

2006 ROACH DEMO SCRIPT

Get your kit together. You'll need the game book, the dice pile, two random NPC cards per participant, the Regina Sutton card, and a character sheet for each participant. If you have one player, you should play the other Roached character. If you have two, have them play the two Roached characters. You can't really play with more than three. Have everybody sit down, shake hands and introduce themselves. Do likewise. We'll assume two players but it is easy to adjust.

OK, this game is called the Shab-al-Hiri Roach. The demo will take about ten minutes and sort of give you a feel for how the game works. You play college professors at Pemberton University in 1919. Pemberton is a sort of tweedy, up-tight New England University, and you guys are on the faculty. The twist is that one of your fellow professors just returned from an expedition to Mesopotamia with what he thought was a regular old giant cockroach, but which is, in fact, an ancient telepathic Sumerian God-King that can crawl into your sinus cavity and control your mind. These things happen in academia. Anyway, the Roach has hatched a bunch of eggs and now half the faculty are slaves to its offspring. Here's the thing, though - these Roaches don't "get" the twentieth century - they still think like Sumerians, and tend to issue brutal, cryptic commands. The game plays out sort of like a cross between the Marx Brothers and H.P. Lovecraft. Let's look at your character sheets. You're each a member of the faculty. What's your character's name?

Allow player to announce their character's name

And yours?

Again, nodding sagely.

Cool, and you know each other well. Each of you has some stuff circled; let's go through that. First, each of you has a standing - you are both assistant professors in this case. You each have an expertise, which is your department. You're an anthropologist, and you are a poet. You also have a pair of enthusiasms - what are yours?

Allow the player to announce them and nod appreciatively.

And yours?

More enthusiastic licking of chops.

Excellent. So this is the stuff that is central to who you are - you want to bring the circled stuff into conflicts whenever you can, because it will help you win. There's one more thing to note about your characters - you are both slaves to The Roach! There are cards in this game, and for the demo your card is printed on your character sheet. There's a weird command there, and obeying it will give you a big advantage. So you should try to hate him and take away his destiny, and you, well, The Roach isn't particular about who you kill. It just likes killing at the moment.

Produce Regina Sutton's card.

I'd like to introduce you guys to Regina Sutton. Regina is the most popular co-ed on campus. She's beautiful, and smart, and talented, and everybody loves her. Including you two - there's a reason you want to dominate and control her. It could be sex, or love, or money, or power, or status - whatever.

Indicate first player.

What do you want from Regina?

Nod appreciatively and grin with malice - they have the best and most original idea ever. If they need a nudge, suggest they review their enthusiasms and tie it to one or the other or both, maybe making her a major in their department.

Oh, that's fantastic. How about you?

Another original and wonderful idea! Who knew?

Oh, that's great.

Reiterate both of their ideas with an eye toward areas where they conflict

And you know, you can't both have her. Your desires for this poor girl are definitely at odds. One of you is going to win, and one of you is going to lose. So let's set up a conflict. First, let's set the scene. Where do you think we could set a scene where you both make your move on Regina? Maybe a wine and cheese social? Or half-time at the homecoming football game?

Allow them to pick, or suggest their own. Whatever it is, it is amazing and cool.

Fantastic - let's describe the scene a little bit. What's going on?

Let each player add a bit of color or two, and heartily approve of their contributions. Add one of your own.

OK, so let's figure out what you want, and what in general is going to happen if you get it. How about you?

Listen intently and be prepared to nudge. If they suggest something minor, suggest that that is fine, but there is nothing stopping them from burning the entire school down and stacking bodies like cordwood - what do you really want?

That's great, but he's obviously not going to sit still for that. What do you want, and what's going to happen if you get it?

Second player, who should have a good idea what's up after hearing the first. His choices may be reactive based on the stake set by the first - that's actually awesome, just make sure he articulates a good outcome for his side.

OK, so if you win this conflict...

Reiterate the first player's stake.

But if you win...

Reiterate the second player's stake.

Sounds horrible and awesome. Poor Regina, you guys are terrible! Where do you get these ideas? Let me add a little twist here - there are some people around campus who might help you.

Lay out the NPC cards, two per player.

Who do we have here? Let's see...

Read the description of each NPC, maybe adding a catty side-note for each.

If any of these people strike your fancy, and you can think of a way they might help you in your plan, go ahead and grab their card. In the actual game you can make up characters out of whole cloth, but for the demo I'm just going to put a few forward for you to choose from.

Make sure that each player takes at least one NPC. As they do, ask them how that NPC will help them. Be prepared to suggest one who could help out if a player seems stuck.

Great! Now we're cooking! We've got a conflict, some goals, some evil minions, everything we need! It's time to show you how to resolve this mess. OK, first of all, what kind of conflict is this? Would you say that it is about power and status within the hierarchy of the University, endowed chairs and tenure and committees and so forth, or is it about literally everything else, like sex and beating people over the head with wrenches?

Let them decide.

OK, I'd agree with that. Now you guys are assistant professors, so in that kind of conflict, your personal die is a d8 or d6.

Show the cross-reference of conflict type and standing, and plunk down a d8 on their character sheet.

Did either of you bring in your expertise?

If somebody did, say "you did!" and give an example, plunking down another d8 as appropriate.

What about enthusiasms? Any enthusiasms in play here?

There definitely will be - applaud them and shake your head at the sheer brutality of it all.

All right, what about your evil minions?

Plunk dice down on the cards. "This guy's just a lowly student, so he sucks at power and status conflicts" or "Oh, a full professor - not so good at everything else..."

Oh, last thing - what side do you think poor Regina would be on?

If there is a clear "Good for Regina" side, give them her card. If not, keep it yourself and don't roll for her, because you might actually win.

Looks like we're ready to throw down. But we're forgetting one thing - you guys are both slaves to The Roach! That means you automatically get a big fat d12 in every conflict, just because!

Put a d12 on each player's command card.

Did either of you actually obey The Roach's command? Yes? No?

If they did, rub your hands together with glee.

Then you get another d12 for being an obedient slave. Awesome. Now we're ready to roll the dice. Gather them all up and we'll roll - the person who rolls the highest single number will win the conflict and get to describe the outcome. Ready?

Let the players roll their handful of dice.

Oh! There's a 10, that's it, all she wrote, you win and you, my friend, lose big. So tell us what happens here.

Give the high roller a chance to briefly describe the outcome as you collect the dice.

Oh man, that sounds horrible. Really, really horrible. Thanks, you guys, for trying my game. In the full game you've got six events, and in each event every player frames a scene like we just did. A game usually lasts about four hours, so you can play the whole thing in an evening. There's a reputation mechanism, and you can bet it on conflicts, and there's actually a winner at the end of the night - the player with the highest reputation, who is free of The Roach, wins. So you can probably see that having The Roach is fantastic and makes you powerful, but it also means unless you shed it, you are guaranteed to lose the game. It's usually pretty hysterical. Thanks again - you can keep those character sheets. If you're interested, the game is twenty dollars over there at the IPR booth behind us. It was nice meeting you guys! Is there anything else you are interested in demoing while you are here?