

Farmtopia

A roleplaying game based on Orwell's *Animal Farm*
Written by Rabalias for RPG Geek's 24 hour rpg contest



Credits

This game was written by Josh Fox for RPG Geek's 24 hour rpg contest.

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WARNING! This game was written in 24 hours. It has not been playtested. It may have subtle or obvious flaws. Black Armada cannot be held liable for injuries, whether physical or social, resulting from the use of this game.

No animals were harmed in the making of this game.



Game Summary

Farmtopia is based on George Orwell's novel *Animal Farm*. In it, a group of intelligent farm animals overthrow the farmer and his family and try to run the farm for themselves.

The focus of the game is to explore the power struggles, and the moral and practical problems which arise out of revolution.

This introduction assumes you are familiar with roleplaying games and roughly how they work.

The game is for 3-5 players. Each player must choose and name a farm animal that they will play. One player must volunteer to be the Instigator, the animal who leads the revolution against the farmer, but the other animals will certainly be involved one way or another, and may turn out to be more important in the new order than the Instigator.

The game is GMless. Instead of having a single GM, each player takes a turn directing a scene (i.e. saying where the scene is, who is present for it, and roughly what the scene is about).

During scenes, conflict resolution is handled collectively, by a sort of voting system.



The game is divided into three stages: the build-up to the revolution, the new order, and the epilogue.

In the first stage we get to see the tensions and relationships on the farm, and as the revolution builds up we see who will back the revolutionaries and who prefers to sit on the sidelines.

At the end of the first stage the revolution happens. The players collectively decide on some consequences that result from the revolution. Status is handed out, mainly by the Instigator, whose victorious revolutionaries now decide how the farm will be run.

In the second stage, we see the practical and moral problems that arise in the running of the new order. How will the farm be run? What will be done with dissenters? How will the new leaders impose their authority?

During the second stage the status won in the revolution will ebb and flow, and those who emerged on top may not stay on top forever. There is the potential for a counter-revolution.

In the epilogue we tie up loose ends and see what becomes of the farm and its inhabitants longer-term.



The Farm

The Farm may contain a number of different characters – introduce as needed:

The Farmer. Cast as the villain of the piece at the start. He (it is usually a he) may be unrelenting and violent. Or maybe he's not that bad – but the Instigator will certainly make him out to be worse.

The Farmer's Wife and Children. These characters are generally bystanders who get caught up in the revolution, though they may be villains in their own right. Farm labourers may also fit into this category, but don't overload the farm with too many humans.

The Dog. The Farmer's Dog will often be loyal to the farm, and an obstacle to the revolution. However, the dog is trusted by the farmer and has access to areas of the farm that others do not. Potentially a powerful ally. The Dog is quick and fierce.

The Rooster (and hens). Treat as a unit led by the Rooster. The Rooster is aggressive and plucky, sees himself as the head of the farm. Not physically powerful but makes up for this with ferocity.



The Horses. Horses large and physically powerful. They are slow to anger but more dangerous than almost any other animal when they do. Likely to be needed after the revolution to keep the farm going.

The Pigs. Pigs are tough, quick and clever. Often at the vanguard of the revolution – or the counter-revolution. Should never be treated as a unit, as they are too individualistic.

The Geese. Treat as a unit. Generally rather foolish and easily led, but formidable as a group and hard to control once stirred up.

The Bull. The Bull is like a grumpy, violent, hard-to-control version of the Horse. A character that needs to be controlled or they may run amok.

The Cows. Treat as a unit. Slow, ponderous creatures, difficult to move to anger. A herd of Cows is not to be trifled with, however.

The Sheep. Treat as a unit. The sheep are like a stupid, weak version of the cows. Count on them to panic at the wrong moment.

Note: the animals can talk, but only to each other.



Character creation

At the start of the game, each player picks and names a farm animal (or, if you prefer, one of the units of farm animals identified above) to be their character. Do this together, and discuss the relationships between the animals.

Discuss the farmer, his wife and children, and any important labourers. Sketch out what they are like in broad terms: is he a tyrant or a good person? Are the kids brats or kind to animals?

Think about what your animal's life is like on the farm. Consider what reasons each of the animals might have for wanting a revolution, or for preferring the status quo. Make sure that at least half of the animals are going to support the revolution, or else your game could end up as a damp squib!

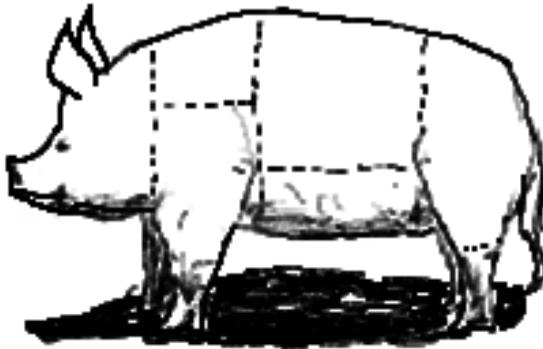
Create one or two important non-player character animals, to flesh the farm out.

Don't take too long over character creation – no more than half an hour, certainly. Avoid going into detail with any of the characters at this point, as we want to see how they develop in play. You can introduce more characters during play if you need them.



Wot no stats?

That's right, there are no stats in this game. (Except status – see below.) But that doesn't mean everything is left completely freeform. Use the descriptions of the farm animals above and your own common sense to figure out what each animal might be capable of. The conflict resolution rules, below, will help you deal with any disagreements.





Status

Status is the currency which determines who is really in charge on the farm. Whoever has the most status is the de facto ruler of the farm. At the start of the game the Farmer has all the status, but after the revolution this changes.

Status can be used to buy favour from other animals. Say what you want them to do, and how much status you're offering. When it's a player character, the player decides whether to accept; if it's an NPC animal or group of animals, the other players collectively agree whether you have offered enough. Generally 1 status is enough for a significant, but not hazardous favour; 2 is about right for a major or hazardous favour. 3 or more is only right if your back is against the wall and they know it.

At the start of the game all animals have zero status. At the end of the Build-Up stage, the Instigator gets 3 status per player to assign to herself or other animals, which mostly represents formal assignment of authority. The other animals receive 1 status to assign to someone else, mostly representing informal influence and support.



Change of Status

At times during the New Order stage animals will be required to give some of their status to others (with no favour returned). When this happens you may *not* give status to NPCs. NPCs who acquire status will hold onto it unless a player makes a convincing case that they have won favour with that animal.

Transfers of status represent the giving of overt or covert support. You should consider your in-character reasons for giving such support, and indicate how public this is.

When two animals switch relative status, the group should consider what happens. *Any player* is entitled to ask for a scene, out of the usual sequence, when this happens. If the animal at the top spot drops down then you *must* have such a scene.

Status changes and the scenes that result from them may be subtle or obvious, quiet or violent. Go with what makes sense, but err on the side of obvious and violent – this is a game about revolution after all.

If a status change appears so significant as to constitute a new revolution, and if the group agrees, you may allocate status from scratch again, as per the end of Build-Up.



Conflict resolution

Conflict resolution in *Farmtopia* is handled collectively. Say what your characters are doing and what is happening. Go with what makes sense and don't sweat the details. When there is serious doubt about whether an animal will succeed at something, and where the outcome is of interest, it's time to initiate a conflict. All players are encouraged to call out such situations as they arise.

To resolve a conflict, you need to work out who is involved. Mostly this is obvious. If the conflict involves a human, an NPC or an inanimate obstacle, force or problem, the current Director takes the role of that opposition. (If his animal is involved then the next available player to his left does it instead.)

Everyone involved gives one reason why the conflict should go their way.
For example: "Pork Chop will win this fight because he's a big, burly pig with sharp tusks."

Everyone then gives one vote to each person whose explanation they found convincing. You can vote for multiple people, and you can vote for yourself. If one person has most votes, they win the conflict. Otherwise, the people who tied for most repeat this procedure until one of them wins.



Injury and Death

Farmtopia has the potential to be quite a violent game. Shifts in status in particular could easily lead to animals who have overstepped their authority being brought down by a mob.

Most of the time this is handled through intention. That is to say, you get injured or killed if another character wants to injure or kill you and it's either obvious that they are able to do so, or they win a conflict resolution per the previous page. The character doing the injuring decides how they want to hurt you, how permanent it will be, and so forth.

There may be the odd situation where someone might get injured or killed without anyone specifically intending it. In that case, it's up to you to collectively decide how bad the injury is, and initiate conflict resolution if you can't agree.

Injuries don't create any penalties in-game, but you should respect them in your descriptions of the action, and they can be used as reasons during conflict resolution.

If anyone dies, they continue to take turns as Director but without a character of their own. It's a short game, so this won't hurt too much!



Establishing Scenes

Each scene has a Director, a role which rotates among the players. The Director decides where a scene is happening, which characters are present and roughly what the scene is about.

For instance, the Director might state:

- The scene takes place in the hay barn.
- The farmer's wife is present, as is Walter the Horse.
- The farmer's wife is saying goodbye to Walter before he is sent off to be put down because he is too old to work.

Where player characters are present, the relevant people always play them. The Director can ask other people to play extras. It's generally best to try and keep it to one character per player per scene if possible (which it may not always be).

When establishing a scene, go with what makes sense and will be interesting to play through. Always pick your scenes for a reason. Don't just throw something together in the hopes it will turn out interesting – you want there to be some dramatic issue to be resolved by the scene, or some interesting aspect of the story to be illuminated. If you can't think of anything, ask your fellow players for inspiration!



The Revolution

George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, on which this game is based, saw the animals overthrow the Farmer and create a communist regime in its place – albeit a communist regime that gradually degenerated into a system based on a ruling class and a lower class.

How your revolution goes is up to you. You don't have to stick to the *Animal Farm* formula; maybe the revolutionaries remain egalitarian to the end, or maybe they never were, and implement a dictatorship right from the start. It may even be that the Instigator sees herself as a benevolent ruler but ends up hated.

Don't decide in advance how this is going to be: let things play out and see what happens.





Game structure

The game is structured into three stages:

- The *Build-Up* to the revolution
- The *New Order*
- *Epilogue*

During the Build-Up, we establish what the farm is like before the revolution, why the Instigator wishes to overthrow the Farmer, who is going to support them, and how the revolution is going to go down.

During the New Order stage, we see the practical and moral problems that arise after the revolution and how the animals deal with them.

In the Epilogue we wrap up any loose ends and find out what happens to the animals after the story has finished.

Notice that we don't actually play through the revolution itself. The revolution is assumed to automatically succeed, though there is an opportunity to throw in a few complications before moving on to the New Order.

The Build-Up should take at most an hour, and the Epilogue 30 minutes maximum. The bulk of the time available should be spent on the New Order, which is the focus of the game.



Build-Up

Build-Up is divided into three parts:

- Setting the Stage
- Plotting and planning
- Complications and Status

Setting the Stage

During this part, each player gets to direct one scene, starting with the Instigator.

The aim of the first half is to understand who the animals are and how they relate to each other, the farm, and the humans who run it. In particular, we want to start to sow the seeds for the coming revolution, and to see who is happy and content, and who is bitter and resentful.

Each director chooses a scene that is focused on their animal – though they may bring in any other animals or humans as needed, and call on the other players to play them.

Every scene should shine a light on the focal character and at least one relationship they have with another character.



Plotting and Planning

During this part each player once again directs a scene focused on their animal, starting with the Instigator.

This time, the aim is to understand:

- How the revolution is going to go down
- Who is going to stand up and fight
- Who is going to help from the sidelines
- Who will merely get out of the way

It is quite likely that the Instigator will be involved in a lot of these scenes. She will probably be trying to persuade the other animals to back the revolution, and may have to offer deals in exchange for support. This is not an issue for formal conflict resolution mechanics; rather it is up to each player to decide how their animal is going to respond.

The Instigator may not talk to everyone. Maybe an intermediary will be used, or maybe some animals will be deliberately kept out of the loop. Perhaps they'll hear rumours, or maybe they won't know until it's all over.

By the end of this part, the revolution should be about to happen.



Complications and Status

We don't play through the revolution itself, but it's a good idea to take a little time to discuss how it goes down. We can assume it doesn't go completely smoothly.

Is anyone hurt or killed? What happens to the Farmer and his family? Does anyone stay loyal – and how is this dealt with? Does anyone escape the farm and become a renegade, or go into hiding? Kick a few ideas around but don't go into detail; these are seeds for future scenes, not something to spend a lot of time on now.

Each player has the right to throw in one complication during this part, for example:

- The Farmer's Dog escaped and is hiding out in the woods nearby.
- The barn burned down and now there is no food.

Also, at this point Status gets handed out among the animals. The Instigator gets 3 points of Status per player, and may distribute it between all the players including herself. The other players get 1 point of Status which they must give away.

Finally, each player should say what their animal thinks about what has just happened, even if this would not be public knowledge.



The New Order

During this stage, the players continue to take turns as Director. It is no longer necessary for the Instigator to go first, instead just jump in when you have an idea for a scene, provided you haven't done one already in the current round. Furthermore, it is no longer necessary for the scene to be about your animal – indeed you are encouraged to go the other way and throw problems at other people.

During this stage the aim is to present the animals with provocative problems which will test the equilibrium of the New Order, and see how they react to them. You can use the complications you generated at the end of the Build-Up stage for inspiration, or throw in completely new ideas. You should aim to put the animals under real pressure here, with difficult decisions that will stir up controversy.

Examples:

- The Farmer's Children have locked themselves in the attic and won't come out. Will the animals force them out, put them under seige, or bring them food in secret?
- The Farmer's Dog has escaped and is launching hit and run attacks on the farm. How will the animals deal with this?



- The Farm does not have enough food to eat. Someone must work to provide it. Will someone volunteer? Will someone have to be forced?

Each scene should present a serious practical or moral problem which cannot be solved without somebody making a sacrifice (even if the sacrifice is something quite simple like “the Horse must go back to work so that we can have food”). Alternatively, a scene can deal with the fallout from such a problem – for instance, if in one scene the Horse is required to work to feed everyone else, it is legit to followup with a scene focusing on the Horse’s efforts to stir up resistance to the New Order.

After every player has taken a turn, every animal must give away half of their Status (round down) to other animals. This cannot include NPC animals. This represents the shifting sands of influence and political support, and it may lead to social ructions or even a fresh revolution (see the Status section for details).

You can continue taking turns in this way for as long as you want – we recommend two or three full rounds of scenes before you move on to the Epilogue.



Epilogue

The Epilogue is the chance to wrap up the game. There are no scenes required, though you are encouraged to narrate out any scenes you want in order to illustrate the post-game events.

Discuss amongst yourselves any loose ends from the New Order stage. How might they be resolved in the fullness of time?

Will the New Order persist, or collapse? Who ends up on top? Who ends up at the bottom of the heap? Who leaves in disgust? Only use the conflict resolution rules at this stage if you have to.

Don't take too long over the Epilogue; no more than half an hour, certainly.



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