WEIRD SCIENCE

A little guide to making it big in the mad sciences

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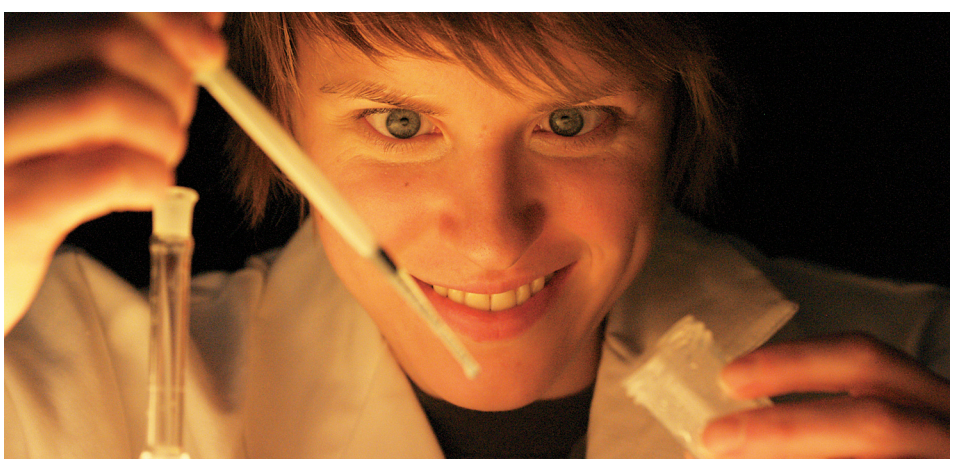
There are some professions that the world has always needed and will always need; our society has always required doctors and construction workers, chefs and farmers. And since the first prehistoric man threatened an enemy tribe with a 60-foot Doom Spear unless his demands were met, we've had mad scientists—those men and women who're not afraid to push the envelope, to cross the line of ethics, science and fashion sense.

However, being a good mad scientist is more than simply throwing on an oversized lab coat and attempting to hold the world hostage from an underground lair. Real mad science is just like any other career: it takes hard work, dedication, education and a vast army of minions to do your dirty work.

The first step for any career in the sciences is to choose a major area of expertise. Many mad science types have mastered the arts of multiple disciplines, but the Lex Luthors and Clayton Foresters of the world didn't just start out with knowledge of all things evil. Even they had to start somewhere, picking one area of study to focus on before branching out.

Because discerning the Evil Science major that will best complement your strengths can be a daunting task, we've gone out of our way to make it a bit easier for you, with a quick run-down of the major specializations in the field. Not to say that you shouldn't branch out into whatever mad sciences interest you, but it is always a good idea to have a strong area to fall back on if your plans fail and government agents start storming your lab.



Any serious mad scientist knows that blowing things up is only half of the fun. Laughing maniacally in the aftermath is the other half.

Atomic Sciences: Radiation is a good place to start for any mad graduate student when picking their doctorate program. The amazing power of the atom has captivated and frightened the world for decades, and the threat of atomic weapons are still effective at sending ripples through the global political community. This branch also has the advantage of being suitable for a wide variety of mad scientists; those looking for a lucrative career can always find work designing suitcase nuclear weapons for tiny dictatorships with grand ambitions and huge chips on their shoulders, while those with a preference for the fantastic can focus on the time-honoured tradition of radiating things to make them grow to amazing proportions. And, while work with genetics has taken over a large part of the giant killer insect/plant/waterfowl industry, radiation should not be overlooked. As an added benefit, most of your equipment, materials and family members will develop a bright green glow, saving thousands on lighting.

There are a few cons to consider, however. Bulky radiation suits are not exactly vogue, and a lifetime of working with radioactive chemicals and test subjects means that you're probably going to end up sterile. Not to mention that you can't just walk into a convenience store and pick up plutonium for your experiments. Sure, you can try to steal some from a group of overly trusting Libyan terrorists, but incidents like that generally end in tears.

Genetics: One of the most controversial areas in science today, this is the perfect choice for anyone who is looking to stay on the cutting edge of twisted technology. If a genetically altered crop of corn is enough to spark hysterics, think of how people will react to a fire-breathing gorilla/jellyfish mix as tall as the CN Tower. No other specialization would allow you to get as close to blasphemy as playing with the DNA of living things.

Of course, no matter how interesting movies make it seem, working in a genetics lab is long and exhausting work, and creating new genetic terrors is still pretty much a trial-and-error affair, with a high rate of catastrophic failure. And in the end, no matter how many times you try to pound "the Law" into their heads, a leopard-man can't change his spots, and is eventually going to turn on the creator.

Robotics/Computing: An old stand-by, modern mad robotics has shifted away from the "50 feet tall with death-ray eyes" mentality of the '50s and has moved more towards the science of nanotechnology, where smaller is better. Whether it's creating tiny gold-eating robots to disrupt the global economy, or putting nanobots in the water supply to turn the townspeople into techno-slaves, nanotechnology is a small world with big possibilities. For those who would rather spend time inputting code into a computer, creating a "thinking" computer with powerful AI is a good way to go. Governments around the world would quickly pay out a hefty ransom to any scientist attacking their computer systems with powerful viruses. Or better yet, hack your way into the federal coffers and help yourself to electronic funds.

Again, there are downsides. If you think it's easy to lose your keys, imagine all the places you could misplace a swarm of robots smaller than an air molecule. And nanotechnology is the easiest way to accidentally sneeze years of work away. As with the computing end of things, two words apply: carpal tunnel. Not to mention the fact that advanced AI has a nasty habit of hubris, thinking itself better than all humans, its creator included. Next thing you know, the damned thing has nuked the entire planet and Robert Patrick is chasing you around a steel mill. No fun.

Meteorology: The easiest way to describe this major is that you act as global warming, only faster. Harnessing the power of nature, you'd be in a position to hold the cities of the world hostage through the threat of powerful hurricanes, precise lightning strikes and hail stones the size of basketballs. Not to mention that you could practically guarantee that it would never rain on your birthday. An often-overlooked mad vocation, the choice of the Mad Meteorologist is nonetheless a great way to rain on the parade of your enemies.

But this branch of evil isn't all sunny days. The main problem with weather controls is that some world leaders have been shown to be reluctant to even recognize shifting climates as a threat. And if the leaders aren't going to recognize your mad genius, how do you expect to extort funds from them? As well, while not many scientists go into weather-manipulation these days, that doesn't mean you are not without fierce competition. You'll need to contend with oil companies, coal mines and soccer moms in SUVs trying to steal your thunder.

While not a comprehensive list of all mad sciences, the points above should give you an idea of some of the major areas of interest. There are, however, a couple of areas that one would be strongly encouraged to avoid if you wish to start a respectable career of infamy.

Mad Mathematics: Sure, algebra tests are scary, but a particularly difficult trig problem isn't going to be enough to hold the world hostage. While math and calculation is an important part of all science, it alone doesn't add up to a successful mad scientist career. Besides, no one bows down before a guy with a calculator watch.

Crazed Civil Engineering: Unless you're prepared to hire out to a Mad Construction Company, you're probably not going to have the manpower to complete a dastardly public works project. Besides, in the end, if you were able to gather the financial and material resources for such an endeavour, what are you left with in the end? An incredibly scary-looking bridge? A sewage treatment centre of the damned? No thanks, we'll pass.

While there's much more to a career in the mad sciences, the choosing of your specialization is the first step, not to mention the most important one. With this quick rundown, you'll be well on the way to building bridges into the fun and profitable career as an evil scientific genius.

And then crossing those bridges leading an army of atomic supermen.