through verbal interactions and any conflict is usually resolved by using figures and some sort of map.

And it's FUN!

But if you've bought this book, you already know that.

However, sometimes it is not possible for players to meet together on a regular basis. That doesn't mean that the fun has to stop, though. There are loads of ways that you can keep having fun with the game – especially in the virtual worlds of the 21st century.

From early times, chess players have often used whatever forms of correspondence they had – pony express, telegraph, radio, telephones etc. - to carry on long distance chess games. In the 20th century many board gamers would engage in “play by mail” versions of their games.

Even if you can't get together with a group of friends every week to play a game of M&M, you can keep games going through:

- Play by mail
- Play by E-Mail
- Internet-based communications – web cams, chat, Skype™ etc.
- Dedicated internet gaming software – eg. Battlegrounds™
- Bulletin Boards
- Internet Forums
- Social Networking
- Virtual Worlds – eg. Second Life™



All of these offer their own attractions and disadvantages and they're NOT virtually exclusive.

Players and Referees will each have their own favourite method or combination of the above methods which will help them keep their game going.

In fact, even if you DO play face-to-face games on a regular basis, judicious use of the above communication methods can add a bit of spice to events:

In order to boost his approachability rating, Lionheart has set up an e-mail address – Lionheart@anymail.co.uk. After a particularly exciting battle, his player goes home to find the Referee has actually sent Lionheart some e-mail messages. Amongst all the fan mail and death threats – there is a message from a sleazy tabloid asking for an interview. How Lionheart responds will determine how events are reported in that paper before the next game session occurs.

Will he give the interview? In this case the loose-tongued Hero might let some important details slip without the benefit of his colleagues sitting at his shoulder to keep him on the straight and narrow. Or will he refuse the interview?

Introduction

This, of course, means that the paper will assume that he has something to hide other than his identity.

In either case, Lionheart will have some questions to answer when the other characters read the paper produced by the Referee at the beginning of the next games session.

Because of the many, many options and combinations of options available, this book sticks to one method of remote-playing M&M – that of using e-mail – so-called “play by e-mail” or PBEM games. (It also happens to be the method I’m most familiar with.)

In a Play-by-Email game, the Referee sends their players e-mails describing what is happening in the game. The players then respond with e-mails describing what their Heroes are doing. The Referee amalgamates the players’ responses. They use the rules to determine what happens as a result of the Heroes’ actions and e-mails everyone with an update of events. A story unfolds episode by episode through your computer in which you can influence events through the actions of your Superhero.

Put like this is sounds really simple and, in truth, it is. However - like role-playing games themselves – hearing about PBEM games is nothing like playing them. Like RPGs, PBEM games can be absolutely fascinating and extremely addictive.

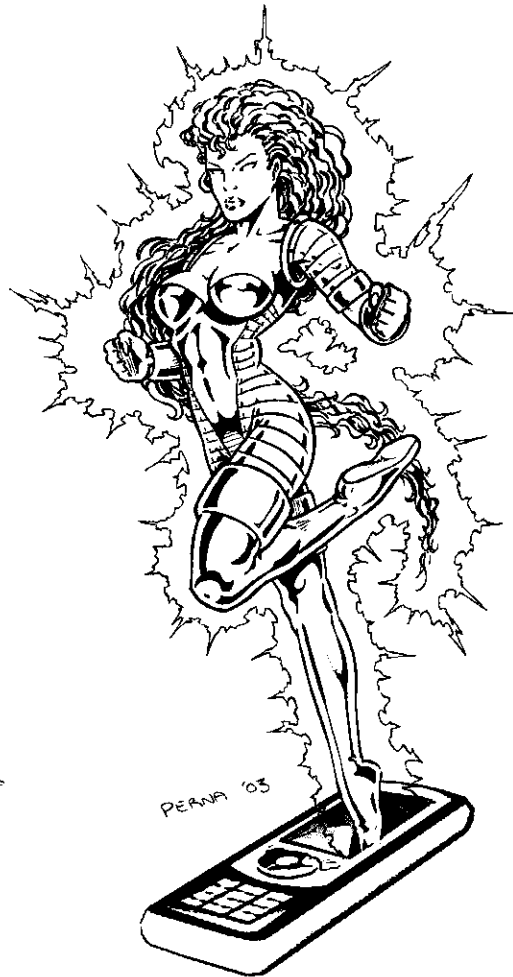
Like table-top RPGs, refereeing these games is a lot of fun but requires a special kind of person.

There is a lot of work involved and many Referees can leap into running this sort of game without understanding some of the pitfalls.

This book is intended to help anyone who hopes to run a PBEM M&M game. It will give you clear warning about some of the difficulties to might face, and suggest strategies which should make you life easier and running the game more enjoyable.

This might be alternative ways of handling combat, advice about structuring the plot-lines, initial planning or myriad other things.

Much of the advice and many of the rule variations suggested in this book can apply just as readily to other methods of remote or, even, face-to-face play. (You could probably even use most of it to help you run *other* Superhero RPGs through e-mail, but obviously I think you’re better off sticking to M&M.)



My recommendation is:

Have a read of this book.

Even if you decide playing by e-mail isn't for you, there's still loads here to spark your imagination.

And if you DO decide to run a game of M&M in cyberspace....welcome to the future!



Chapter 1: Why P.B.E.M.?

The most obvious reason to play by e-mail is because you want to continue playing M&M but, for some reason, can't meet together to play face-to-face as often as you would like.

Often people who have attended University or worked together and become gaming buddies wish to continue with a campaign when they move apart at the end of their courses or when promotions cause people to move.

Sometimes it allows people who live away from populated areas to take part in games which they would otherwise have no access to. PBEM gaming groups often consist of people who have only ever "met" through e-mail. Players can come from any part of the world as long as they all have access to e-mail and can speak a common language. In fact this can be the source of loads of fun – especially when the "common language" is shared – for example – between Americans and the English!

However, there are more than just practical considerations.

PBEM games by their very nature develop different emphases than fact-to-face games. Superhero RPGs, such as M&M, are based very heavily around combat. A gaming session can be occupied entirely with a single battle between the Heroes and their dastardly opponents. And there's nothing wrong with that!

Sometimes it feels good to just go toe-to-toe with evil in a world with unclouded morality and just kick its backside.

But then there's the campaign. One big difference between the comics of the "Silver Age" (1960's onwards) and earlier "Golden Age" comics was the introduction of multi-issue on-going plotlines interweaving

with stories from the Heroes' private lives. Suddenly the comics became as addictive as TV soap operas with plot, sub-plots, cliff-hangers, running characters and running gags. Even when an individual story was resolved and planet Earth was saved from destruction, readers wanted to keep reading to find out what happened next to their favourite Heroes.

M&M – whilst also having a fun and action packed combat system – allows players and Referees to enjoy this more immersive (and addictive) campaign aspect of the game.

In a PBEM game, battles and slugfests become less important as foci for game activity. You can enjoy a good battle face-to-face but they are not as engaging over the Internet. It's fun planning and preparing for them and even more fun finding out what happens afterwards but – with all the options possessed by both the Heroes and the Villains – it would prove extremely tedious to play out every combat round-for-round by e-mail. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

The Campaign aspect of the game, however, really comes into its own when played by e-mail.



Face-to-face games fit with the quick decision making and high octane actions required in Superhero combat. PBEM games are much slower and allow time for reflection. This gives players time to THINK about their characters. They develop a much deeper insight into how and why their characters act as they do. Detective work is carried out a lot more thoroughly. There's time to deal with mundane matters "at home" in the Hero's secret identity.

Whilst it might be said that this is a lot less exciting than playing face-to-face – and there is certainly less adrenalin involved – the whole experience can seem a lot deeper and more involving. Less exciting but a lot more satisfying is one way to describe it. Possibly less like a blockbusting film and more like a high budget television series.

In fact because of this deepening of the campaign aspects of the game, some Referees actually use some PBEM elements even if they are able to have face-to-face sessions with their players. The face-to-face games are usually for resolving combats or other direct character interactions. Hero The award of pp, character development and aspects of the Heroes' private lives are handled through e-mail communication between sessions. The very first set of Superhero RPG rules ever published took this approach and there's no doubt that it's an extremely satisfying way of running a Superhero campaign.

Playing by e-mail is also an extremely cheap way of running a game. As long as you've paid for your Internet connection and can cover your electricity bill the only additional cost is TIME. You don't need figures, characters sheets, pencils, paper, maps or munchies to keep the players fed. All you need is a few spare hours per week.

Referees

The best advice that can be given to a person intending to Referee a PBEM game is:



DON'T DO IT!

This is a serious endeavour. It will take a big chunk out of your life. There is a BIG time commitment, a significant intellectual commitment and, possibly surprisingly, a considerable emotional commitment. If you have a life, then you might want to think seriously before taking on this level of responsibility. Because it IS a responsibility. Trust me, your players will love your game. You'll be surprised how committed they become to it in a very short time. If you are not able to deliver it to the level they, and you, want then there'll be a lot of disappointment.

Don't take on this responsibility lightly. If you don't have the time or the stamina then don't do it.

OK, I'll be honest. If you are that special sort of person who can find the necessary level of commitment to run such a game, then it could be one of the most satisfying experiences of your life. Just don't expect it to be easy.

This book is devoted to you so I won't say too much more here. If after reading it you ARE still determined to run a PBEM game then I doff my cap to you sir. Hopefully some of the suggestions it includes – for example the "honeymoon period" introduced in Chapter 2 – will make your life a bit easier.

Players

Playing by e-mail is not for everyone. Some players may only have time for one game session per week and/or



enjoy the social aspects of getting together. Using e-mail can be more time-consuming and can be seen as a solitary activity. Face-to-face gaming also suits people with quick wits who are more verbally adroit.

The opposite is what makes PBEM so attractive to many people. Whereas a face-to-face game requires a player to be at a certain place for a certain time, reading and writing e-mails can be deferred until a convenient time.

In many ways this way of playing the game is a lot easier than tabletop gaming.



You have time to think about your responses carefully so you know that every action your Hero takes and every word he says is exactly what you want.

The fact is that most people enjoy playing PBEM games as much as – or even more than – face-to-face ones. They give a different type of enjoyment. You will have no problem attracting players to your game. If you're hoping to be a player in a PBEM game then you really don't need to read any further.

You don't even need to know the rules of the game. Your Referee will handle everything for you. Once your character is made, all you need to do is to be able to read and write and have a degree of imagination.

You also need to be committed to the game. There's nothing worse than a PBEM game being held up because one player is unable to get his responses in on time. Your Referee will be devoting hours to giving you and your fellow players the best game he or she can. The least you can do is to write an e-mail every week.

Lurkers

A slightly surprising side effect of a PBEM game is the emergence of so-called "Lurkers".



These are individuals who don't want to actually play in the game but who are interested in watching what's going on. They ask to see the public e-mails which are circulated to every player.

For them, it's sort of like watching a television series. As the story of your game develops, they get to read along with the players. Some PBEM games can have more lurkers than players.

It doesn't cost take any effort to support Lurkers. All you do is add their e-mail addresses to the mailing list and that's it. Suddenly you've got an audience.

NPCs

In a PBEM game, non-player characters can actually be played by non-players.

I'll explain.

There might be someone who is unable to commit to being a full-time player but who wants to do a bit more than "lurk". The Referee can e-mail them the details of one of the minor NPCs in the game and – whenever that character appears – the bit-part player can write their script.

Obviously the Referee will maintain a veto over the way the character acts to ensure that they don't stray away from their role. However, having someone else put the words into the mouth of an also-ran like this can save the Referee some thought and allow them to develop a more unique personality. Used with moderation this can be immense fun.

Lucky Referees might also have some people who are willing to provide other support services.

For example, imagine that the campaign had its own newspaper which published the events in the campaign at regular intervals. Producing this on a regular basis may be too much for the Referee who will be overloaded with other things. But if they can get a volunteer/lurker to produce it for them it will add immeasurably to the campaign as a whole. The paper would be written from the perspective of the editor, not the Referee. They might also be called upon to play the roles of roving reporters or, even, the publisher himself - if the players choose to drop in to the press office to complain about the media handling of their adventures. I've never heard of a Referee who's been lucky enough to find someone to do this for them but it's worth a thought.

A table-top RPG can keep half-a-dozen people entertained. A PBEM game can bring joy to many more.

My recommendation is:

If you get the chance to PLAY in a PBEM game then I'd grab it with both hands – IF you have the time to commit to playing it properly. If you don't have the time it's still fun to lurk or – even – help out as an NPC from time to time.

Don't take on the role of Referee of a PBEM unless you are absolutely sure it is what you want. If you are able to do it, though, you'll find it a fascinating and rewarding challenge.



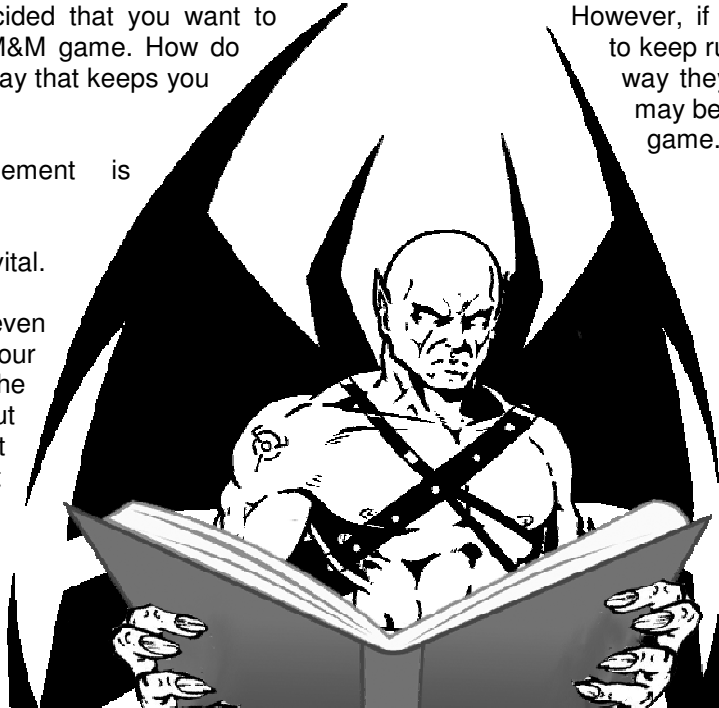
Chapter 2: Preparation

OK you've decided that you want to run a PBEM M&M game. How do you do it in a way that keeps you sane?

The first element is preparation.

Preparation is vital.

Before you even begin to put your fingers to the keyboard to put down your first notes about your PBEM campaign, you have some important decisions to make.



And DON'T let anyone know you're even thinking about starting a PBEM campaign until you have made these decisions and started to get your ideas down in print. The instant word gets out, you'll have people asking you all sorts of questions and wanting to start making their characters.

Existing campaigns

First of all, if you're thinking of starting a PBEM game because you want to stay in touch with people you've been playing face-to-face with you may have a BIG decision to make. You might want to continue your table-top game over the Internet.

If at all possible, my advice to you is to put that campaign away and start a brand new one. There are a number of good reasons for this:

1) I explained in Chapter 1 that a PBEM game is a totally different animal to a face-to-face game. Tabletop games revolve around combat. E-mail games revolve around character and campaign play. The whole style of the existing campaign will change. Now if that's what you want that's fine.

However, if your players are looking to keep running their Heroes in the way they always have, then they may be disappointed by a PBEM game.

2) PBEM games generally work better with lower-powered Heroes (see below). Most face-to-face Heroes will be of power level 10 (or higher) and will have improved through gaining and spending additional pp. Their wider range of combat

options will be much harder to handle by e-mail.

Even if your campaign was a lower level one, the exact skills, powers and feats taken by players in face-to-face games tends to be more combat oriented. Some players may complain that the abilities they chose during the character creation process are less useful under the new campaign framework.

3) Creating new characters and starting a new campaign is FUN.

You don't have to scrap the old campaign, but you should mothball it. Put it away to bring out like a comfy old pair of slippers if you and your friends ever do manage to get together in the future. (Having this to look forward to might even give you more of an impetus to arrange the meeting.)

Another option is to start a new campaign but to draw upon the existing setting the players are familiar with. The new campaign could be set in the same town but down in the gutters, or in a different city or country.

Some familiar NPCs and settings could be re-used but will now be seen in a new light.



A New Campaign

So you've decided to start a new campaign to run by e-mail have you? Good choice!

1) Go wild!

Here's some good news. You can now run almost any campaign or setting that you want. You can start to think outside the box.

A world where Superheroes are outlawed. A world ruled by Superheroes. Defeating an alien invasion in Victorian England. Mutants versus monsters in a sewer kingdom of outcasts below our 21st century cities. A giant space station kept functioning by ancient magic. Time travel. Demon summoning in World War 2.



The reason for this is simple. When you run a face-to-face game you have to have everything to hand. If the players have a question, you have to have the answer there and then. This is why I, personally, almost always run campaigns set in a version of my native Birmingham (UK). It is why most peoples stick to fully designed campaign settings. If the players hare off in an unexpected direction, at least we know what's there. You have to keep the background manageable when you're playing in "real-time" on a tabletop.

With a PBEM game you have time in between a player stating what they want to do – or asking a question – and your response. Time to think. You don't need to know what's down in the bowels of the ancient space station before the game starts but, if someone decides to go down there, you've got time to think up an appropriate encounter.

So go a bit wild.

However.....

Don't go so wild that you limit the number of adventures the characters could have.

It's no good coming up with a great pilot episode for your TV series if there's nowhere else for the story to go.

2) Superpowers

At this point you may also want to decide where the characters powers are coming from. The "kitchen sink" universe - which works so well in organically self-generating tabletop campaigns – is best avoided in a PBEM game. Having some sort of common origin for the Superpowers works best. Work out which Archetypes are more suited to your campaign set-up. If you can come up with a couple of different ways that people could gain powers then so much the better.

In a paranormal game the Heroes could be re-incarnated souls of ancient Heroes, modern researchers into the occult, reformed demons or the standard superfit/martial arts type.

Be prepared for your players to come up with other ideas which are compatible with your background.

3) Solo vs. Team

There are two basic ways of organizing the action in a PBEM game. One is to start all the characters off separately from each other. The other is to have them organized as a group or team – possibly called together by some kind of authority or mentor figure.

The solo approach can be fun for some Referees. If a player is slow to respond, it doesn't delay the Referee's interaction with other players. The Referee has great fun as each player explores his or her world.

They bump into each other, pick up each other's sub-plots and hear about each other's adventures – never being sure if they're meeting or hearing about an NPC or another player-hero.

Personally, I think this approach is more work for the Referee due to having to keep myriad plotlines on the go at once. Also, even though the Referee might be having a great time sitting in the middle of their web of adventures, they are the only one who sees the whole picture. Players are kept in the dark about each other and there's absolutely nothing for Lurkers in this kind of game.

Chapter 2: Preparation

If you have the players operate as a team then you have to wait until most or all of them respond before you can move on. This can be a bit frustrating at times. You only need a single plotline, though, and you can publish a public summary of events for the players and any lurkers.

There's nothing to stop you "splitting the team" at later stage in the campaign to run parallel plotlines when you feel ready for this. (See Chapter 4.)

I recommend starting with the team approach.

(For suggestions on how to deal with slow or unresponsive players, see Chapter 5.)

4. Make notes

Now's the time to turn on your computer. Jot down a summary of the background. Write where the Heroes' powers come from and then half a dozen story seeds. If you can do that then your campaign will probably be a flier.

Example: The Alien invasion of Earth was thwarted when a brave astronaut rammed the mothership with his shuttle. Some aliens are still loose on Earth but even if they weren't, the planet is scarred. Alien viruses affect random individuals – killing many, mutating others and granting abilities to a few. Some choose to use these for evil. Some manage to get their hands on Alien technology from crashed attack craft. Professor Brian Bart has developed a method of detecting alien materials – organic and manufactured – and is convinced that they are infiltrating the city prior to launching a take-over. The authorities do not believe him so he is putting together his own group of rag-tag heroes to resist the on-coming attack.

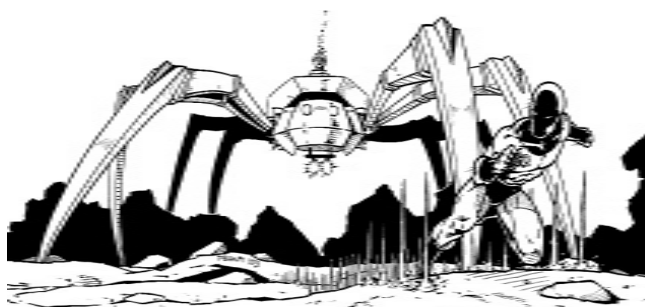
Possible story ideas:

- Track down the alien infiltrators and expose them.
- Discover and destroy the alien base.
- The alien virus mutates fatally. Find a cure by finding and making peace with an alien.
- Criminal organization using and abusing captured aliens to develop their own powers and influence.
- BIG alien robots.

- The "authorities" object to the Hero group and closes them down, driving them outlaw.
- Another mothership, another invasion.

If you are able to, come up with a funky title for the campaign at this time. This is earliest time that you should let rumours of your intention to run a PBEM game slip out.

We'll simply call this alien invasion campaign "Incursion".



Internet Backbone

So you've come up with the big idea for your campaign. And you're STILL determined to go ahead and run it.

What you need now is the means. The main thing is you need regular access to a reliable computer with a secure Internet access. Create a separate folder on the hard-drive for this campaign, keep everything to do with the campaign in it and back it up regularly. I know this seem obvious but it's amazing how many people fail to do this. Really your campaign folder should also be populated with a variety of sub-folders to allow you to keep everything in order.

You need to set up two things on the Internet:

1) Private e-mail

The first thing you need is a secure e-mail address which you and your players will use to communicate PRIVATELY.

You may be tempted to use a pre-existing personal e-mail address. Bear in mind that the campaign will generate a lot of traffic and this will get jumbled up with your other private e-mails. It also makes it difficult to separate the game from your private affairs. You may sit down to read and deal with your personal e-mails and be distracted by events within the game and vice versa.



Also, bear in mind that, if you're opening the game up to players that you haven't met personally, then you can't be absolutely sure who it is you're giving your personal e-mail address to.

For these reasons, I would personally set up a separate e-mail address specifically for this e-mail campaign.

Eg. **incursionreferee@anymail.co.uk**

2) Public information

You also need some way of publishing events in the game in a forum where all the players – and lurkers – can access it.

This can be as simple as a second e-mail address.

Eg. **incursion@anymail.co.uk**

This e-mail address should have a contact list attached to it which automatically e-mails any updates to all those who need to see them. No-one except you should ever use this e-mail address.

Example: Carlton has agreed to prepare a regular newspaper reporting the events in Stuart's Incursion campaign world.



As Referee, Stuart wants to review and check it before publication.

The completed issues are e-mailed to Stuart using the private e-mail address. He then uploads it for public reviewing as soon as he has approved it.

There are no circumstances in which players should use the public forum to contact you about events in the game. They should use the private e-mail address (above). (They may, however, use it in other ways – see Chapter 7.)

There are alternatives to a simple e-mail, however. Many companies offer the ability to set up "groups" which allow registered users to post and share messages, files etc. A group allows you to archive events in the campaign. Public postings remain on the group area indefinitely. Any lurker or player who joins the group would easily be able to catch up with past events.

The players would also be able to upload pictures of their characters to the files area of the group. The Referee could use this area to store newspapers and any other documents they prepare to support the campaign – maps, background documents etc.

Using a group like this is extremely useful but you need to be clear about exactly what players are allowed to do in the group – what files they are allowed to upload, for example. Many Referees set up a group and make it available for viewing by the public. (This means ANYONE could look at your campaign in action. You don't know who is lurking or how big your audience is.)

However, they do NOT make their players members of the group or they limit their access rights. This would mean that the only the Referee can upload messages and files to the group.

Alternatively, you could limit access to specific members of the group – controlling who can see your game – and/or allow those members to upload files openly.

If you do this you would have to carefully control it through your "Netiquette" rules (see below). There are advantages to this. (Discussed in Chapter 7.)

Another great advantage is that a system with archived messages and files – such as a user group – would allow any new players to easily "catch up" with events in the campaign – saving the Referee all that extra work.

Other possibilities include Internet Forums and/or Bulletin boards. Some of these have been set up specifically to support the running of RPGs across the Internet. These are worth looking at even if you don't end up using them. Many of them have FAQ's, advice or articles about running Internet-based games which you might find useful. (Not as useful as this book – obviously – but still worth reading.)

There are also opportunities offered by Social Networking, FTP or other file-sharing sites and utilities.

Which method(s) you choose depends upon your personal preferences, level of knowledge and your intentions for the campaign. Two simple e-mail addresses is all you need to run most campaigns, however.

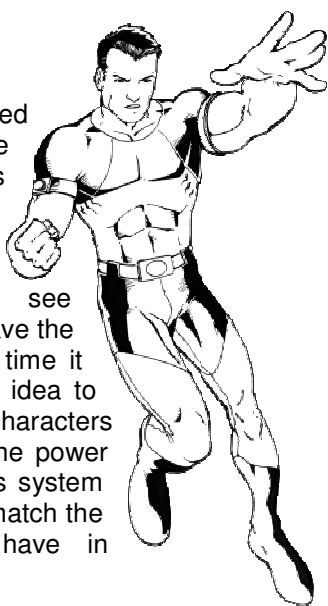
Personally I would set up a private e-mail address and a group to handle public messages.

What is *crucial* is that the players should have no way of communicating directly with each other about events in the game. If your players know each other prior to the campaign - and exchange e-mails, talk on the telephone or even (shudder!) actually meet in the real world – you need to be clear with them that they are not to discuss in-game matters with each other.

You should be involved in *all* exchanges of information between players in the game about the game.

Characters

At this time you need to decide how the player characters are going to be created. For more details on how to go about this, see Chapter 3. If you have the inclination and the time it is probably a good idea to generate a couple characters yourself to see if the power level and limitations system you come up with match the background you have in mind.



The Honeymoon Period

Now is the time to sketch out the first adventure in the campaign. Again, this is discussed later – in Chapter 4.

However, this is a good time to introduce the concept of the “Honeymoon Period”. Simply put, this first adventure is going to be short and simple. You don't know at this stage – despite all your good intentions – just how well you're going manage running this PBEM campaign. You might love it. You might find it doesn't work out the way you expected.

At the same time, you don't know if your players are going to enjoy it or how easy they are to work with on the campaign.

You might find yourself with too many players or with the capacity to take on a couple more.

In short, go into the campaign treating the first adventure as a honeymoon period. Set yourself an achievable short term goal. Be prepared to make changes to the game or, even, give it up when you reach this plot resolution.

There is no shame in this. Many people find running a PBEM game to be different than they expected. It is sad when a Referee puts a lot of effort into designing a highly detailed campaign and starts a complex multi-layered plot and is unable to see it through – leaving their players hanging. Make sure you can at least finish off the simple introductory chapter.

Think of it as a “prologue” to the campaign proper.

Paperwork

Before you can start the campaign, you need four items of paperwork.

1) The Background

This is the players' introduction to your new campaign world. This is the first thing you send them after they have signed on to the campaign and it is what *sells* your campaign to them.





You'll probably need to redraft it a few times to get it right. It needs to:

- grab their attention
- communicate the mood and style of the setting
- give them all the information they need
- be as short and concise as possible – the equivalent of a single side of paper is best

This is the keystone document of the campaign. Take your time about it.

However, as this is the honeymoon period, you don't have to cross every "t" and dot every "i" in the campaign background. You will probably revisit this background from time-to-time to refine it and add some more polish to it. It doesn't have to be perfect to start with.

Feelings are more important than facts. Purple prose is perfectly acceptable.

2) Netiquette

This is a simple list of rules which govern how you, the players and any other participants should communicate with each other.

It is surprising how essential this is. Things which may seem obvious to you (eg. Always be polite in e-mails) may not be as obvious to some players.

This could cover:

- Methods of communication (public and private)
- Timetable of communications
- Content of communications (length, depth, style, acceptable level of profanity, tense etc.)
- Responsibilities of players
- Responsibilities of the Referee
- Rules which apply to non-players
- Likely methods of addressing any issues which arise

Use a light hand and be very polite when writing this. Be as clear about your responsibilities and your commitment to the success of the game as you are about the players. It's not about stamping your authority on the game, it's about trying anticipate and resolve any potential misunderstandings or issues which might arise.

In his Netiquette document, Stuart explains that he will be posting a public description of events in the game once per week. He expects a private response from each player every week. If a player is unable to respond with instructions for their Hero in a given week, the game will continue. However, that Hero will not take any decisive actions that week. Any actions they do take will be determined by Stuart based upon standing orders (see Chapter 7) or his knowledge of the character.

By doing this he is showing his commitment to the game, encouraging the players to be as committed, giving an incentive not to fall behind when sending in instructions and deflecting any possible complaints from players should he need to take control of their Hero in this way.

You WILL want to revisit and redraft these Netiquette rules at the end of the Honeymoon Period. It is highly unlikely that you will cover everything you need to at this stage. But try to think of as much as you can. The more you put in the easier things are going to flow.

3) Character generation rules

You'll need a simple sheet which outlines the kind of characters you expect to see in this game and how they are going to be created (see Chapter 3).

You may wish to give them some examples of possible characters – maybe the test Heroes you created (see Chapter 2). Personally, I find that - if I give examples - some players use these as templates rather than letting their imaginations roam free. It's best to give them just the rules for character creation. Only give them example characters to look at if they seem to be struggling.

If your players are unfamiliar with M&M you may wish to encourage them to purchase a set of the rules or - at the very least - e-mail them link to the free .pdf of chapter 1 from the Official M&M web-site. It saves a lot of time if players can do most of the character creation themselves.

This isn't essential though. The only person who needs to understand the rules behind a PBEM game is the Referee. A player can take part without knowing the game and – from their point of view – participate in the joint story telling.

4) Introduction to the adventure

This is to be given to the players after they have created their characters but before they start playing the first adventure. You may wish to draft an outline introduction at this stage and then customize it for each individual character as they are created.

Stuart decides that each character will suffer in some way through the legacy left by the alien invaders and are rescued by Professor Brian Bart. If they are mutated by the alien virus, it will become deadly and he will arrive with a serum which stabilizes the mutation. If they are using alien technology, it is backfiring, out of control, when he pops up to point out the correct controls. He will visit scientists and show them the errors in their work. He will rescue martial artists from attacks by left-over alien robot drones. In each case he will then invite the Hero to a meeting where he will outline his plan.....

Invite Players

Now is the time that you can “officially” announce your intention to run a play-by-email M&M game.

If you already know some people who might like to play, contact them and explain your plans. If, for some reason, you don't attract enough players at first, ask them to invite friends.

If there still aren't enough interested parties trawl the Internet for M&M fan-groups, Superhero RPG web-sites or RPG forums and announce your game there. (Do this one site at a time – don't do a blanket marketing campaign or you WILL be swamped with offers of interest.)

You'll find yourself overwhelmed with interest. DON'T be tempted to take on too many players at first. Sign up a small number for the honeymoon period (5 at most).

If possible, take on one less player than you think you can cope with in case someone you simply HAVE to let play wishes to sign on after your deadline is passed.

For example, one of your close friends might say they're not interested in playing but change their mind after you've filled all the available places.

In my opinion, 5 players is the “ideal” number for a PBEM game. In the Honeymoon period, when you're getting a feel for things and everyone is (over) enthusiastic, then you should consider it a maximum number. (So you might start with 4 players to keep a space “spare” for a late-comer.)

However, when you move into the main part of the game you need to have enough player responses every week to keep the game going – in the face of real-life commitments and waning or variable enthusiasm –you probably need a minimum of 5 players.

If you reach the maximum number you feel you can cope with, you can always put other interested parties on a reserve list and introduce them into the campaign later when you feel you have the capacity. You may wish to let these reserves “lurk”.

It is up to you how you feel about letting other people “lurk” during the honeymoon period. You may prefer not to have too many lurkers in your honeymoon period – whilst you are still finding your feet.

On the other hand, a bigger audience might give you more motivation. (It also gives the opportunity for a wider range of feedback – see Chapter 7.)

How you select your players is up to you. If you're inviting people you already know then you're probably alright.

However, if you're signing up a friend of a friend or someone who has contacted you through the Internet you might want to have some criteria other than “first come first served”. When you get an e-mail enquiry send them a polite note back thanking them for their interest. Say that they're on the waiting list and you'll get in touch soon.

After a short while – a couple of days maybe – you will probably be able to tell from the e-mails you've received (and their response – if any – to your “thank you” message) which of the interested parties you can work with.

Send these people an e-mail informing them that they've got a place in the game let them know that it is for a trial period to see how things go. Let everyone else know that they are on the reserve list or (if you wish) that all the places in the game are gone but they are welcome to lurk.



You can now post the full background for everyone to read and send your players details of how they are going to start making their characters (see Chapter 3).

The one thing you WON'T have to worry about is getting enough players. Trust me, they'll be queuing around the block and you'll have to fight them off with a stick!

My recommendation is:

Think carefully about what you want before starting to run the game and don't be afraid to think "outside the box".

Prepare your Netiquette rules, campaign background, character generation rules, first adventure and half a dozen further adventure seeds before advertising for players.

Have some "in-game" origins for superpowers and keep the Heroes weaker than in face-to-face games.

Set up a private e-mail address for players to contact you and a public e-mail address or internet group to publish events in the campaign.

Always plan to start with a Honeymoon Period.





Chapter 3: Character Creation

Time to make the Heroes for your game.

This is one area where the M&M rules really come into their own. If you're lucky enough to have players who are familiar with the game, and have their own rule-books, this step doesn't take long at all.

Here are a few possibilities:

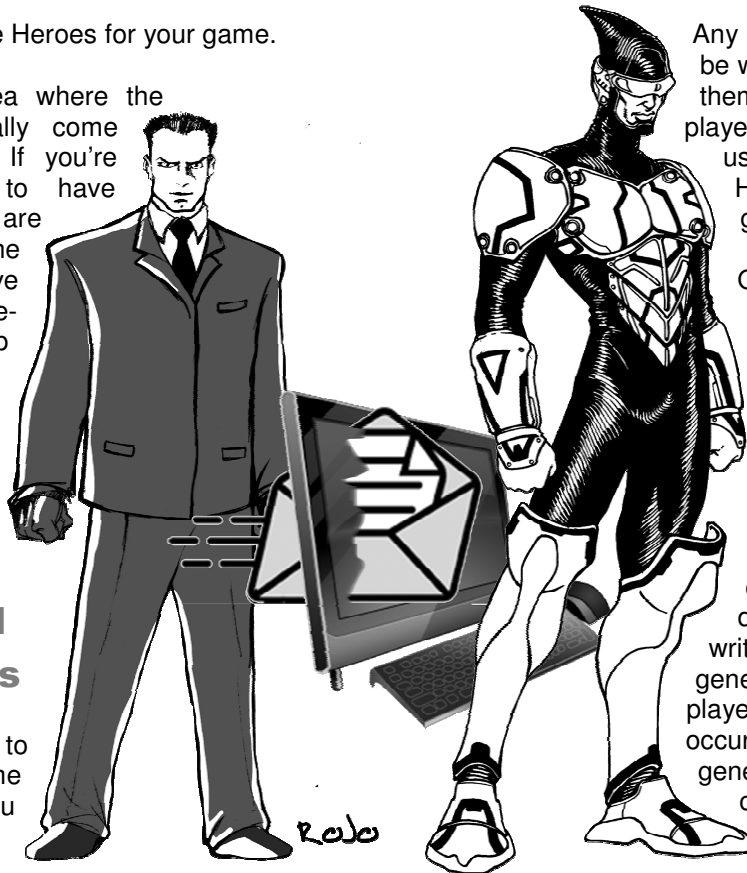
Pre-generated characters

If you DO want to get into the game quickly and you have a clear idea about how you want the story of your game to develop one option is to give the players pre-generated characters.

If you DO choose this option, try to develop a wide range of different characters who are equally interesting. Do it over a period of time. If you try to make 5 characters in a single sitting, some of them are just going to be "fillers" lacking the spark they need to be a truly original Hero. You're working with just one imagination here, your own, so take the time to use it to its fullest. Every character you make should be one that you yourself would be happy to play.

You will be tempted to develop a perfect team but if you make just exactly the right number of characters for the game, some of your players will have no choice over which pre-generated Hero they wish to play.

The best way is to create far too many Heroes and give players a choice. Ask them what sort of character they want to play and then give them the choice of the 2 or 3 closest ones from your "pile".



Any unused Heroes won't be wasted. You can keep them in case other players join the game or use them as NPC Heroes or – even bad guys.

One possible system is to create a Hero from each Archetype given in the rulebook – except for any you specifically ban.

One advantage of pre-creating the characters is that you don't have to bother writing out any character generation rules for the players. If any issues occur during the generation process you can deal with them without the players ever

having to be aware of them. You can ensure that rationalization of the characters fits perfectly with your background. You can just issue the characters to your players and start to play.

By denying players any control over their characters' development, however, you run the risk of them not feeling as attached to them.

Pre-generated characters should really only be used for players who are totally new to the rules or if you really can't wait to start playing.

Player generated Heroes

Another option is to give the players total control over creating their Heroes.

You give the players details of the character generation system and leave them to it. They tell you what Hero they have created.

The advantage of this is that it gives the players more autonomy and they feel happier with the characters they create.



If players rationalize their own powers, they feel a lot closer to their Heroes. You've also got half a dozen more imaginations to draw upon. You might have ideas for some adventures but these will mushroom as soon as you read the backgrounds created by the players for their Heroes.

One of Stuart's players – Zack – decided he wanted a character who could use an alien device to control the weather. This was outside Stuart's original idea for the campaign. With a bit of thought, though, he came up with a subplot where the device was part of a scheme the aliens had to "Xeniform" the planet Earth.

The best option is to try and emulate face-to-face character creation. The players create their own Heroes but check with you that their design and interpretation of the rules fits with the game you had in mind. Players feel happier about the characters created. The system is transparent to both sides. A broader, more interesting and longer-lasting range of characters are created.

This is the system I recommend. Players will be hooked right from the word go and you will be surprised how quickly many of them can dash off e-mails about the characters they are creating. The time and effort put in now will reward you later in the campaign.

Generation Systems

You should use the character generation system given in the M&M book, but you will probably want to adapt it to suit your particular campaign. Here are some possibilities:

1) Power level

Most Referees find PBEM games easier to supervise if the characters are less powerful than those in face-to-face games.

Power level 10 is generally seen as being a good basic level for face-to-face games. However, PBEM games work better at lower power levels. 6 or 7 is probably best – though you can go as low as 5.

Stuart sets the power level of the Incursion campaign to 7. He wants it to be "realistic" – and was considering level 5 or 6.

However, some of the effects of alien devices and viruses can be quite extreme so he decided a higher level would allow this to be simulated.

2) Limit the available Superpowers

If you are generating characters for a specific setting, you may want to specify the powers and abilities which are appropriate for that campaign setting.

If you only have minor changes you want to make you could probably get away with allowing players to create their Heroes as usual and just over-rule any incompatible design elements as they occur.

For his "Incursion" campaign, Stuart could allow the characters to make and Hero which they think fits with the background.



However, if anyone tries to take "Mystic" Superpowers, he asks the player to redesign the Hero.

Alternatively, you can make it clear up front that some powers, feat and abilities cannot be chosen. This is easier if they fit into a broad category of abilities.

Don't cut too many powers from the game. Most powers can be rationalized in most settings. Only cut a power if it definitely would NEVER fit in your game.

Reducing the number of powers too far will result in a narrower range of Heroes being generated. Feel free to add new powers if you want them for this campaign but, only do this if you are really familiar with the rules. The existing published range of Superpowers can cover most things.

Stuart wants to make Psionics and Cybernetics more common in his campaign, so he tells the players this.

He also goes through the rulebook and makes a note of which powers he thinks are particularly appropriate for the "Incursion" setting. He also bans any and all Skills, Superpowers and Feats which refer to Supernatural Magic. (He allows sleight of hand, of course.)

3. Limit Archetypes

You can use the Archetypes in the rules to give players a clear idea of what you are looking for in this game.

Apart from the outright banning of one or two archetypes (don't ban too many) you can also make it clear that some archetypes are a better "fit" for the campaign than others.

Stuart decides to completely ban the Mystic archetype. He makes it clear that he is happy to accept Psychics, Martial Artists and Gadgeteers. Gadgeteers are more suited to the campaign than Battlesuits. (Battlesuits are possible but they'd be a person wearing an adapted set of alien battle-armor rather than something created on Earth.)

Paragons and Costumed Adventurers have not been seen before but some started to emerge during the alien invasion.

Other factors

You also need to specify in the documentation you give to players details of style and preferences.

This may entail you making some slight modifications to the character creation rules.

In addition to the 105 pp characters get at Power Level 7, Stuart gives the players 5 extra points to spend entirely upon "mundane" skills. This is intended to represent the careers and skills the characters possessed before they were affected by the alien presence on Earth.

Of course some drawbacks and complications will be more appropriate than others, and this needs to be drawn to the players' attention. You might want to ban some of the existing ones and/or invent some new ones. You may find your players inventing some themselves!

Stuart introduces complications relating to the aliens. Characters can choose to hate and want to destroy them at all costs or they could be seeking to understand the aliens and make peace with them.

You also need to be clear which clichés of Superhero literature apply. Do the characters wear the brightly coloured costumes of the comics?

Or do they wear the more practical, dour, leather and Kevlar outfits often seen in films?

Or do they wear the "normal" (but somehow still stylish) clothes seen on television series?

What sort of names do they have?

Stuart indicates on the sheet of instructions that – though the characters are not intended to be traditional Superheroes, they will be issued with uniforms and given "call signs" during the campaign. The players can come up with a "Hero" name for their character.

Character Creation

Example:

Stuart is contacted by a player called Stephanie. She has some familiarity with the M&M rules and comics. He e-mails her the campaign background, Netiquette and the rules for generating characters.

He receives the following response:

"Kendo. The subject of an alien experiment to enhance and improve the human body. She, along with many others, were kidnapped, changed, and set loose.

"Many died. Some were rendered catatonic and for some the treatment could not be administered. All she knew was that the previous week was a blur of white light and near silence, of a clicking and whirring machine, and blazing lights, always.

"Waking up with others, naked in the park, and stumbling home in the early hours clothed only in an old discarded coat, she slept for a full day before discovering, when awakened, she was different. Improved. Faster. Stronger. Tougher. The ultimate warrior - able to fight longer, harder, even against more powerful foes, for she just won't stay down..."

"Spent 103 points (from 105) left a couple for profession skill (1 point or 2 depending on how good she is).

"Limited by power level 7 as to just how much damage she can do/withstand (I had to redo the character twice when I find out all that stuff).



"In the end went with regeneration - as a tireless warrior who doesn't know when to stay down, who can jump about like the actors in martial arts movies, able to withstand far more punishment than usual (protection 3) needs no sleep and able - eventually - to overcome almost any wound, as well as being able to go indefinitely without sleep to be a tireless avenger of the night.

"Street level, not sure how long she'd last against PL10 or higher, maybe a team player. More points can be used to give detective type skills. I envisaged her as being similar to 'Katana' from Batman and the Outsiders, with similar healing to Wolverine and the ability to 'charge' a sword with power (Strike, needs a sword to be able to use) so it glows and crackles, and delivers a mighty strike. This is limited, again, by PL7 though as to what damage can be done."

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+3	+3	+3	+1	+1	+1
16	16	16	13	13	13

Toughness	Fortitude	Reflex	Will
+6	+3	+3	+1

Combat (16pts)

Attack: +1 (+7 swords), Defense +7, Initiative +7, Damage +3 (unarmed) Damage +7 (sword)

Stats cost (27 pts)

Skills (13pts)

Acrobatics 8(+11), Bluff 8 (+9), Climb 4 (+7), Escape Artist 4(+7) Intimidate 4 (+5) Investigate 4(+5), Knowledge 4 (+5) (Martial arts history), Search 4 (+5), Sense Motive 4 (+5), Stealth 4 (+5), Notice 4 (+5)

Feats (13pts)

Attack Specialisation (Swords), 6 (3pts), Accurate Attack, Defensive Attack, Elusive Target, Improved Initiative +8 (2pt), Instant up, Weapon Break, Improved Block, Taunt, Power Attack, Takedown Attack (2 ranks)

Powers (34 pts)

Strike 4 (Mighty, Limited - only when using a sword), Leaping 2, Protection 3, Speed 2, Regeneration (recovery +4 (+7)) - Rec rate Bruised - 4 (30 secs) Unconscious - 4 (30 secs) Injured - 3 (1 min) Staggered - 3 (1 min).

Stuart is impressed by the speed and detail of Stephanie's response. He notes her veiled criticism of the low power level of the campaign and vows to win her over!

He is a bit disappointed that she has left 2 points unspent for "Background Skills" and hasn't used the 5 points he gave "free" for this purpose. She also hasn't specified what "Kendo" did before she was experimented upon. She hasn't even given her a name!

Swapping a couple of e-mails soon resolves this. Stephanie calls her character "Sally Scott. She indicates that her character works in a Newspaper office and has Computer and Photography Skills - specialising in computerised image manipulation.



My recommendation is:

Limit the power level of the campaign. Disallow any Skills, Feats, Superpowers, abilities, Archetypes, Drawbacks or complications which definitely won't suit your campaign. Invent new ones if appropriate.

Allow the players to create their own Heroes within the limits of the rules and the campaign guidelines. Maintain the Referee's veto on approving or modifying any and all aspects of the characters.

Chapter 4: Adventures

Now you've got your campaign all set up and you've got a few characters ready to go, you need something for them to do.

Again, designing scenarios for a PBEM game is different from planning games for face-to-face games.

The key difference, as has been mentioned before, is that combat is a lot less central to the scenario than usual. It is the narrative which leads up to the combat and the stories which lead on from it which are important.

At their most basic level, a Play-By-E-mail, Superhero Role-playing game is about TYPING. You type what the Heroes can see and the players type what they are doing. It is the contents of the text which are important and the pictures they paint in the minds of the participants.

If you want to simulate a table-top RPG more closely, there is software available which will let you show maps and the position of "figures" etc.

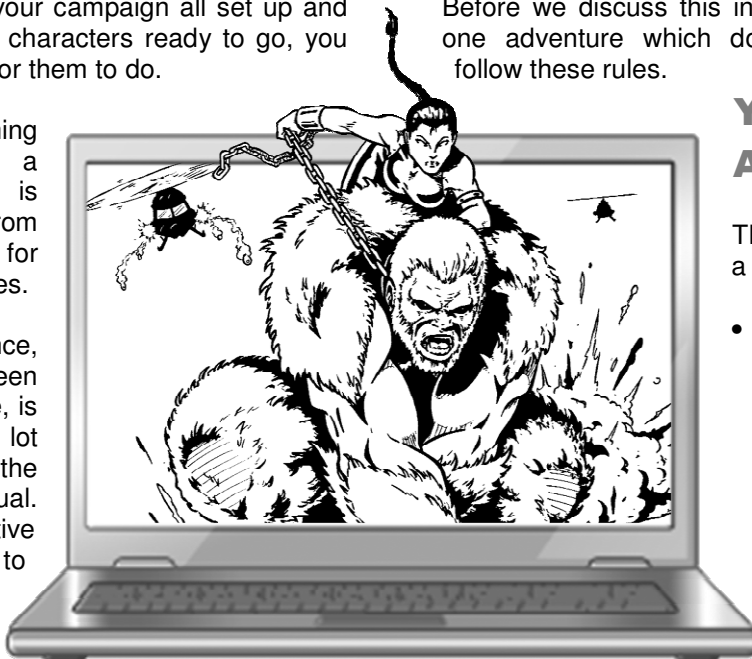
But there is loads you can do with just writing, trust me. Somehow falling back onto just reading and writing seems to fire the imagination. PBEM games can be seen as a form of communal story-telling. And in stories the most important element is the PLOT.

In a Superhero setting this means, in practical terms, that the Detective work suddenly becomes more important than the ability to deck a few thugs.

KENDO's background skills will prove extremely useful in spotting faked photographs of alien activity.

You should design adventures with this in mind.

Before we discuss this in any detail, there is one adventure which does not necessarily follow these rules.



Your First Adventure

This adventure fulfils a lot of purposes:

- It has to get the Heroes together and introduce them to each other.
- It must motivate them and give them a reason to participate in the events of the campaign.
- It needs to get things moving as quickly as possible.
- It has to "hook" the players into the campaign so that they want to keep playing.
- It has to allow you to work out any "kinks" in the systems you are using to supervise the game.
- It has to be simple to run so that you can concentrate on resolving those "kinks" (or other issues which do arise).
- It mustn't be so complicated that it puts you or the players off.
- You've got to be able to complete it even if you decide after a couple of "turns" that running a PBEM game isn't for you after all.
- It has to be short. It has to fit into the "honeymoon period". You and your players want to get to a point where you can draw breath and reflect upon how the game went so you can resolve any issues before moving on to the real meat of the campaign.



In order to be able to do all this, the key factor is to keep things simple. Most likely you and your players are new to PBEM. Even if you have some prior experience, this particular game and this particular group will be new.

You will find there's enough novelty in the new game as it is without having to make the first adventure particularly original. You could lift a plot from the world's most famous film and populate it with the most obvious stereotypes and your new group of characters will still turn it into something fresh.

Make things easy for yourself. Have a linear storyline. Use every cliché you need to. Here are a few:

1) Mentor

This is someone who is already aware of whatever the big menace is behind the campaign and calls the Heroes together to tackle it. A mentor saves you having to manipulate the players through information they have to discover playing the game. The mentor just calls them together, tells them what's going on and gives them their mission.

There has to be some reason why the Mentor cannot tackle the situation themselves. They could be ill, infirm or just too old. Maybe they cannot afford to reveal themselves or are unable to travel to or manifest themselves on this world. It could be that – despite their great knowledge – they don't actually possess any great power themselves.

Mentors make things easy at the start and during the honeymoon period. Later in the campaign, however, they can become a pain. Often the players tend to lean too heavily on them for information they should be gaining or remembering for themselves. Sometimes they come to resent the mentor – seeing them as a way the Referee uses to keep control of their characters' actions. Because of this, it is usual to remove the mentor at some point:

- They could be killed by the bad guys. This gives the Heroes a revenge motivation to carry the campaign forwards. It is particularly effective if you've painted the mentor as a highly powerful character.

"If they've taken out MAJOR THUNDERSTRIKE what chance do we stand?"

- They could easily lose communication with any mentor who is not physically present.
- The mentor could just disappear enigmatically. Often they turn up later and tell the Heroes they were just testing to see how well they coped on their own. At this point they often either disappear for good ("you have passed the test") or get nailed by one of the other options given here.
- (My favourite.) The mentor turns out to have had their own agenda all along. The Heroes come to realise the mentor does not have their best wishes - or the welfare of the world at large – at heart. The Heroes have to challenge someone who knows all their secrets.

I highly recommend you design a Mentor for the first adventure/honeymoon period of your first PBEM.



Stuart has designed Professor Brian Bart as a character who can bring the Heroes together and set them working as a team.

2) Steering

If you don't have a Mentor then you need some other way of bringing the Heroes together. This is a bit more tedious but can feel more satisfying.

Basically you have to give each character their own individual storyline leading up to the final battle of first adventure. During this period the Heroes will be get some extremely easy to follow clues which lead them to various locations where they begin to cross paths and meet up. They should finally come together in the battle at the end of the adventure and realise how effective they are as a group.

3) Linear storylines

Make the missions/errands in the first adventure very straightforward.

"I've detected powerful emissions of alien energy from a warehouse in Temple Street. It's locked and seems to be guarded by armed men. Go there and find out what's inside."

At first just getting somewhere in the game world and performing the most basic of errands will be interesting to the players. They tend to over-think at this stage and expect an ambush behind every door. You don't need to offer them much to keep them engaged.

4) Sense of dread

If you can, try to make the players feel that something bad is just around the corner.

"The warehouse is empty but, judging by the marks left on the floor, there was something big here..."

During this early phase you will probably find the players being paranoid already. It won't take many hints to have them seeing shapes in the shadows or assuming the worst from fairly basic clues.

5) Climax

The first adventure should not involve much, if any, combat for the bulk of the game. Knocking out a couple of thugs to gain entrance to a location is the most that should happen.

It's not the fight that's important but what the Heroes find inside or what the thugs say when they're questioned.

The combat should come at the end of the adventure and everything should build towards it. It shouldn't just happen out of the blue, Heroes should be expecting it and have plenty of information – not all of it accurate – about the trials they are going to face.

Decide what the final battle in the adventure is going to be and work backwards from there.

6) The Twist

The final confrontation should have an unexpected twist to it. If you've had a very linear and clichéd storyline so far this isn't hard to do. Just change the ending from the expected one to something else.

"You haven't been looking for my father. I'm not even related to Doctor Krauss. I just wanted him found so that I can acquire him for my employers. Thanks for finding him for me. Now, step aside!"

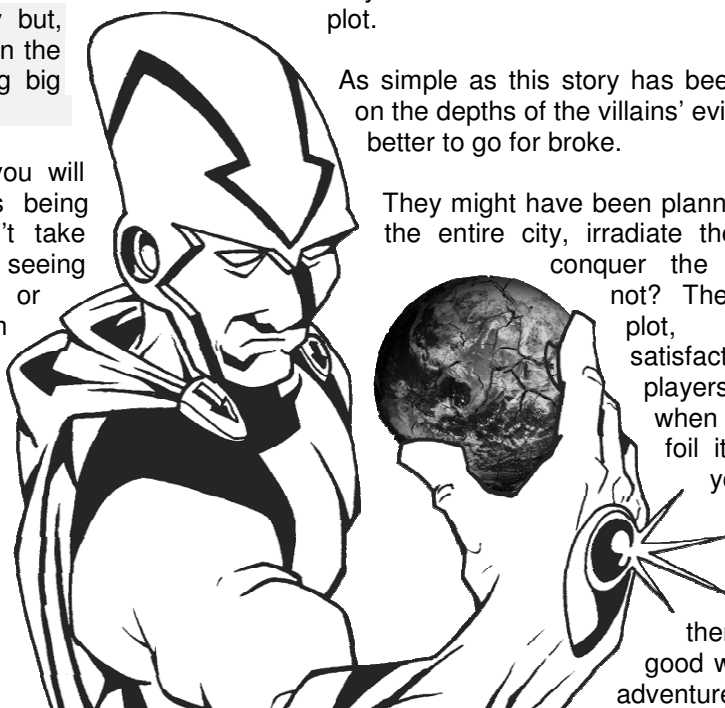
7) The Reward

M&M rewards people through gaining pp and being awarded points for their heroism. However, the adventure also needs to reward the Heroes in other ways.

When they finally defeat the bad guy at the climax of the story, they need to know that they have saved someone or foiled a heinous plot.

As simple as this story has been, don't stint on the depths of the villains' evil scheme. It's better to go for broke.

They might have been planning to poison the entire city, irradiate the country or conquer the world. Why not? The bigger the plot, the more satisfaction the players will feel when their Heroes foil it. Remember you're trying to hook the players in here, so you need them to feel good when this first adventure is resolved.





8) Hooks

You need some unresolved plotlines to suck the Heroes in to further adventures.

Just who were the bad guys working for? What happened to all that plutonium? Was that REALLY a gateway into hell or just a clever illusion covering the Sorcerer's escape?

You can add some throwaway lines as you run the game (see Chapter 5) but build in some pointers to future adventures just in case.

Example: For his Incurion campaign, Stuart has Professor Brian Bart call the Heroes together. He explains that he can detect alien energies and bio-signatures – which is how he found each of the Heroes. He believes an attack on the City is imminent but the authorities don't believe him. He needs the Heroes to find proof.

He gives them costumes, call-signs and walkie-talkies. He splits the group in two and sends them to investigate two locations where he has detected alien influence. (Stuart has "split the team" deliberately. He wants to test this facet of the game during the Honeymoon Period.)

Both the teams of Heroes are sent to locations that are empty, having just been cleared.

However, there is enough evidence to show the Heroes that there is something BIG going on.

Whilst they are investigating Brian Bart is attacked and killed. The Heroes will hear some extremely disturbing noises over the walkie-talkies before the signal goes dead. Rushing back they find their mentor slaughtered with evidence of great power being used. Putting together clues from the scene of the massacre and the two sites they've visited, they head towards a mansion on the edge of the city.

There they find, not the alien cabal they were expecting, but a human crime lord who has been accumulating alien technology. He intends to use it to spread his criminal rulership across the city and – eventually – the whole country. He is aware of the imminent alien attack upon the city but expects to be able to negotiate with them from a position of power. If he helps them conquer the world, all he wants is a country or state of his own to rule.

His alien gadgets make him a difficult opponent but the Heroes outnumber him – once they've defeated or scared off his goons. The battle should be a tough one but the Heroes should prevail.

They've lost their mentor but they now know an alien attack IS coming. If they keep working as a team, perhaps they can save the city.

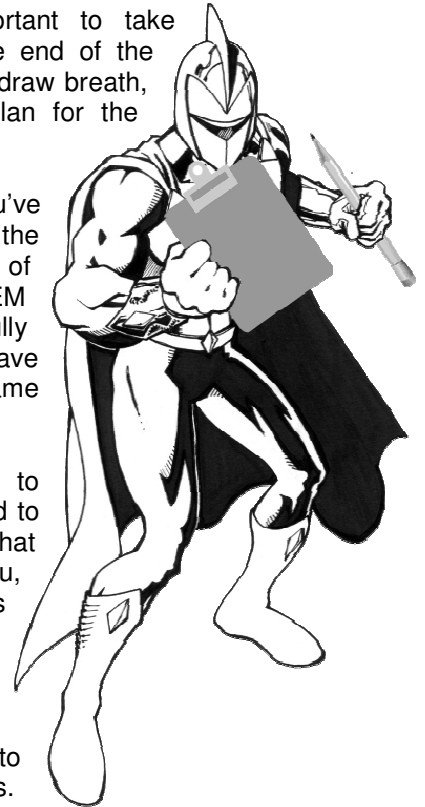
The Review

I think it's important to take some time at the end of the first adventure to draw breath, look back and plan for the future.

Hopefully you've enjoyed the experience of running a PBEM game. Hopefully your players have enjoyed the game you offered them.

If you want to continue you need to be clear about what worked for you, what the players really enjoyed and what issues – if any – arose.

You need to address the issues.



For example: If you found conducting combat difficult you may want to switch to a simpler method of resolving it. (See chapter 6.)

You need to make sure that any elements which were a success are replicated in future adventures.

If the players enjoyed interacting with a particular NPC then they should make a re-appearance. You might even want to consider building a whole adventure around them.

How you conduct this survey is up to you. You can probably glean a lot of information from the e-mails exchanged during the honeymoon period. However, some players tend to be a bit uptight about expressing their feelings.

Chapter 4: Adventures

You might find a player continuing to play out of politeness when there are things about the game that they're not 100% happy with. So it might be worth actually ASKING your players for comments and opinions.

You're not seeking praise (though you'll probably get some). On the other hand, having asked, you need to be prepared if anyone does make any critical comments.

If you've working hard at the game and making compromises in your private life to get e-mails to the players on time and then someone says they found the turn-around a bit slow, it can be a bit hard take!

Having sought the feedback, be grateful for it. Some matters you will be able to address, others might just be a case of explaining to the players issues of which they are not aware. Always send thank you e-mails and don't make "knee jerk reactions".

NOT: "If you think you can get the results out any faster YOU try running the game!"

BUT: "Thanks for your response. I'm glad you're enjoying the game and are so keen to get your results. Unfortunately I have to wait for responses from all the players before I can work out what happens next in the game. Then it takes a bit of time to combine all the e-mails into a coherent response and this takes a while. I'd rather take my time to do a good job on this"

If you've set up a public arena such as an Internet Group to handle this element of communication, you might wish to consider posting some or all of the players' feedback and your response to them where everyone can see them. It might even form the basis of a FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) section within the group.

You might also consider asking for feedback from any lurkers who you permitted to watch the game.

Ongoing adventures

You can now think about running a long-term PBEM campaign. Some things you need to bear in mind when planning adventures for this campaign are:

1) Feature the Heroes

If a players has agreed to play in a PBEM game and, after playing through the prologue, wants to continue, then the odds are they like the sound of their own typing.

Many PBEM players are frustrated authors ready to churn out a couple of hundred words at the drop of a hat. Sometimes, in face-to-face games, players can be a bit slow getting around to typing up their Heroes' backgrounds. This isn't the case in a PBEM.

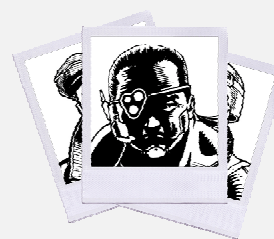
In fact, by this time you'll probably have discovered that it's worth running a game just for all the free fiction you get. Some of the Heroes' backgrounds are great fun to read.

So USE them. Pick the best ideas in them and use them as a basis for adventures in the campaign. Players are always happy to see their ideas used in the game. See if there are any cross-overs you can find between the Heroes' backgrounds and build a story about them.

If both the Heroes refer to a famous scientist in their background, it could be same scientist or scientists who have worked closely together. They can enter the campaign as NPCs.

Apart from the very obvious hook Stephanie kindly built into the background about kidnapping and experimentation, her character – Sally Scott – works in a newspaper office. There are lots of stories which could be based there. Or based around her desire to be a reporter and bring in a killer story. What if she finds out that reporters have been sent out to hunt down her team?

She has skills as a computer programmer and photographer. She is an expert at computer imagery. If someone is faking photos of alien encounters, Sally will spot the fakes. If MI6 need someone to fake some photographs, Sally is exactly the kind of person they'd seek out.



There are loads of hooks Stuart can use to build stories on.



2) The World's a Stage and Life is a Soap Opera

Even if not specifically mentioned in their background stories, develop the Heroes' private lives and work these into the game.

Relatives will come to stay. Housing developments will mean the landlord will ask a Hero to vacate his flat. A neighbour will borrow something and not return it or a workmate will develop a crush.

Try to fit in at least one Birth, Marriage and Funeral into the campaign.

Many of these can be developed just through the occasional throwaway line.

"As Sally enters work, Brian – the security guard – throws her a smile and asks her out to dinner, again!"

Adding this layer of "normality" to the wild and wacky world inhabited by the Heroes somehow grounds events and makes them seem more real. (Ha!)

3) Chapters

PBEM games take longer to play than face-to-face games. You need to keep the characters involved.

The way to do this is to break the campaign down into sections. Call them sub-adventures, episodes or chapters. Whilst you may have a complex on-going storyline, you should resolve one or more sub-plots on a regular basis.

It's all about finding the right balance between anticipation and satisfaction. The players need something to look forward to but if they have to wait too long to get it they will get bored.

Give them lots of developing plots and storylines, whether from their backgrounds or normal lives or through combating evil. Keep the number of sub-plots topped up. Every so often throw another one.



This can be explicit:

"The computer disk lists 20 scientists who have worked on Project 72."

Or a throwaway:

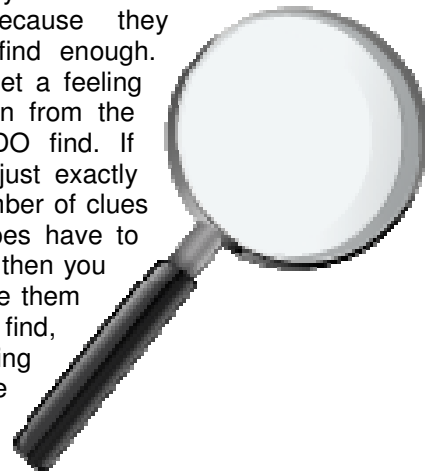
"As you enter the house, Fritzy – your cat – rushes up and rubs against your leg. She seems remarkably affectionate today."

And then, every so often, give them a mini-climax to the campaign where something dramatic happens and one (or more) sub-plots gets resolved.

4) Combat isn't important

PBEM games revolve more around Detective Work than fighting. You should put your effort into designing the plot, the clue the Heroes are going to have to follow and designing the personality and character of the NPCs they are going to talk to. There is no need to spend a lot of time working out the exact details of the bad guy. Use Archetypes. The plot's the thing!

Try to think up some whodunits (or work out how you can steal some) which the Heroes can solve. Then work out how you can offer key clues to them without actually giving them the resolution of the story. It is better to build in twice the number of clues the Heroes need to solve a crime but then make them hard to find. That way they will miss some but it's OK because they should still find enough. And they'll get a feeling of satisfaction from the ones they DO find. If you include just exactly the right number of clues but the Heroes have to find them all then you have to make them easy to find, virtually giving them to the players on a plate.



5) Combat IS important

This is a Superhero game after all. Every so often (at the end of each chapter) the Heroes need to confront a bad guy of some kind in a physical confrontation. So build one in every so often.

Chapter 4: Adventures

The Heroes don't have to win every fight.

Being defeated can lead to some interesting storylines. Apart from anything else it means you still have the bad guy and their plot around for the Heroes to foil. You don't always have to come up with something new.

My recommendation is:

Make your first adventure incredibly simple.

Use events which arise during the first adventure and details from the character's background to create further adventures for the campaign.

Keep these short, planning them as chapters in a book or episodes of a television series.

Build the storylines of the chapters about solving mysteries and allow the Heroes to do this by the end of the chapter.

Include a battle in each chapter – usually as part of the climax.





Chapter 5: Running the campaign.

So you've got the characters and some idea of your first adventure. But how do you actually *run* one of these games?

At its most basic, you type a description of what the Heroes see and hear. The players all type what their Heroes are doing or saying. You decide what happens in response to their instructions and mail out the next description to everyone.

Dead simple. IF you follow a few simple rules:

Set a timetable

Some players (bless 'em) can get a bit carried away. They will happily send you a dozen e-mails a day asking for clarification, explaining how their character's feeling, WHY they're doing what they're doing etc. etc. You end up wondering where they get the time.

Other players might send you one terse e-mail per week.

You need to make some rules about when and what goes down the wire. These rules are as much for yourself as for your players.

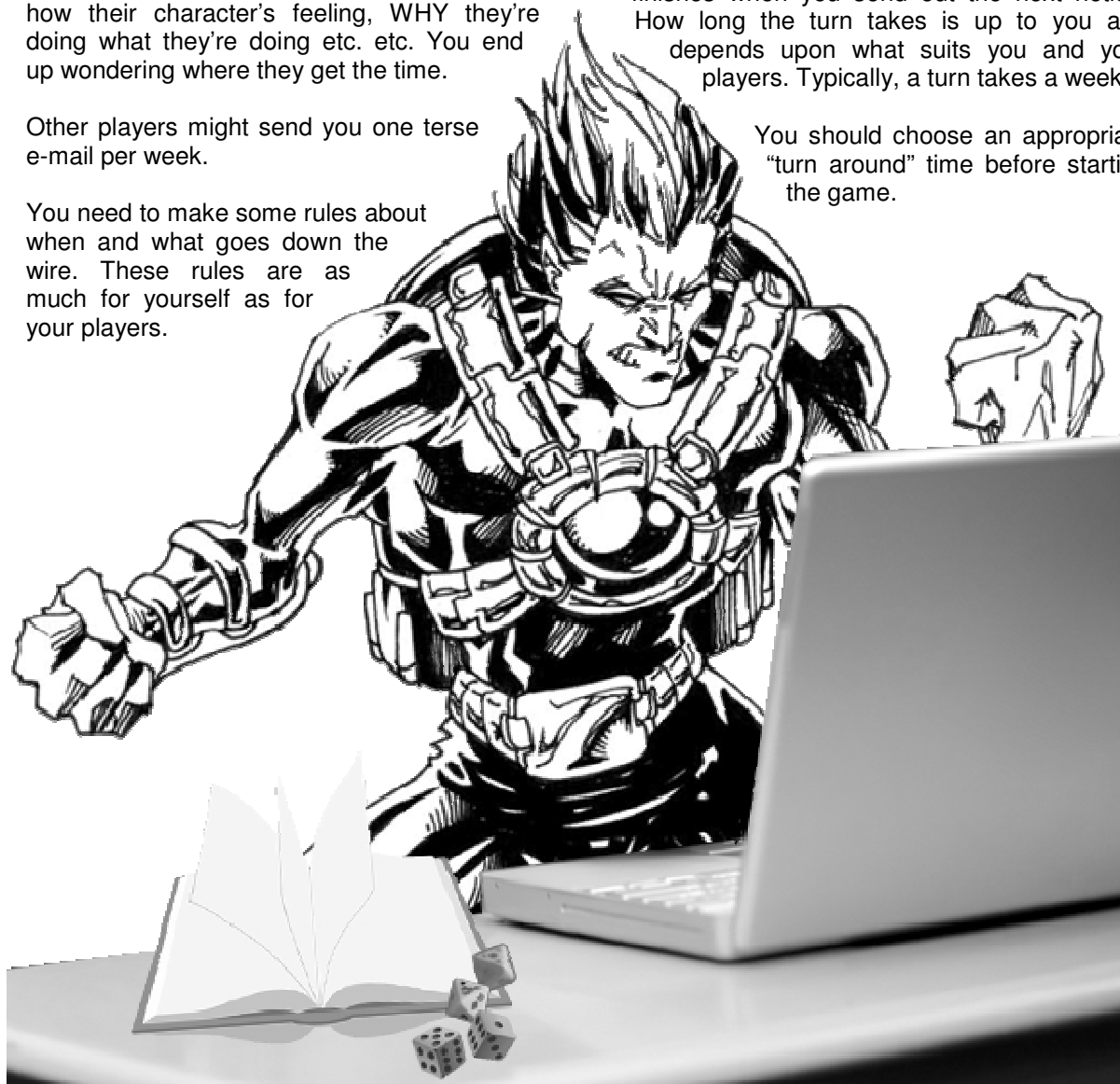
However enthusiastic a particular player might be, don't get sidetracked into their agenda. You've got enough on your plate without getting into debates about exactly what sort of noise their gadget makes.

Also, you've made a commitment to these people and it's up to you to deliver on that commitment. The first time you are late sending out an e-mail it's a step on a slippery slope.

You need to set a time-scale for everyone and everyone needs to stick to it.

Just like any game, a PBEM game is played in turns. A turn starts when you e-mail out a general notice about what is happening. It finishes when you send out the next notice. How long the turn takes is up to you and depends upon what suits you and your players. Typically, a turn takes a week.

You should choose an appropriate "turn around" time before starting the game.



Be prepared to adapt it at the end of the honeymoon period if you decide – for example – you need two weeks to get everything sorted.

The turn-around time depends entirely upon you, as Referee, and your life outside the game. How much time do you have to devote to this game each week and when do you get this time. You **MUST** build in a safety margin into the timetable which would allow you to keep posting regular updates even in your busiest times. It is better to have a slower game that keeps going than one which buzzes along but which stops whenever the Referee gets given some overtime at work.

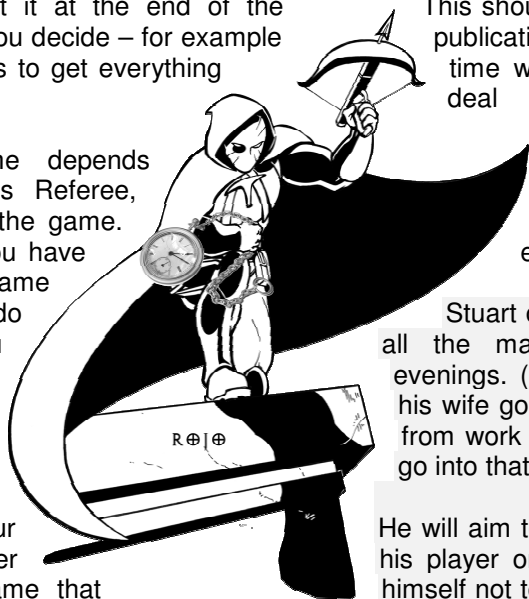
Players only have to turn in one response per week (and they don't even have to do that, see below). As long as you give them a reasonable period of time in which to give their response, they should be able to fit in with any timescale that suits you.

From now on I'll assume we're talking about a week per turn. It makes discussion easier. However, the exact timescale you pick must be one which suits you.

So the first thing to decide is when you're going to be able to sit down and work on the game. Ideally this should be a set time in the week. Even if you only have one slot in the week to work on the game that should be okay – if the slot is long enough. Only practice will tell how long you need but think in terms of a couple of hours a week at least. This is just to keep the game running. Setting it up in advance will take a bit longer.

Then work backwards from that slot. Give yourself a reasonable safety margin. So plan to e-mail out the weekly update two days after you plan to sit down and produce it. If anything happens one week to delay you, you've still got a chance to get it out on time.

Then set a time by which the players have to get their responses in to you.



This should be about halfway between the publication of the weekly update and the time when you intend to sit down and deal with things. There shouldn't normally be any reason why you need time to swap private e-mails with any players but it's best to build it in for emergencies.

Stuart decides that he is going to handle all the major campaign stuff on Friday evenings. (He has some free time because his wife goes out for a drink with her friends from work that night – but we don't need to go into that.)

He will aim to e-mail the weekly update out to his player on Sunday mornings but commits himself not to go to bed on a Sunday until it is e-mailed.

He then gives his players until Tuesday night/Wednesday morning to e-mail their responses in to him. This gives him Wednesday and Thursday to deal with any issues which might arise.

Ideally you don't need look at any of the players' responses until the deadline for their submission is passed. I know you won't be able to resist the urge but the problem is that, as soon as you read what the player has written, your mind can't help come up with ideas for what's going to happen as a result. So it often becomes a case of "first come first served". Best to read all the responses at the same time – and in a different order each week.

And – to be honest – you've got a life to lead outside the game. You can't be checking you e-mails every few hours to see if someone's responded.

This is another good reason why you should have set up a dedicated e-mail address for the players to contact you – separate from your personal one.

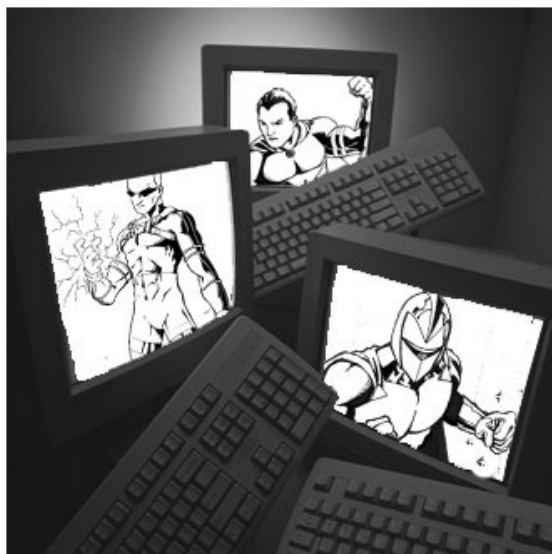
So your commitment to the game consists of three timing points during the week. There's a slot when you read all the players' responses. There's a slot a few days later (after you've had time to mull them over) when you produce the next bulletin. Finally there's a slot a couple of days after that when you e-mail it out to everyone on the mailing list.



If your PBEM game is going to work you need to stick to this timetable. “Drift” in response times is one of the reasons games come to an end.

Splitting the team

Though it's easier to keep things going when all the Heroes are in the same place at the same time, from time to time it is fun to split the team up.



In this case, the Referee would NOT post a weekly update through the public communication channel. As long as the Heroes were split, the referee should post the weekly results privately to the players. They can only see what their character sees.

To start with, try splitting the Heroes into two groups and see how that goes. If you find you are able to handle it, you can try giving each player an individual adventure in a future chapter.

Ideally, when the team comes back together again, you should post a copy of all of the “missing” weekly updates on the public area. However, you might decide to post an edited or summarised version. If you do this, you might wish to show it to the players featured before posting it.

If you care about your lurkers, you might choose to send them private updates on one of the Hero's/sub-team's adventures.

Don't send them from your private/Referee e-mail address though. Lurkers should never have access to this address.

Use the players' words

You will soon decide in the honeymoon period whether you want to put any limits on what the players' write each week. You may decide to limit the number of words or – even – send them a set format to use to respond. Sometimes some of them CAN go a bit over the top!

Hopefully you won't need to do this. A quick note asking them to keep it a bit shorter – or add more detail - is often all most players need.

Because you don't want to put limits on what they write. Very often, what they write is pure gold. It can surprise you, impress you, make you laugh. When you read the responses each week it'll remind you just why you've committed so much effort to this game.

So what you need to do is to share the players' work around. If there's something entertaining in their responses, you should just cut and paste it into the weekly update. You may need to change the tense:

From: STORMFRONT will summon up a small snowstorm and say to the thug, “It's going to get a lot colder out here unless you tell me what's going on...”

To: STORMFRONT summons up a small snowstorm and says to the thug, “It's going to get a lot colder out here unless you tell me what's going on...”

It is normal for players to phrase their instructions in the future tense and for the Referee's responses to be phrased in the present tense. Some Referee's prefer to phrase their responses in the past tense to make it feel more like a story. I find this can distance players from the action emotionally.

If you're feeling lazy, you can ask the players to use the present tense when writing their responses. This will save you time in the cutting and pasting. However, players are more likely to feel that what they say is going to happen has actually happened.

They are more likely to feel slighted or complain if the Referee rules that their intended action doesn't occur. (This is why I would NEVER ask a player to use the past tense in describing their Hero's intended actions.)

Player: STORMFRONT summoned up a small snowstorm and said to the thug, "It's going to get a lot colder out here unless you tell me what's going on..."

Referee: STORMFRONT started to summon up a small snowstorm but, before he could finish, a shot rang out.....

You may want to put some instructions about how you want player responses phrased into your "Netiquette" document (See Chapter 2.) Whichever way you decide to handle things, it can be infuriating when different players use wildly different styles and tenses, making them difficult to amalgamate.

Not all of a player's instructions will work out or can be followed. As Referee you get to decide which ones apply and which ones don't. Some players will write entire soliloquies for their characters. You need to pick and choose the bits that co-ordinate with other Heroes to make a coherent conversation. You may even need to put words into their mouths from time to time – though often you'll be able to get away with a non-committal grunt, a nod or a significant look. (They're still the player's Heroes. Try not to do too much with them yourself.)

Creating a conversation like this usually isn't as hard as it sounds. Once you've done a couple – and have a feel for the players' preferences – it becomes second nature.

Remember that you will often need to edit a player's instructions to state what is seen rather than what they do.

"Sally is going to search her database of images to see if there are any similar stories of an alien device which would disrupt a body like that."

Becomes:

"Sally starts to type into her laptop. Images burnt bodies flash up on the screen."

(She didn't specify she was going to be discreet.)

Subtle use of cut and paste can save you a lot of typing. As much as 80% of a weekly update can be gleaned from player responses.

It gives the campaign a more shared feeling without your single voice/style dominating the text produced.

Most players are dead chuffed when the words they typed are reproduced for everyone to see. It makes them feel what they are doing is worthwhile.

Keep things going no matter what

There are two areas which come under this heading. PACE and CONTINUITY.

1) Pace

PBEM games are a LOT slower than face-to-face games. Each turn takes a whole week!

You need to ensure that you keep things clipping along at a fair old rate to keep the players' interest up. Don't get drawn into side debates, extended conversations or the needless for endless clarifications. You decide what happens and move on.

In the last example, Sally Scott had just searched her computer for some information.

Stuart has a key decision to make here. Should her findings to Stephanie, Sally's player, privately or just assume that she passes it on to the group as a whole?

Stuart tries to find time on Wednesday night to send Stephanie an e-mail giving the results of her search. He wants to ask her what she is telling the group.

If Stephanie hasn't responded by Friday (or if he didn't have time to send the extra e-mail), he will just assume that she passes on all that she has found.

Stuart must be careful that Wednesday evening does not become another extended work evening. The occasional private e-mail to one or two players asking for clarification of instructions might be useful but if he doesn't have time for this that's fine. He is the Referee and can decide what happens from the players' orders without further input.



Hopefully as the game progresses past the honeymoon period players will learn to put enough into their responses to allow you to keep things going without constantly asking for more input.

If you find yourself doing this then just send one e-mail to the player concerned asking for more detailed instructions and stating that, from now on, you are going to decide what happens from their one weekly response, with no further enquiries. Then stick to your guns. As soon as you make one decision they disagree with, you'll find their responses start to contain a lot more detail.

If necessary, amend your Netiquette rules and publish the updated version.

Another way to keep the pace up is to come down firmly on the side of generosity when it comes to decisions regarding actions or abilities. You can far more generous in a PBEM game than you would face-to-face. You want to keep the pace up, so why undermine what the players are doing to keep things going?

When STORMFRONT threatens the thug with a quick freeze, instead of responding with "So what I got my thermals on..." or something like that – requiring a further threat and more e-mails - Stuart should just have him cravenly cave in. He should give up everything he knows. (But who's to say he knows a hell of a lot?)

If a player fails to respond or their response is late or incomplete, you should feel free to refer to their standing orders and/or determine appropriate actions for their characters (see below). If you've read all the players' responses and worked out what's going to happen, you shouldn't have to tear it all up and restart just because one player sends in their stuff late or decides to amend their instructions. Keeping the campaign moving forward with a reasonable workload for yourself is far more important.

Set yourself targets for where you want the action get to each turn. Don't take two weeks to resolve a scene and move forward when you can sort it all out in one. Expedience is usually preferably to thoroughness in a PBEM. Crack on, crack on.

2. Continuity

As well as keeping up a good pace, you need to make sure that the players want to keep playing, and you want to keep Refereeing the game.

So you need to keep things interesting. Part of this is down to how you plan your adventures. (See Chapter 4.) As I mentioned there, it's important not to have long-running plot-lines that are never resolved. With one turn per week it can easily seem to players that a couple of months have gone by without anything significant occurring.

If you find this happening, then introduce a plot element to get things moving. If all else fails, set off a bomb.

SET.....OFF.....A.....BOMB.



You don't need to know who set it off or why at this stage. You can always rationalise this later. Just set one off to get things moving again. It can be in the room where the Heroes are sitting, chatting their lives away or halfway across town – as long as the Heroes can see and hear its effects. If you REALLY want to put the cat amongst the pigeons set off two or more bombs throughout the city and throw your Heroes into a frenetic, chaotic situation.

By the time the Heroes have resolved this problem – even if this is just saving some people trapped in the rubble – the other plotline (the one which was flagging) should have moved on and be easier to get to the bottom of. Or – by then – you should at least have worked out a way to get things fixed more quickly.

The Heroes can come back to solve the mystery behind the explosions later (when you've come up with an explanation for yourself).

Obviously there are loads of other plot developments you can put in instead of setting off a bomb. A knock at the door, an unexpected phone call, a story on the TV news, beaming them up a passing starship etc. etc.

The point is, don't let the plotline founder. Keep it going by any means necessary.

Standing orders

A REALLY useful tool to help keep things going is to ask the players to give you some standing orders. Then, if, for some reason, they don't respond one week you can work out what their character is likely to do by looking at these. They are also useful if a player's instructions for a week do not fully cover the situation they are in.

Obviously, you wouldn't want to do this too often, but they are an essential tool for keeping the campaign moving.

You can ask your players for standing orders at the beginning of the campaign. However, the best time might be at the end of the honeymoon period. By then the players probably have a better handle on their characters and the campaign world as a whole.

(If you didn't get standing orders from a player before the campaign and find you need them *during* the honeymoon period perhaps you ought to consider whether to continue with that player in your game.)

There are a number of ways of handling this.

You can just ask players at the beginning to describe their Heroes' attitudes and how they are likely to respond under pressure.

They will then use their own methods to outline what is important to their characters and how they go about their business.

This method puts no limits on the creativity of the players but can result in you getting a wide range of different documents in different formats. Some of these will be more useful than others.

Alternatively you could give your players an outline to work within. This could be a series of unfinished sentences for completion by the player...

"If { KENDO } were to find an injured and apparently unarmed alien he/she would....."

Alternatively you could ask the players to give "ratings" scores to their characters in key areas. These can be general, such as Patience, Compassion, Determination, Aggression etc. or specific to the campaign...

Hatred of Aliens, Suspicion of authorities.

If the top number of the rating is the same as a given size of die, you can roll under the relevant rating using that die. This is extremely useful if you want everyone to know that you are using a random element to help determine what happens and are not just making up things up arbitrarily.

Eg. Stuart decides to use Ratings out 6 for his campaign. Stephanie decides that Sally Scott has a Hatred of Aliens score of 2. If she encounters aliens and Stephanie has not sent in orders to cover the situation, Stuart will roll a 6 sided die. Sally will only initiate an attack against the aliens if he rolls under her rating - that is if he rolls a 1.

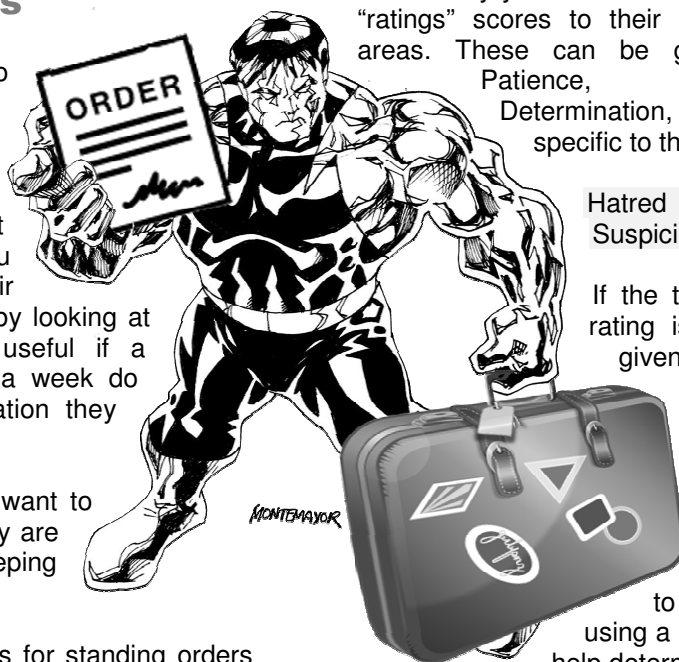
She has a Patience score of 5. If she is involved in a stake-out which is dragging on, she will get bored and undertake some positive action on a roll of 5 or 6.

Personally, I find that written standing orders and my own common sense are normally sufficient on the rare occasion that I have to determine the actions of player characters. If you're expecting to need to refer to them on a regular basis – often enough to need the alternative outcomes given by a ratings system – perhaps you need to consider finding some more committed players.

Three things to bear in mind:

1) Weekly responses take precedence

Standing orders are for emergencies only. They are not intended for regular use. It is what the player states in their regular e-mails which is the important thing.





If a player specifies that he is losing his temper and getting really stuck in to a group of thugs that is what happens – even if the player has specified that the Hero is a pacifist.

If there is a mismatch between standing orders and any given weekly response don't be tempted to



use the standing orders to over-rule the character's actions. The player decides what their character does on a day to day basis and if they decide to go against what they stated in their standing orders that is fine.

(Unless you want to run a game where you take in everyone's standing orders and then just use them to decide what the character's do throughout the campaign. You could then just e-mail the characters actions and events to the players every week without having to ask them what they think their Heroes would do. YOU might enjoy such a game but your players wouldn't)

If the players specify something in their standing orders and then choose to ignore it in play, you should amend their standing orders.

Standing amidst the fallen, battered and bloodied thugs, the Hero from the above example would presumably feel the need to re-assess his pacifist attitude.

2) Character Design takes Precedence

Of course, nothing a player puts into their standing orders should conflict with any part of their character design. A player wouldn't specify "flying away if the going gets tough" if their Hero can't fly. In the same way, nothing they specify in their standing orders should conflict with any Drawbacks, Complications or Allegiance they have.

You can – and should - deal with any such conflicts when the orders are written.

If a situation ever arises where a character's standing orders don't cover a given event, you should use any appropriate parts of the character design – their Allegiance, in particular – to help you decide what they are doing.

3) Update standing orders

However a player thinks, at the start of the campaign, they will play their character, events will change this. Heroes evolve and change. Attitudes are often reformed in the crucible of life's challenges.

It would be a bit silly if, halfway through the campaign, a long-time player misses weekly response and you slavishly use out-of-date standing orders to decide the Hero acts in a way which is no longer "in character".

By this stage, I like to think that I know the Heroes well enough to decide what they might do without reference to any formal orders. As a Referee I'd probably just have the Hero act in a way I'd see as consistent with their previous actions.

However, if you don't want to be that high-handed you might ask the players to revise their standing orders on a regular basis. This could be done at the end of each "chapter", for example. Alternatively, you can revise the standing orders in light of the characters actions in the campaign and then e-mail them to the players from time to time to check they approve.

One really good trick is to make a permanent record of any great quotes the Hero makes and include them in the standing orders.

"I let an alien live once. Then, it killed a friend of mine. I didn't give it a second chance."

"As long as I'm breathing, I'm fighting."

Recalcitrant players

Sometimes, despite all the efforts you put into a campaign, you get a player who just doesn't play ball. Either they regularly fail to get their responses in on time, or they are incomplete, or they use ideas, phrases or language which you find inappropriate.

You find yourself wondering why they said they wanted to play the game.

The first thing to do if you encounter this situation is to take a look in the mirror. If you were a player in your game, would you feel like getting your responses in on time and taking a full and active part?

Chapter 5: Running the Campaign

Are you sure that you, as Referee, are offering the player the best experience you can? The answer to this is almost certainly YES. However, if you identify any slight niggle you think might be best corrected – for example making the campaign more pacey, or making sure their character isn't being sidelined – then fix this and see if it improves things before going onto any of the suggestions below.

If you're sure you're holding up your end of the deal and the player is still not responding then there's no point in carrying on as things are. This game is supposed to be enjoyable for everyone and that includes you.

Make sure you keep your worries between yourself and the player concerned. If you've been doing your job right, the other players shouldn't be aware of any problems with this particular participant.

Under no circumstances share your thoughts with the other players. No rumours, gossiping or bitching behind his back!

The best way to handle things is to be honest and up front with the player. Send them a private e-mail saying you're a bit worried. Explain the situation as it seems to you and ask them if they have any concerns. Try not to be confrontational.

Four things can happen:

1) They don't respond. This would seem to confirm your worries. This player needs to leave the game.

2) The player responds and confirms that they aren't enjoying the game. In this case you can negotiate how they want to withdraw from it.

3) The player responds and gives you clear feedback as to what is causing the problem. Whether it is due to their situation or something about the way you are running things, you can negotiate a way to keep the player in the game or agree a suitable exit strategy.

4) The player responds in shock – totally unaware that there was any issue. Having drawn it to their attention, the issue normally fixes itself.

If, for any reason, you decide that the player shouldn't continue in the game, you need to decide how to accomplish this.

Ideally, you should try to negotiate for the player to continue running the character until the end of the current "chapter" and you can try to write an appropriate ending for them. If the player agrees you can even give them an "Heroic Death". If you don't tell the other players about your scheme, this can come as a real surprise to them and become a really memorable event.

Alternatively, the player may wish to keep their character alive in the hopes of one day returning to the game. In this case it is up to you to craft an appropriate exit for them.

If the player is totally non-responsive or wants to leave the game immediately then you should run the character according to their standing orders (see above) until you have a chance to remove them from the game without disrupting the current storyline. In this case you should NOT aim to "kill off" the character.

In any event, you should always offer the player the opportunity to continue monitoring the campaign as a "lurker". Even if they haven't e-mailed you in weeks, still send them the invite and keep them on the mailing list.

At the earliest opportunity you should ask a person on your reserve list if they want to create a character to enter the campaign at the beginning of the next chapter. If this fails you can always ask a lurker if they want to join in. If you can't find a reserve or lurker who wants to join in the game....well that tells you something. Perhaps there IS something about the way you are running things which needs addressing. (See chapter 8.)

My recommendation is:

Use a weekly turn-around for your game. Set a strict timetable for yourself and your players and stick to it.

Amalgamate the players' responses to create the weekly report.

Don't slacken the pace and don't stop. Use whatever means you need to keep the game flowing.

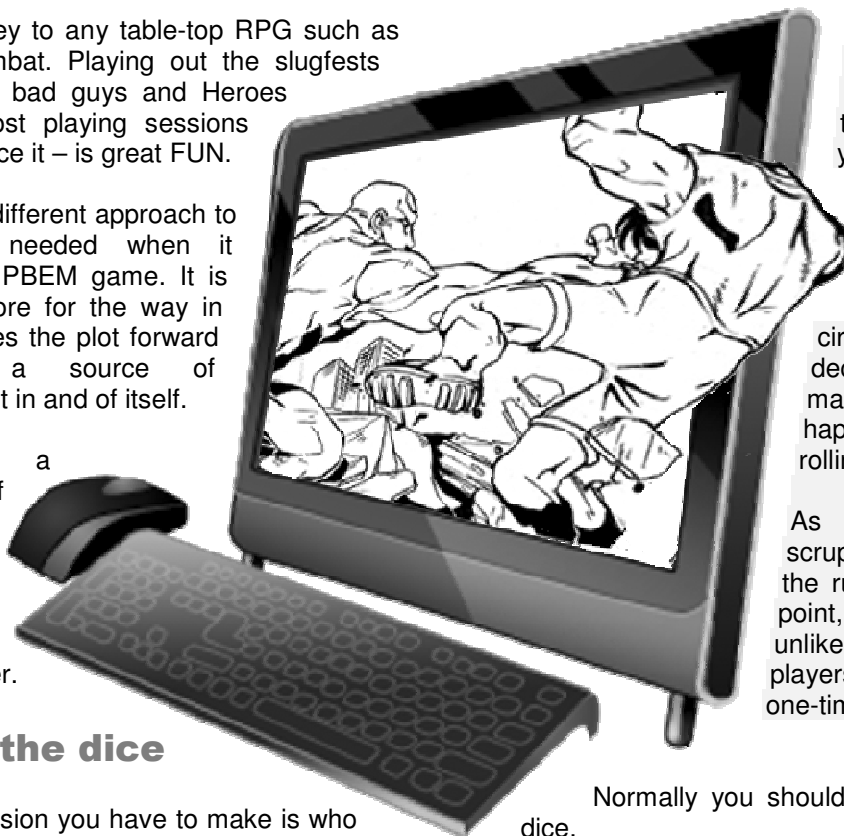


Chapter 6: Combat

Absolutely key to any table-top RPG such as M&M is combat. Playing out the slugfests between the bad guys and Heroes occupies most playing sessions and – let’s face it – is great FUN.

However, a different approach to combat is needed when it comes to a PBEM game. It is important more for the way in which it drives the plot forward than as a source of entertainment in and of itself.

There are a number of ways of achieving this which are discussed in this chapter.



It’s Sunday afternoon. Stuart hasn’t produced the weekly report yet and he only has an hour free to get it typed up and posted out. In these extreme circumstances he decides to just make up what happens instead of rolling the dice.

As he has always scrupulously stuck to the rules up until this point, it is highly unlikely that his players will notice this one-time lapse.

Rolling the dice

The first decision you have to make is who gets to roll the dice.

Do you let the players roll the dice when running their characters? Can you really trust all of them to always tell the exact truth about what they roll? Even the most honest person can be tempted to “shade” the odd die roll if there’s no-one around.

It’s generally best if the Referee rolls all the dice. Of course, this means that your players have to trust you. However, if this isn’t already the case then perhaps they’d be better off playing with another Referee who they DO trust. You’ve probably got a long reserve list by this time anyway.

Of course, if you’ve got the players’ trust, there’s no reason why you actually need to roll dice, is there? You could just make up all the die-rolls. Just decide what you want to have happen in the game and just decide that that is what happens. This is what lots of Referees do - sometimes even when they are playing face-to-face. They make their die-rolls behind a screen and just announce the results.

You can this if you want. I wouldn’t recommend it, except in emergencies.

Normally you should actually roll the dice.

When I say “roll the dice”, personally I wouldn’t. Some people enjoy having a map set up in one of their rooms at home with the figures on it and enjoy moving them around. (In this case you could post photos of the set-up in the place of maps.) It’s a bit like a postal chess player having the board set up in their den – a situation we’ve all seen on film many times. However, I, myself, find sitting alone and rolling dice a bit sad. So I don’t do it.

On the same computer you use to type up the weekly results and e-mail them out you’ve almost certainly got a spreadsheet program. It’s five minutes work to use the RANDOM function of the program to set up a sheet which generates multiple rolls of a d20 at the push of a button (usually F5).

Another alternative you may wish to consider is the use of “on-line dice-rollers”. These are web-sites programmed to simulate rolling dice. Often they are dedicated to games other than M&M but most generate the d20 die rolls you need for this game.

You could use these to generate your rolls whilst at the computer if you're unable to use the spreadsheet option.

Sometimes the sites have an e-mail option which will e-mail the results of any rolls directly to specified e-mail addresses – in this case the Referee and the Player. If you can find one of these sites, it solves the issue of trust. The player uses the web-site to generate die rolls and these are e-mailed directly to the Referee who knows there has been no fiddling. In this case you could use these sites to allow the players to “roll” their own attributes and powers. Using these sites during play might slow things down a bit but - if you find one you like – there is no reason you shouldn't use it.

One way to speed things up is to use the die roller to roll in advance. Either at beginning of combat or the beginning of each round, the Referee asks each player to generate multiple die rolls. More than should be needed by their Hero's actions. The Referee then uses these rolls in turn whenever the player would roll a die.

This is faster but some unscrupulous players might use advance knowledge of die-rolls to affect their announced actions.

To avoid this, start to use the die rolls at a random position, for example, from the 6th roll onwards. (This is one reason for generating extra rolls.) Alternatively, you could just use them in reverse order.

When I'm typing and rolling at the same time, I find using one of these systems means I don't have to turn away from my machine. It's faster, easier and – if anyone were to pop in – it doesn't look at all odd (well...except for all those little figures on the map on the table).

A turn is a round

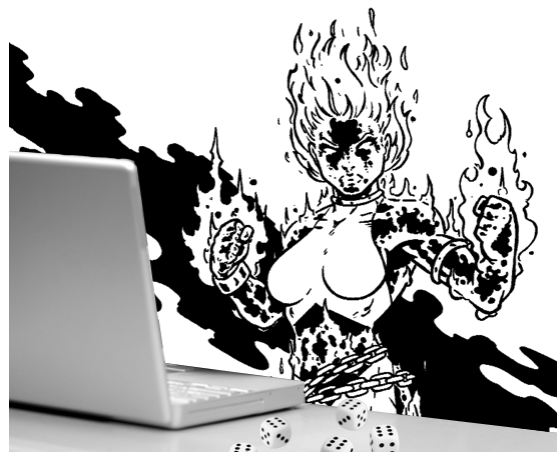
In this option, one turn of the PBEM game represents one round of combat. Usually, the Referee posts a map every week showing the location and relative positions of all participants. Often they publish the results of the initiative roll. All the players specify what they wish their characters to do. The Referee then determines to the outcome of the Heroes' actions and posts a new map along with a description of what happens.

Super-keen Referees might even want to try swapping private e-mails with players during

the turn to give them more control over their Hero's actions during the round. This takes a LOT of commitment, however.

This is probably the closest you're going to come, using e-mail, to simulating face-to-face play.

You'll be swapping multiple e-mails every day, though, and I doubt you'll be able to complete a round of combat in one week.



However you roll the dice, this method of handling combat is extremely labour intensive and extremely slow.

This is why I don't recommend using this method of controlling combat when running a PBEM game.

A combat is a turn

In this method, the players describe their actions and intentions in detail at the beginning of the combat. The Referee then plays out and determines the outcome of the whole combat. Afterwards, they write a detailed description of the entire battle and post it on-line.

This means that from giving their orders, the players only have to wait a week to find out what happens. Much faster. It keeps the pace going in the campaign and allows you to move the story on.

Of course, some players might feel that this gives them less control over the minutiae of their Heroes actions in the midst of battle.

You have to decide if the benefits outweigh this drawback.

You may or may not feel the need to move figures about on a map.



I've always found I can visualise the situation in my head for the short time it takes me to work out the results. (You need to make some kind of note where everyone is if you are disturbed halfway through, however.)

Another option is to use a computer graphics program to keep track of characters' positions. and then drag and drop them around the screen.

A turn is 5 rounds

This is basically the same as trying to complete the combat in a single turn but the Referee stops every so often – usually at 5 combat round intervals – to ask the players for updates. In this system, combat usually takes a couple of weeks to complete.

Even if you are trying to resolve an entire combat in one week/turn, there may be times when you have to suspend it. This is when a major event occurs which players were unaware of or could not predict at the beginning of the combat. If a third party suddenly makes an appearance, if one of the (non-flying) Heroes is blasted from the side of the building, if a bomb suddenly goes off - you should probably stop to ask the players how they respond to it.

Short cuts

Even though you may use some form of die-rolling to determine most of the important actions throughout the combat you may feel – as I do – that it is OK to just use short cuts to speed up combat resolution. Here are a few to consider:

1) Ignore initiative

Instead of rolling initiative each round, have all the characters act strictly in order of their initiative scores. Alternatively, the order can be determined by a single initiative roll for each character at the beginning of the combat.

Personally I wouldn't use this short-cut unless I was particularly pressed for time. The fact that characters are acting in a particular order shows up noticeably in any descriptions you might give of the combat.

2) Take "10"

Normally you are not allowed to "Take 10" for combat rolls.

However, it is possible to work out the results of a combat very quickly if you simply assume that every die roll made during the combat is a 10.

You can decide to take any number as the standard roll. Try 15 and see what happens.

In fact, if you need a faster combat, you can choose to take a **high** number for Attack Rolls and **lower** numbers for Saving Throws.

If you adopt a system like this, you can run through an entire combat very quickly. The thing that would make the combat unpredictable is the initiative rolls – so this system shouldn't be combined with the one above.

The main drawback of this system is that it doesn't allow for Critical Hits and Critical Misses.

3) Modifiers

If you want to keep the die-rolls, another way to speed up combat and resolve it more quickly, is to determine a modifier - +5, for example – and add that to every Attack Roll. If you want to be really brutal, you can apply it as a negative modifier to Saving Throws. That is, all Attack Rolls are at +5 (or whatever number you choose) and all Saving Throws are at -5.

4) Generalising

You might decide to keep the Attack Rolls and Saving Throws – whether "straight" or modified. However, for speed, I have been known to "guesstimate" the results of these rolls without calculating them all out precisely. If a roll looks like should succeed you don't need to do the exact calculations every time. If you make a wrong call from time to time, it shouldn't make too much difference to the outcome of the combat and – even if it does – it won't be noticeable in the write-up of the combat.

Note, this is not the same as "fiddling" die-rolls. If you guesstimate a result, you are honestly trying to come out with the correct outcome, not changing one you don't like into one that you do.

5) Upgrade damage

For a really quick combat just upgrade all the damage to the next level. No-one just gets bruises – everyone is either stunned, staggered or knocked out by the attack.

Overall

- Don't get caught up with making loads of die-rolls to resolve unnecessary detail. Guestimate results if you need.
- Speed up combat by upgrading Attack Rolls or levels of Damage.
- Speed up combat by downgrading Saving Throws.
- Don't use these short-cuts if you feel it is unfairly affecting the outcome of the combat.
- Don't, under any circumstances, let the players find out what you are doing.

Keeps notes about what happens during the fight. You will know when you come to write your report on the combat if the systems you chose to expedite matters "feel" right. If anything doesn't seem to fit, try a different short-cut next time.

Face-to-face

If you can manage it, it's extremely enjoyable to actually meet up to actually play out the combat sections of a PBEM game face-to-face.

But if you can meet face-to-face like this, why play a PBEM game at all?

Remember that to run a tabletop game effectively you need to meet up regularly – typically every week. If you run the game as PBEM, you'll only need to meet to handle combats once every couple of months or so. This might be possible for some people.

Even if you intend to use another method for handling combats, it doesn't hurt to say "I don't suppose everyone's free at the weekend?" in your e-mails. Once in a while you might find a time when everyone is.

Some people find playing-by-e-mail for campaigning but meeting face-to-face for combat to be the ideal way to play M&M.

Wonders of the Web

It is the 21st century and there are other options offered through the wonders of technology.

It is possible to set up conference-type communications through internet chat and the like. You can run a combat using a systems like this. (I've never actually tried it myself but it should work – if everyone arranges to be on-line at the same time).

Taking it a step further, there are examples of dedicated software (eg. Battlegrounds™) which are designed to allow you to run Role-playing games across the Internet. Again, I've never used these myself but they may be worth looking into.

However, since these require everyone to be on-line at the same time, even if you decide to use one of these methods for combat, I'd still recommend using e-mail for the bulk of the campaign.

If you use a "group" or message/bulletin board to post your weekly updates, another option is to use that forum to handle combats. Instead of players having to e-mail you privately, you can allow them post openly in the group for the duration of the combat. This might allow you to use the turn-for-round system outlined above within a reasonable timeframe without everyone having to be on-line at the same time. If everyone agree to post their actions to the group once per day during combat then it should be possible to complete most battles in about a week. This would take a huge chunk of the Referee's time, however.

My recommendation is:

If the opportunity exists for the occasional face-to-face meeting to resolve combat, then take it.

Otherwise, describe the situation to the players and ask them for their instructions and intentions for the entire combat.

You, as Referee, should then play this out in its entirety - using a spreadsheet in place of rolling dice and shortcutting the rules where possible - in a single week/turn – only stopping if a major event occurs.

You should try to post the results of combat in a single update.



Chapter 7: Character development and the Campaign

In a PBEM M&M game, the Campaign game and character development become more important. There are also some options offered by the Internet which can be used to add some extra spice to the game.

Points Awards – Public or Private?

The M&M character reward and development systems slot perfectly into PBEM play.

The issue you have to decide is whether the exact points each player/character is awarded or has should be private between yourself and the individual players or whether they should be published for everyone to see.

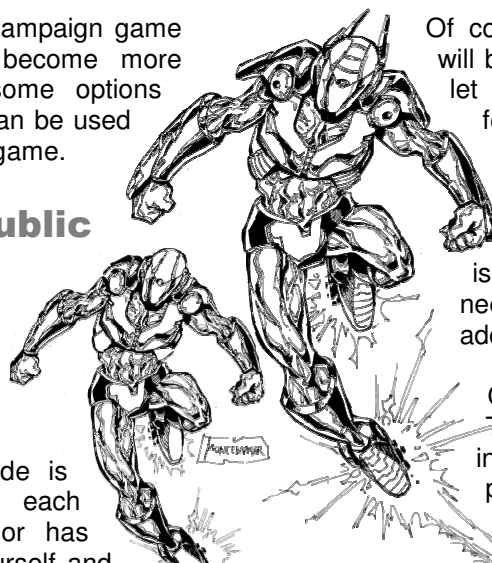
There are pros and cons for each of these. There is absolutely no logical reason why any of a Heroes' Points need to be made public. Other players should be able to easily estimate which character has the highest number and know why.

Personally, however, I favour publication. It adds a further nuance to the game – another thing for the players (and lurkers) to read and enjoy. On occasion I even welcome debate. Though I am quite good at assessing my opinion of a Hero's actions and rating them accordingly, there are still times when I vacillate over whether give bonus points or not. If a character has been particularly Heroic, I have been known to seek the opinion of other players about exactly how much reward they deserve.

Feedback is always fun – if you have a thick enough skin. Be prepared for people – sometimes a LOT of people – to disagree with you.

Commentaries

It is possible to take the concept of “feedback” a little further and invite commentaries upon the campaign. That is, you allow players AND lurkers to post comments on events.



Of course, hopefully the players will be e-mailing you regularly to let you know how they are feeling. If they're enjoying it, it's only polite to tell you that. (Keeps you motivated, keeps their fun going.) If they have any issues or queries, then they need to tell you so you can address them.

Commentaries are different. They are postings which are intended to be seen by other participants.

“Love the weather-based puns – STORMFRONT – keep them coming”

OK, so there are some potential issues here.

Firstly, not all feedback is useful and/or positive. Sometimes, even if it's meant well it can be received negatively.

“What's with all the weather puns, STORMFRONT?”

Secondly, if we don't want players discussing plot issues directly, do we want lurkers doing it?

“That's twice now the Referee's said your cat is happy to see you. I'm getting suspicious.....”

There are two ways to deal with these. You can choose to accept feedback only through the private e-mail and then filter the responses. Publish only those which help the game forward. This method is a bit like a comicbook “letters column”. (You can actually call it that, if you like.) The trouble is, it's all more work for you as Referee. If you can find someone to edit the letters column for you, that's great, but you still need to read the feedback and approve it for publication.

The other one is through tightening up your Netiquette rules. Invite feedback but be clear about what is and what isn't allowed. Anyone who is unsure can e-mail you directly.

Anyone who flouts the rules gets a warning and – if it's repeated – is out of the game. Even if just a lurker they don't get posted any more updates.

If you adopt this second, more adult, approach it dovetails well into a situation where you're using a group, message board or forum to post the results. As well as your weekly updates, you could find fanmail, debates.....

“Should they make peace with the aliens or just wipe 'em all out?”

.....suggestions or, even, artwork depicting important events in the campaign.

“Stuart hasn't actually described the aliens in any great detail. This is what I thought they might look like....”

If this works, it can be tremendous fun and add immeasurably to the campaign. Whether you go for it or not depends upon how much of a control freak you actually are.

Life style

Whilst the rules give some guide to the character's lifestyle, PBEM games give you the opportunity to define their lifestyle in more detail. You and your players should try to find time to flesh out exactly how the Heroes' alter egos live.

What sort of flat/house do they live in? Which area? A flat in a posh area of town can be twice the price of a terraced house in a rougher suburb. A poorer character could actually seem to have a nicer place to live if they've been given public housing and the, nominally richer, character is a home owner.

It is rare, in a face-to-face game, for Heroes to change their financial position unless it becomes a major plot development. (I mean, we've all played the game where we've had the Heroes thrown onto skid row for a while, haven't we?) In a PBEM game, it can become a fairly regular thing. Don't be afraid to give a Hero a pay rise or put up their rent.

Play these backgrounds. If a character needs a piece of kit which they don't own, you might to make them role-play (by which I mean – specify in their weekly orders) locating the item (at the best price?) and then raising the money to buy it.



Like everything else, regular publishing of character background details can be interesting. Only do this if the players are in agreement though. Sometimes a character who is filthy rich, or living as a tramp, in their private lives likes to keep this secret.

Character Development

I've found that many gaming groups are cautious in their use of the character development rules. They worry that, if their characters develop too much, they might change radically and no longer be the Heroes the players want to play.

This is a reasonable concern. When your character changes from “leaping tall buildings” to actually flying - and from being resistant to bullets to being totally invulnerable – it can become hard to find reasonable opponents – and plotlines – for them. This kind of “character inflation” is what happened to some Golden Age Superheroes in the comics. The backlash from this meant that developments in the later Silver Age heroes were much, much slower. Most silver age Superheroes as basically the same characters today as they were when they were originally created back in the 1960's.

Because of this, Referees can be cautious in their award of pp.

Because the PBEM game is so involving in and of itself, some Referees totally ignore the issue of character development and issue few – if any – pp. The plot's the thing. The story is what matters. If we are planning our campaign like a television series then most characters are the same at the end of the series as when they started out, surely.

If players do want some development to take place in their characters, it is normal to try to keep the developments small so as not to change the feel and nature of the campaign.

However - in a PBEM game - there is nothing to stop you pushing the boat out. You could go the opposite route and give faster developments or developments with greater increments of power. As Referee you have greater control over combat in a PBEM than you do on the table-top.



Whilst a player gaining a large upgrade to their energy attack might make a huge difference in face-to-face play, in a PBEM you can downplay it.

Nominally, PBEM games take longer to play out than face-to-face games. It can take several months to play out a single chapter of the plot. So even if you do give players big upgrades at end of each chapter, they're not going to happen overnight.

If you do decide to use a faster method of handling character development, you should take care that you apply it in a balanced and fair manner. Typically, each Hero should get a noticeable improvement at the end of each chapter.

Play the systems exactly as they are written in the rules but – because the PBEM game is slower – be prepared to give out more pp. You can try to use the Honeymoon Period to determine what an appropriate reward rate is. This should be enough to allow sensible players to gain an upgrade for their Heroes at the end of the chapter with a few spare towards the next development. Personally, I'd veer towards generosity but, if you're in any doubt, give them more limited rewards at the end of the Honeymoon Period and see how this affects the characters. You can then choose whether to give more or fewer pp per chapter for the main part of the campaign.

Some Referees give rewards out more regularly – possibly giving a pp every month or – even - with every turn of the game.

Of course, you can always do a mixed economy, 1 pp every couple of months and with a bonus at the end of the chapter, for example.

Giving out pp during play can raise issues about how and when characters are supposed to use them. Can they “spend” a pp whilst in the middle of an adventure? Giving them out at the end of the chapter give you more chance to build in some “dead” time for the characters to use their points (and spend some time in their secret identities). By doing this, you can actually make reference to the character's development stages during the game.

In a PBEM game, the character's “ordinary” persona can have a much bigger footprint within the game.

Their activities outside scheduled adventures can be referred to more explicitly. The character development can be built into this part of the game. Things can actually happen when Heroes are on patrol.

TACHYON wants to build a radar system to allow him to teleport into “blind” spaces safely. Having written down his method for doing this, he leaves the Referee to work out the details. The Referee can let the player know whenever TACHYON has time to work on his device. He can let him know when each of the phases – Design, prototype etc. - are complete. If he needs to, TACHYON could take his device out untested or, even, in the prototype phase. (He better be extremely lucky, though, or be prepared for his device to malfunction at a critical time.)



It might be useful to set targets for Power Level of the Campaign. You might aim to increase it the campaign by 1 power level for every 2 chapters you play – for example.

My recommendation is:

Publish all characters' Point awards.

Invite open feedback from all concerned – including lurkers – but be clear on the Netiquette surrounding this.

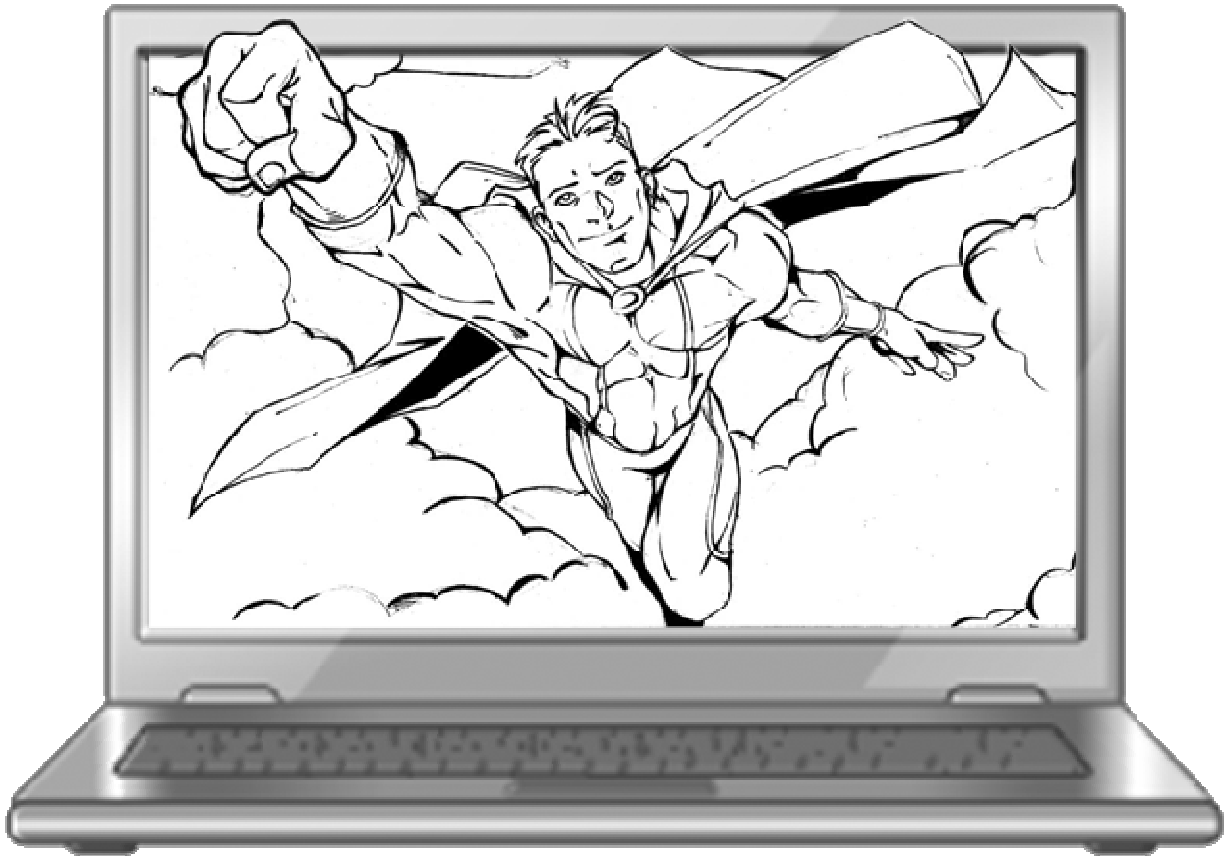
Use the systems given in the rulebook to detail character development as an integral part of playing the game.

Give characters regular but small increments of increase in power.

Set Power Level targets for your campaign and aim towards achieving these.



Chapter 8: All Good things



Experience has told us one extremely sad thing about running a role-playing game, such as M&M, as a PBEM. They start with immense enthusiasm on the part of all concerned and prove to be thoroughly enjoyable. But, somehow, most of them seem to just peter out sooner or later.

My experience is that this is after a couple of “chapters” but before the Referee has a chance to resolve any of their major plot-lines.

Why this happens I don't know. I suspect it is because of the intensity of the experience. Until you've played in – or refereed – a PBEM game you've no idea how enjoyable it is. But, as they say, a candle that burns twice as bright burns half as long. I think it's hard to sustain the enthusiasm.

As Referee, you'll probably begin to see the signs when things are slipping. Anything from reliable players sending in slow or incomplete orders to your wife moaning you're spending too long on the computer. Be aware. This time WILL come. Don't miss or misread the signs. There is no point in flogging a dead horse.

Plodding on with a game past its sell-by can be unseemly.

There are a number of things you can do to keep a campaign on its feet when it begins to flag. There are also some things you should bear in mind to end the game with some dignity should this become necessary.

Keeping things going

Things are beginning to slow down. There are some signs that the game has become a bit lack lustre but it still has some legs in it. You can revitalise it by:

1) Radical setting change

This is a sudden and massive change in the location or time of the campaign. The players can be beamed up to a passing starship and have an adventure in space. They could travel back or forwards in time. The players could play ancestors or descendants of the original characters. Many television series have begun to use flashbacks or flash forwards.



Your players might like the new setting and want to stay there or they might see it as a holiday and want to return – invigorated – to the original setting, so build in a way out. Flash forwards, for example, are often warnings given before the characters are sent back to change the dystopian future they have seen.

Stuart sets an adventure DURING the alien invasion featuring the characters BEFORE they got their superpowers. They are taken hostage aboard the alien mothership and discover that they are the ones who were responsible for causing its self-destruction. Stuart introduces a shadowy group that wipes the characters' memories of this event, however, substituting a different story for the general populace.

He prefaces the adventure with the Heroes finding an alien artefact which envelops them in a blinding white light. He finishes it by telling the players that the light from the device has awoken their Heroes dormant memories.

The Heroes now have to find out who wiped their memories and why. And how was it that Professor Bart brought exactly this group back together again?

2) Change the Referee

If you're finding things heavy going, tell your players. If they want to keep going, then ask if one of them wants to take over the reins. If they do you can e-mail them all your notes (they might be surprised how few you've actually got) and the password to the private e-mail account.



Then you have to decide what you want to do. At the very least you will want to stay on as a lurker and see what happens to your world. However, you could join the game as a player. This would mean the new Referee would need to change some of the "secret" background information but they'll probably do that anyway.

However, it is a BIG thing to give up something you've created into the hands of another. What if they run your world into the ground?

It might be best to suggest to the new Referee that they set up their own campaign. Tell them how to get their hands on a copy of this book and leave them to it.

3) Change the players

If you've got loads of energy left but your players are flagging, draw the campaign to a close (see below). Then restart it with a totally new playing group.

If none of the new players were players or lurkers in the previous game, you have the option to "reboot" the whole game and start from the beginning. If you've been using an Internet group or bulletin board to post results you'll need to delete or, preferably, archive all the posts pertaining to the original game so that the new players never see them.

Rebooting the game has advantages. You've already got everything designed. You've already played through the material once so you've got a chance to correct any mistakes you felt you made first time through. Any lurkers or players from the original game who choose to lurk in this one will have a great time seeing how the new guys tackle the old stories.

If you have a player from the old game who wants to keep playing but you desperately want to reboot the game, try negotiating with them. You could offer them the job of managing (not playing) a major NPC.

"Say! How about you play the editor of the game's newspaper?"

Give it a try, you never know. He might say yes!

If you've got some old players playing and/or promoted some lurkers to player status, you can continue with the storyline from where it was left off but with new characters. I'd suggest making all the players – even the ones "in situ" – create new characters. If someone REALLY wants to continue to play an existing character then you should negotiate a power downgrade with them. Working out how the characters LOSE pp can be an interesting challenge in and of itself.

They could be crippled or have lost the alien artefact (or pet) which gave them their powers.

They should start with the same equivalent power level as the new characters. However, knowledge of the campaign so far counts as an ability so they should be made to pay 5 pp for this.

One great option is to have the existing players be the mentors of the new players. They're forming the team to face the threats.

(A really devious Referee could negotiate with another one of the players who has dropped out. They could ask them to come back for one chapter of the new game.....as a bad guy.)

Of course another option is to keep the existing players at the current level and introduce new players at that level with the same number of pp. Again you may decide to give them a bonus of 5 points to "off-set" the existing characters greater experience within the campaign world.

Personally I wouldn't start new characters off at this higher level for two reasons. I mean, where have these powerful guys been hiding up until now? Also, starting at a lower level allows the players and their Heroes to "grow into" the game world which is more satisfying for all concerned.

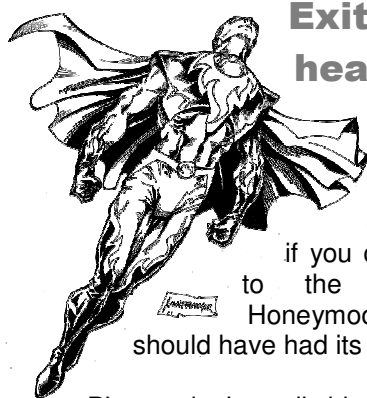
4) Set off a bomb

(See chapter 5)

5) Gone but not forgotten

Retire the campaign but keep everything. Tell the players you'll e-mail them all in a Year (or two) and ask if they want to play in one more adventure.

You might find "parking" the campaign like this from time-to-time is the most effective way of keeping it going long term.



Exiting with head held high

You've had a good run. (Even if you only just made it to the end of the Honeymoon period it should have had its moments.)

Please don't spoil things by outstaying your welcome.

Try to recognise when it's over and go with dignity.

This is how you handle your exit strategy:

1) Decide that you're going to end the campaign.

This is the big one. You've given blood, sweat and tears to this game. You'll find it hard to give it up.

Make the decision and stick to it.

2) Don't just stop.

Too many campaigns just stop when everyone gives up. All the e-mails begin to dry up and suddenly the game disappears with a whimper rather than a bang. Having decided to stop the campaign you should feel relief. This should give you enough energy to see out the final chapter.

3) Tell/Don't tell your players

This is a hard one and I can't advise you here, other than to tell you that you should think about it and make a decision one way or the other. Giving the Heroes one last great adventure and then telling the players by surprise at the end that it's all over is the dramatic thing to do. It might upset a couple of people but it's memorable.

Giving your players a warning that this is their last adventure might re-invigorate a couple of the more lethargic ones. It'd give time for a replacement Referee or game to be found if desired (see above). It's probably fairer on the players. However, you might lose one or two. They think - if the game's over - why bother playing out the last couple of turns.

Please think carefully about it. You should know what the right decision is for your group.

4) Resolve plot-lines

Plan one last grand adventure which will tie up any and all hanging plot threads - however many you have. You don't have to finish them off in the way you originally intended, as long as they are dealt with in some way. There should be no unresolved issues at the end of the campaign.

Yes, even the sub-plot about the happy cat needs to be explained and put to bed. If you don't have time to conclude your original story idea about her bearing the soul of a long-dead sorceress, just make her give birth to a litter of kittens.



However, don't feel the need to unburden yourself and reveal all the secret information behind the campaign or throw in all the plot threads you were INTENDING to use. Just tie up all the bits and bobs the players are aware of. Keep all your unused stuff for future games or in case you ever decide to resurrect this campaign down the line somewhere.

5) Go out with a bang

Make the last adventure memorable. Tying up all the loose ends should give you lots to work with. Odds are you'll have so many returning enemies gunning for the Heroes that you'll have to set them at each other's throats just to keep them busy. Make the threat level high. Put the world in peril. It doesn't matter if the Heroes die, it's the last game and you can always fiddle things to make sure they save the day, no matter what happens to them.

Actually, I wouldn't recommend killing them all off if you can avoid it – especially if you are keeping the end of the campaign a secret from your players. However, an heroic death (or two) might be in order.

6) Epilogue/eulogy/awards

You started the campaign with a detailed background sent to all the players. Finish it with an epilogue which ties up the storyline. Include a heart-felt eulogy – reminding everyone what each of the players and their characters has contributed to the campaign. Some people (not my preference) give awards based upon significant events in the campaign. Most memorable quote, most selflessly heroic action....

Most interesting use of an alien device

etc.

7) Don't wobble

Ironically, often players who had become a bit jaded with the campaign get re-enthused by this heroic final chapter. They love it.

You will find yourself besieged by requests to change your mind and keep on running the campaign. Don't do it. If you've done it right, your swansong has been a truly memorable and enjoyable experience. You won't be able to top it. Restarting the game will just lead to disappointment and you'll find it fading away with a whimper again – probably even faster than before.

If players want to keep playing suggest one of them gets this book and runs their own game – which you will be happy to play in. At most suggest that you might consider contacting them all in a year (or two) to see if they're interested in bringing back this game or in you starting a new one.

But make it clear – this game is over – for now.

My recommendation is:

Go into running PBEM games knowing that they have a limited lifespan.

Stay alert for signs that interest is waning. If you can't fix things, don't flog a dead horse.

Go out with a bang – a big adventure which ties up all loose plots and sub-plots.

Finish with an Epilogue and Eulogy.

Accept the gratitude of your players and my gratitude for reading what little I have to offer on this subject. I hope it's been useful.



Do you love M&M?

But are finding it hard to keep things going?

Your players can't meet up every week

Someone's moved away

Real life, family and jobs intrude

You never know when you'll be free to play

Fear Not!

Keep playing through the Internet.

**This book tells you all
you need to know to run
your games using e-mail.**

Let your players be:



Cyberspace Heroes!

