

Science!

an RPG by Anthony Deming

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I just want to thank those who've had a hand in the production of this game.

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Intro.

I was inspired to this based on all the mad scientists I've seen in fiction. The idea is to create a game with the PCs in that Archetype. The idea is to play a mad scientist. A person who believes fully in the power of SCIENCE! to solve his (or her) problems. A person who has a grand design in mind, a driving goal, a life's ambition which he will sacrifice everything else for.

For examples of this character, look to Girl Genius, Dr. Horrible, and really any other character that might be classified as a Mad Scientist. Though it should be noted that I do not see the characters created for this game as villains, that doesn't mean they can't be.

Scientists.

To create your Scientist, follow these steps in whatever order works best for you:

1. Decide on a Life's Ambition.
2. Name your Scientist.
3. Determine your Scientists Theme
4. Divide 5 dice between the available Branches.

The Scientist consists of a handful of skills referred to as Branches. The basic Branches are: Mechanical, Biological, and Photonological (High Energy physics). In order to change the feel/setting of the game you can use alternate Branches such as: Clockwork, Steamwork, Electronics. For a more medieval feel, consider using branches like Alchemy, and Golems. The skills available will depend on the setting you want your game to take place in, and the type of technology you want to have available.

The Scientist also has a Life's Ambition, which is their goal in life. This is what your Scientist is using science to achieve, and the combination of these is what the game will be about. The Scientist gains bonus dice whenever pursuing this goal, or when abandoning another (more urgent) task to pursue this goal.

The last major part of the character is his theme. This is the type of Construct he generally builds. Building a Construct that goes along with his theme, is also worth bonus dice.

Example:

Fabien decides he wants a Scientist with a focus on biology. So he focuses his points there. He also decides that his Scientist has set his goal

on conquering world hunger. And that his name is Dr. Rotwang. His Scientist sheet would look something like this...

Name: Dr. Rotwang

Life's Ambition: To conquer world hunger.

Theme: Plants

Branches

Biological: 3

Mechanical: 1

Photonological: 1

Further Example Scientist:

Name: Dr. Mendelbrat

Life's Ambition: To take over Cleveland

Theme: automata

Branches

Biological: 1

Mechanical: 2

Photonological: 2

Advancement:

It should be noted that advancement isn't really a consideration here. This system is only meant for use in mini-campaigns, which is to say until the Life's Ambition of each character has been pursued. However, since it may well be that someone will set their Life's Ambition to something as flavorless as "to know everything", here's the rules for advancement and learning of new Branches: each construct you build earns you 1

advancement mark. This mark can be placed towards any Branch you want, but only towards one. Every 10 advancement marks placed towards a Branche allows you to raise that Branches score by 1, to a maximum of 4.

Example:

Dr Rotwang builds a construct which uses both the Biological and Mechanical branches, a fungus powered mecha of some description. He hasn't yet made any other constructs, so he has no advancement marks on either Branch. He doesn't plan to make much use of the Mechanical Branch with his constructs so he marks this construct down on his sheet for the Biological branch. So now he has one advancement mark towards the Biological Branch. If he builds 9 more constructs that use the Biological Branch, and puts the advancement marks towards this branch, then he can raise it to 4. At that point he will have maxed out that Branch and will not be able to raise it further.

System.

When there is question as to whether an action succeeded or failed, you roll D6s equal to any applicable Branches plus whatever bonus dice the player wishes to use from his bonus die pool (see the next chapter). Every die 4 or above is a success and is a detail defined by the person who rolled it. Every die 3 or below is a failure, and is a detail defined by the GM.

It should also be noted that this is a narrative resolution mechanic. Simply put: dice don't determine success or failure of the action, they just determine who gets to say whether it succeeded or failed, and how it did so. This means that you could easily roll all ones, and still defeat your enemy. It also means that you could roll all sixes and still fail to complete your objective. The only exception is when building a construct. Constructs are always built, the only thing that the roll there determines is who defines it's traits.

Once you've rolled for the conflict, you don't get to roll again for the same conflict. If a player only has one die for the conflict, then they should look to the bonus dice table.

There is always something you can do from there (when in doubt, laugh maniacally). If you still can't come up with something, then either delay the conflict, or revisit the conflict after you've had a chance to work up some bonus dice.

There are two kinds of rolls in the game: unopposed rolls, and opposed rolls. An unopposed roll is a roll of the dice that only one player is involved in, this is used when building a construct, or in any instance that a player is doing something that doesn't bring them into conflict with other players. An opposed roll is a roll of the dice that two or more players are involved in, this is used during combat, or any

other instance that brings players into conflict.

Details about the conflict are defined starting with the highest die showing going first. In the event of a tie, the person with more dice will state the detail they wish to add first.

Example:

Player A rolls 6, 6, 4, 3, 3.

Player B rolls 5, 5, 4.

Order of details goes Player A, Player A, Player B, Player B, Player A, Player B, GM, GM.

Bonus Dice.

Monologuing	1-2 per quality/length
Maniacal laughter	1
Unnecessarily long names	2
Plebotinum	1
Sticking to Theme	1
Kibitzing	1
Minions	1

Each player has a Bonus Die pool. Every time they get a bonus die, they add it to the pool. They can then use as many dice as they want from that pool, at any time to provide extra dice on a roll, but each die they use is then removed from the pool.

Every game has a reward mechanism. It is through this mechanism that we encourage a specific type of game play. Find that mechanism and you've found how the designers want their game played. Well here, game play is supposed to be about playing a Mad Scientist, so any behavior that you can look at and say "well, he is a mad scientist after all" should get bonus dice. But for those who need a list, this is my suggestion of behaviors and numbers of dice for them. These dice go into the bonus dice pool, and can be used at any time the player chooses. These are particularly useful for instances where building a construct is a bit awkward.

If two players want to convince the same NPC of something, then they can use their bonus dice. Now, in such an instance someone who built a construct for exactly this purpose is likely to

have an advantage over someone who didn't, but they will still both be able to roll.

A table precedes, but some of it requires explanation. Monologuing is a difficult task. It will not generally come easy to those not used to it. To that end it is recommended that players have a few prepared monologues for when they need them, which is really fitting since those who monologue generally are just venting what they've been wanting to say for a while anyway. A monologue is between one and three sentences.

Also, kibitzing. Basically, if you can't think of what to use for a detail, you can offer the die up to another player. If you accept what they say, they get to add the die to their pool.

Plebotinum is a scientific sounding explanation for how technology works, and is good for a bonus die.

Unnecessarily long names are common with Scientific types, calling it your Molecular Deconstruction and Reconstruction device, rather than a transporter, would be a great example.

And yes, you can easily combine long names with plebotinum. And yes, you would get the dice for both.

Constructs .

This is an unopposed roll, and you can do one of two things. Either you can spend the successes on mooks who can be taken down with one hit, but have the advantage of numbers, or you can spend the successes on one construct, defining multiple details of the constructs capability.

All dice used in the roll to create the construct become part of the die pool used when the construct acts, regardless of whether they succeed at the creation roll or not.

Successes are details added to the construct by the player. They define instances when the Constructs die pool can be used in a conflict (*if you need a large Construct in order to bash down the door, you'd better have given it the trait of "big"*).

Failures are details the GM can add to the construct. These define the ways the construct will go wrong during later rolls.

Mooks have as many traits as there are dice applied to them. The main difference is that a mook doesn't regenerate damage. While a Construct can fail without affecting more than the current conflict, each failure from a group of mooks die pool is one of them being destroyed.

Players creating mooks in order to avoid negative consequences of creating constructs should be wary of this. Think of a mook as being a Construct with the automatic negative trait of "Destructible".

Example:

Dr. Mendelbrat decides to build a table to follow him around. It is a simple mechanical table (+1 for sticking to Theme) that carries his tools and moves to where it's sensors detect noise.

He uses his Mechanical Branch of 2, and says it also has a lighting mechanism that uses the same

energy source, to garner another 2 dice for a total of 5 dice. This means that the table will have a die pool of 5 dice.

He rolls: 5 5 3 1 1.

Dr. Mendelbrat: I'll give it the trait of "Mobile" so that it can move around on it's own.

Dr. Mendelbrat: I'll add "follow sound" so that it will follow my movements.

GM: Okay, but it has the trait of "easily distracted" so it will follow any noise it hears,

GM: It also has "wobbly" so round objects set on it have a tendency to fall off.

GM: And it has "slight hum" so whenever it moves it makes a noise which can be used to track it.

You'll note that neither one mentioned the light. That could be because of one of two reasons. Either, they decided that it doesn't have any mechanical effect (which means the table can't be called on to provide light in a darkened room) or because the player decided that he didn't successfully build the light, and it doesn't work. Either way he can't use the construct to provide light.

But lets say that a player finds himself in need of a construct right now, and can't wait to take the time to prepare it. The player can take a roll to say that he just happens to have such a device on his person already. This is the classic "omni-device" from the comics. Like Superman's powers, and Batman's utility belt, the Scientists are always assumed to have the foresight to have built what they needed before they needed it... just out of scientific curiosity. To handle this type of situation, just consider whether it would be reasonable that they could have carried the item with them this far (on a plane ride to the Alps, a

23' automaton would be fairly difficult to hide, but if he was traveling by sea, he may well have been hiding the construct below deck).

Note: Only one construct may be used per roll. If there is a conflict in which multiple constructs are to be used, then you will roll for each one separately. In this case mooks count as "one" construct. In such an instance, you will start with the construct that would act first (to be determined by the nature of the conflict) and details established with each roll only concerning the constructs involved in that roll.

Fundamental Laws.

1. You can't get more out than you put in.
2. You can't create life/sapience.

Fundamental Laws are things that simply can't be done by normal means. These are things that truly require a spark of genius to work around, exactly the kind of spark our Scientists have. Further, Fundamental Laws always apply to all Branches of science. This means that all Branches are bound by them, as well as that a Scientist can break them with any Branch

Each Fundamental Law broken adds a trait to the construct, and raises the target number by 1 (for example either from 4 to 5, or from 5 to 6).

As such, when building a construct, it is necessary to determine what laws (if any) the construct breaks, before rolling any dice.

Example:

If Dr. Mendelbrat wants to build a standard construct (a solar powered death ray for instance) then it will have the standard target number of 4.

However if he decides that it will use less energy than it puts out (a logical addition to such a device, unless you want six months between blasts), now he's broken the first Fundamental Law, the target number becomes 5, and it gains the trait "quick charging".

But lets say he decides that the death ray must be able to choose it's targets, this requires sapience (read: judgment + awareness of the environment) and thus breaks the Second Fundamental Law, raising his target number by one yet again, for a final target number of 6, and an additional trait of "self targeting".

And yes, you can use the breaking of Fundamental Laws to add free traits to your construct without using up any successes you roll.

In the preceding example, if Dr. Mendelbrat were to have rolled 6 6 6 5, then his death ray would have 5 positive traits. It would have "Quick charging", "self targeting" + 3 more traits he can add for the successes he rolled.

Minions.

A minion is a helper, an Igor. They have both a positive and negative aspect. You can either use the minion as a bonus die during the roll, or you can have the minion do work preparing for it, and lower the target number by 1 for each minion so disposed.

Whenever a minion is called on to help, his help must be defined in terms that include his positive trait.

Whenever a minion spends time preparing, the preparation must be defined in terms that include the negative trait.

In either case the player must provide a brief (1 minute or less) narrative of how the minion was of assistance, and how it's trait played into that.

Example:

If Dr. Rotwang has Snelvile (his minion, traits: clumsy, botonist) infiltrate the Russian Embassy to get a sample of the clippings from the Russian Ambassadors prize winning petunias for his construct, then his target number will drop by 1. However, he must describe the encounter, and how his clumsiness nearly caused calamity. And yes, this calamity can be brought back into play by the other players later in the game.

If, on the other hand, he has Snelvile help him in the lab, handing him materials as needed, then he gets an extra die, but must explain how Snelviles skill with botany was indispensable.

Your character starts with 1 minion. Any time you accomplish one large step towards your life's ambition, instead of gaining bonus dice the next time you would, you can instead convert each bonus die you would have earned to minions at 1 minion

per die sacrificed in this fashion.

Example:

Before play begins, Dr. Rotwang has divided his Life's Ambition into x steps.

- 1. Develop a fungal tower that is edible.*
- 2. Come up with a Spore Delivery Mechanism that will allow for a proper distribution of the towers*
- 3. Deliver the spores to an appropriately starved area.*

After a few sessions he finally accomplishes his first major step, he has built an edible fungal tower, without those pesky side effects. Having done so he decides to reveal his findings to the world. He begins a broadcast: "You laughed at me when I said that I could end world hunger. You said I would never develop a fungus that would yield proper nutrition. Now, stand in awe of my latest creation, Agaricus Edibelis!" gaining 2 bonus dice for monologuing.

He decides that rather than keeping the dice, he will instead take two new minions, Stan (spy for nemesis, handy with a laser) and Dimitri (too sure of himself, mushroom farmer).

Extended Example.

Dr. Rotwang decides to construct a large fungal tower (+1 for sticking to his theme) to serve as home, energy, and food for it's residents.

He uses his 3 dice for his Branch of Biological, and adds in "microwaves" that focus the photoluminescence of the fungal tower to create intense heat, garnering an additional die for his mastery of the photonological sciences.

He declares that with his latest creation he will soon put an end to world hunger, no more will they laugh at him for toying with his fungus. Mocking him for being such a "fungi". He will make them all rue the day they dared to mock the great Dr. Rotwang (+2 for monologuing).

And now he makes his roll with his 7 dice.

6 6 4 3 2 2 1

Now we consider the Fundamental Laws. He is trying to create something that produces more than it uses (enough to feed itself, and it's inhabitants) so it breaks the first fundamental law, raising the target number to 5, so only two successes.

He decides to have his minion do some prep work, like breaking into the Botanical Gardens to acquire, "just the right specimens", allowing him to drop the target number back to 4, so he now has 3 successes.

This gives him 3 traits he can define about the construct. And gives the GM 4 traits to define. Now we assign traits:

Dr. Rotwang: Okay, then it has the trait "fast growth" so that it goes from seed to full grown in a matter of minutes,

Dr. Rotwang: and it also has the trait "edible" so that it can be eaten,

Dr. Rotwang: and "Illuminate" so that it can light

up a room when needed.

GM: Okay, it also has the trait "mobile", as it slithers from one place to another (rather than staying put)

GM: and "knows daddy" so it always can pick you out of a crowd.

GM: We'll also give it "small", it doesn't get very big when grown

GM:: As well as "Squirmy", it doesn't stay put for long

At this point our GM has the little construct start squirming it's way over to daddy using it's traits of "mobile" and "knows daddy"

Let's say the Dr. Rotwang sends his little Fungal Tower against the steam-powered table that Dr. Mendelbrat built earlier.

Dr. Rotwang will roll 7 dice for his construct, and Dr. Mendelbrat will roll 5 for the table.

Dr. Rotwang rolls: 5 4 3 2 2 1 1

Dr. Mendelbrat rolls: 6 4 3 1 1

Dr. Mendelbrat: The table steps on the Fungal Tower.

Dr. Rotwang: The tower grows around the table.

Dr. Rotwang: The tower takes control of the tables gear mechanisms.

Dr. Mendelbrat: The added weight throws off the tables balance, causing it to fall on it's side.

Dr. Rotwang: But the tower cushions the tables fall.

Dr. Rotwang: However the table spills the latest research project, which was set on top of it, all over the floor.

GM: The project is an attempt at the universal solvent.

GM: It dissolves the floor beneath the constructs.

GM: And they fall two stories before slamming into the ceiling of Dr Mendelbrat's car.

GM: The new device has a split personality, sometimes being loyal to Dr. Mendelbrat, sometimes to Dr. Rotwang.

At this point, the GM is out of ideas, so he offers the dice up for kibitzing.

Dr. Rotwang: Perhaps it hears a cat moving outside, and follows that noise while looking for us

Dr. Mendelbrat: Or perhaps it makes a noise giving us a warning that it is coming.

GM: Yes, you both hear it's humming and scramble to get out of it's way, but just in time it hears a cat in the alley and goes after the cat instead.

The GM then hands a die to both Dr Rotwang and to Dr. Mendelbrat and we move to the next scene.

Gameplay.

When the game begins the GM will look to each Scientists Life's Ambition. Discuss with the each player what major steps are necessary to accomplish their Life's Ambition. Once you've done so, then consider the ambitions in relation to one another, how do they compliment each other, and how do they conflict with one another. It is not recommended to have multiple Scientists with the same Life's Ambition.

Sessions for this game will be mostly player led. As GM you don't need to be thinking about what heist to plan for the players, or what their opposition will be doing, you just need to think about how to bring their Life's Ambitions into conflict, and try to have each player get into such a conflict during each session.

As a player your job is a bit different. You should be focused on how to achieve your Scientists Ambition in the most entertaining way possible. Just try to come up with a few steps towards your Ambition, and how to get to that over the course of the session. And of course, not everything your Scientist does has to be directly tied to the Ambition. Remember, by creating a life and responsibilities outside of his Ambition for your Scientist, you provide yourself with opportunities to have that life, those responsibilities, come into conflict with his Ambition, and thus opportunities for bonus dice.

Now while designing this game, it occurred to me at numerous points that the GM isn't really needed for this game. The main roles the GM plays here are: Defining the failed details, scene framing, ensuring the Scientists come into conflict, and assigning bonus dice. But each of these can be handled by the group, so here is how I'd modify the game to play it GMless.

Failed dice: Simply go around the table (counter

clockwise) having each player other than those involved in the roll define the failed dice.

Scene framing: Each player frames the scene his character takes the lead in.

Conflict: At the start of each session the players simply take 5 minutes to talk about where their characters are, and how their goals might come into conflict this session.

Bonus dice: Other players can assign bonus dice, just make sure no player gets bonus dice on the same thing from more than one other player.

Character Sheet:

Player: _____

Scientist: _____

Theme: _____

Driving Goal: _____

Branches.

....Mechanical: _____

....Biological: _____

Photonological: _____

Bonus Dice Pool: _____

Constructs. (Die Pool, Name, Traits)

Minions. (Name, Positive trait, negative trait)

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