

ROBONIMALS: Escape from the lab

A mini-RPG by Côme Martin written in May 2018, for 1 MC and 3 to 5 players.

You just woke up in the scientific laboratory. There's no noise, apart from the hum of a few machines: you, half-robot half-animal creatures, are the only survivors of this place... Well, almost. There's also the Thing roaming at the end of the corridor...

CHARACTERS: Choose your animal and your robot in the two following lists, or roll.

/	<i>Animal</i>	<i>Robot</i>
1	Octopus	Piercer
2	Chicken	Acrobat
3	Mouse	Puncher
4	Snake	Analyst
5	Ostrich	Armoured
6	Goat	Tinkerer
7	Fish	Programmer
8	Crow	Shooter
9	Fox	Detachable
10	Otter	Spy

You have two pools, Animal and Robot, each starting with 3 tokens. If one of those pools drops to zero, you're out of order. If one reaches 6, you overheat and become a Thing tracking the other PCs...

The PCs don't really remember their life before they came into the lab; they can speak to each other thanks to their robotic implants. The players describe what they look like (and possibly their name or nickname) at the beginning of the game.

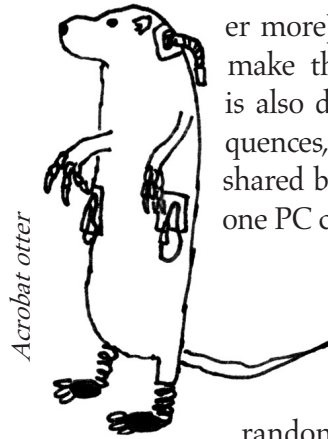
BASIC RULES: *Robonimals* is played without dice, one action per player at a time, in a flexible clockwise order (it can be shaken up if it makes sense in the fiction or to make sure every player plays the same number of actions).

When it's their turn, a player chooses if their PC uses their nature of Robot or their nature of Animal to act, and puts the corresponding tokens on the "Goal", "Pursuit" and "Danger" tables (see at the back). Every token in a given pool must be used during an action, divided freely between these 3 tables (if you want, you can put zero token on one or two of the tables). The player clearly states what the success of his action implies before dividing the tokens; at the same time, the MC tells them what Danger they expose themselves to (see page 3).

After the resolution of each action, the player moves a token from the unused pool to the used pool; in other words, using the "Robot" pool re-

moves one token from the "Animal" pool and adds one into the "Robot" pool, and vice versa).

BONUS TOKENS: If the PC showcases their Animal or Robotic specificity when they act (rushing head on for the Goat, springing across the room for the Acrobat...) they get a bonus token they can put on any table (the token is then discarded).



Acrobat otter

A PC can also get a bonus token (never more) if another PC helps them to make the current action. This token is also discarded after use. The consequences, both negative and positive, are shared between the two PCs, and only one PC can help at any given time.

Finally, when a PC finds an Object in the lab, the MC gives it 1 to 3 tokens (determined randomly) which can be used during an appropriate action (only one token per action, discarded after use). When an Object has no more tokens, it's destroyed and/or unusable.

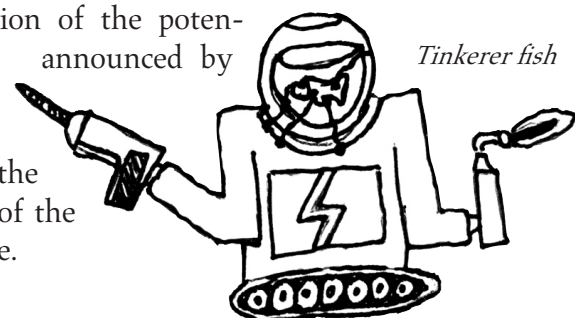
WOUNDS: Each Wound suffered blocks a token which cannot be used before the PC is healed. These blocked tokens count in the pool's total: for instance, 2 blocked tokens and 3 free tokens in the "Animal" pool count for 5 tokens, which is quite dangerous for the PC's balance...

A pool which is entirely blocked can still be used via the bonus tokens: in other words, it's possible to get help on a "Robot" action, use (then discard) the bonus token, and get one from the "Animal" pool, for example. However, blocked tokens are not movable: if the PC's "Robot" pool contains only blocked tokens and they make an "Animal" action (or vice versa), they don't win any token in this second pool.

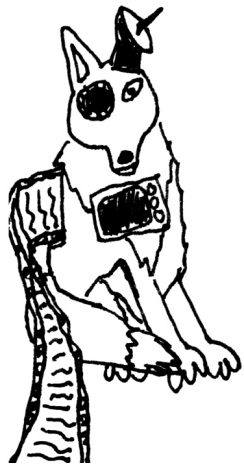
DIVIDING THE TOKENS: The success of any action depends of the "Goal" table: moving from one room to another, giving or healing a Wound, using an object, searching a room to find an Object or a Clue...

The movements of the Thing at the PCs' heels depend of the "Pursuit" table.

The realization of the potential danger announced by the MC, relative to each action of the PCs, depends of the "Danger" table.



Tinkerer fish



GOAL - <i>Does the PC manage to do what they wanted to?</i>
No token: It fails and the PC discards a token from the pool they used, loses a Clue or destroys an Object (the MC chooses).
1 token: It fails.
2 tokens: It succeeds.
3 tokens: It succeeds and the PC wins a token in the pool they want, or an Extra clue (the player chooses).

The PC freely describes the Clues their PC find, helped if needed by the table on the last page. It's up to them to make a link with the existing context. Three Clues can provide an answer to one of the game's Questions.

PURSUIT - <i>Does the PC manage to not attract the Thing pursuing them?</i>
No token: The Thing moves (the MC chooses where).
1 token: The Thing's Movement pool increases by 2.
2 tokens: The Thing doesn't move.
3 tokens: The Thing moves one room (the player chooses where).



Shooter mouse

The Thing's Movement pool starts with 4 empty boxes at the beginning of the game. When the 4 boxes are checked, the Thing moves one room towards the PC, and the pool is then emptied.

If the Thing arrives in the same room as one or more PCs, it gives as many Wounds as its Attack score to one of them in a random pool and makes them flee to an adjacent room (staying in the same room to fight requires a successful action).

DANGER - <i>Does the Danger announced by the MC happen?</i>
No token: The danger happens and the PC cannot use bonus tokens during their next action.
1 token: The danger happens.
2 tokens: The danger is avoided or delayed (the player chooses).
3 tokens: The danger is avoided or delayed (the player chooses) and the PC gets an extra bonus token for their next action.

Details about dangers can be found in the MC section.

ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS: The PCs have to answer three Questions, all available at the beginning of the game. It's up to them to answer them by making sense of the Clues they find, which they use freely on any Questions; the MC bases their descriptions from their answers.

Each Question has a different effect:

QUESTION	EFFECT
"What devastated this place and why?"	The PCs can now kill a Thing by exploiting its weakness (it still needs to lose all their hit points beforehand).
"What's this laboratory's purpose and where is it?"	The PCs can now heal their Wounds with the laboratory's equipment (they still need to find the adequate material).
"How can we get out of there?"	The PCs can now run away (they still need to get to the exit).

Answering any of these Questions also makes the Thing faster and more aggressive...

ENDING THE GAME: Once the PCs have escaped from the laboratory, end the game with a short epilogue, which can be more or less happy whether some of the PCs are severely wounded or if the Thing is still after them!



Spy ostrich

Piercer octopus

MC SECTION

Before the game, the MC must prepare a basic plan of the laboratory and think about the Thing's nature.

THE THING:

The Thing's exact nature and its motivations can remain unclear, even if it means making them more precise when the PCs find Clues and answer Questions during the game. It's useful to think about what it looks like—a corrupted robonimal? A half-plant, half-animal being? An unspeakable monstrosity? Something else?—keeping in mind this description may need to be modified or amended: remain vague, describe a shape moving in the shadows rather than precise details.

The Thing always starts with as many Hit Points as there are PCs, an Attack score of 1 and a Movement pool of 4. When the players answer one of the Questions, the Attack score immediately increases by 1, while its Movement pool loses one box.

Wounding the Thing requires the success of an action; it can never lose more than one hit point at a time. A wounded Thing immediately empties its Movement pool and moves one room, fleeing the PCs. When a Thing dies, another wakes up in the room farthest from the PCs (if possible, a room that hasn't been explored yet). This new Thing has the same characteristics as the starting one: as many Hits Points as there are PCs, an Attack score of 1 and a Movement score of 4.

THE LABORATORY: The MC decides where the PCs begin in the laboratory, by rolling 2d20 on the table on the next page or by choosing themselves. Draw a handful of rooms around this starting point (by rolling on the table if need be) and put the Things two rooms away from it. The rest can be improvised and drawn gradually as long as everything remains coherent.

You should add to each room's description, and even add rooms, with each movement by the PCs. Some rooms can be rolled several times; for others, it's better to

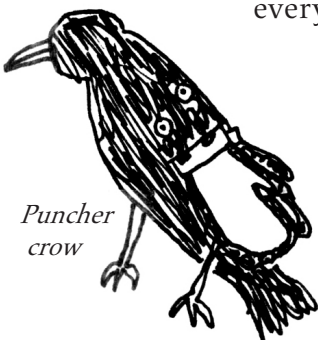
strike them gradually. The laboratory's exact floor plan (number of floors, number of doors in each room, etc.) is up to you.

MOVEMENTS, ACTIONS AND DANGERS: Moving from one room to another often requires a successful action: because doors are locked, blocked or difficult to open; because floors are slippery or damaged; or because a threat is present in the room. However, a room which has already been crossed by a PC without trouble can be crossed again without an action if the MC prefers.

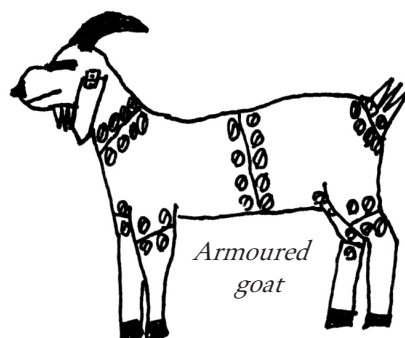
All actions involve two dangers, the first always being the Thing getting closer. The second danger is at the MC's choice; depending on the circumstances, it can be:

- The partial or total demolition of the current room;
- A malfunction of the PCs' internal system or the laboratory's electronic system;
- The sudden irruption of an animal, a robot or hostile vegetation;
- A looming disaster within the laboratory (a fire, a power failure, a flood, a toxic gas...);
- A Wound inflicted to the PC;
- Any abstract danger related to the realization of an action (it's loud, it takes a lot of time and/or must be divided in several turns...).

The nature of the Danger and its consequences must always be clearly stated by the MC before an action takes place. A Danger can never involve the complete failure of an action: it's always a "Yes, but," not a "No".



Puncher crow

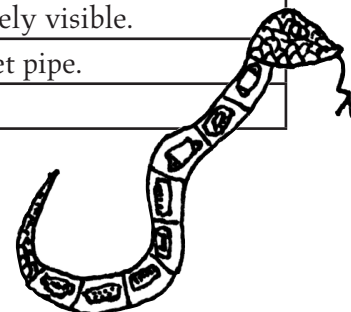


Armoured goat

Laboratory rooms table (2d20)

2	An arms cache. Most of the weapons are still usable but the munitions are in poor condition.
3	Really filthy toilets: a foul smell comes from most of the cabins.
4	A large aquarium takes up most of the room. It seems empty, but is it, really?
5	The dropped ceiling of this room has been ripped open: on the floor, metallic walls and a few ventilation blades.
6	The office of the manager, with a huge mahogany desk. It clearly was searched recently.
7	A real carnage in this room: the Thing dragged all its victims there and piled them in a bloody heap.
8	Large puddles of blood, slippery and viscous, are scattered throughout this corridor.
9	A break room. Large armchairs that were comfortable once, softened light, a record player in a corner.
10	An armoured and opaque glass roof replaces the ceiling. Desks were piled to try and reach it.
11	A security room: dozens of screens cover the wall and show, in low resolution, what is going on in several places of the laboratory. Many screens are turned off or full of static.
12	A kitchen: large sideboards with rotten vegetables and fruits in it, damaged ovens, dismantled cupboards...
13	A dining room: rows of chairs and tables, distasteful paintings that are supposed to lighten up the mood.
14	A corridor in poor condition; its access is blocked by bicolor strips taped across its walls.
15	Strange vegetation proliferates here and hampers the PCs' movement, seemingly reacting to what they do.
16	This room was probably destined to become a garage, but its construction was never finished...
17	A dormitory where, on rows of bunk beds, lie bodies, their throats slit in their sleep.
18	A long corridor full of diverse metallic parts: a dismembered robot?
19	A room full of old dusty files and sleeping computer towers.
20	A badly lit staircase. Several steps, sometimes whole flights, are full of huge holes.
21	The walls of this room are covered with large human-sized tubes, full of a dark liquid. The neons of the ceiling flicker and drop sparks.
22	Large menacing electric cables make it difficult to go through this corridor.
23	An office, almost completely burnt to ashes, save for a large safe with an electronic lock.
24	In this small stinky room, pipes eject waste to the outside, thanks to powerful garbage disposals.
25	On the walls of the corridor, long and deep claw marks instead of the colored strips indicating the laboratory's different departments.
26	Small specimens lie in jars under infrared light. Some are broken or open.
27	An office with metallic furniture. Files are scattered on the floor.
28	The corridor has partly collapsed, PCs need to crawl under the ceiling to go through.
29	Large containers are stocked here, only tagged with obscure series of letters and numbers.
30	This room contains several small animal-sized cages. Some of them were clearly occupied until recently. Some are open.
31	In this corridor lies the body of a man in a blue uniform, his electric drill twitching by his side.
32	A surgery room. Large and powerful lamps are placed here and there, blinding the PCs.
33	The morgue. A lot of corpses were eaten; large gashes ripped their bodies and the white sheets.
34	An elevator shaft; the elevator lies at the bottom, shattered.
35	Generator room. Between two series of hums, it lets out worrying noises.
36	A series of recording devices are measuring all sorts of data about a pedestal to which heavy chains are attached. What was kept there has clearly been freed.
37	The room contains half-finished robot corpses and various reparation tools.
38	The room is plunged in total darkness; cocoons, anarchically developed there, are barely visible.
39	A sticky matter covers the walls, ceiling and floor of this room, leaking from an outlet pipe.
40	A safety airlock with several armoured doors, which don't seem to work properly.

*Programmer
snake*



Clues / Objects table (2d20)

2	Syringes of unknown liquid.
3	A USB key which looks like a tiger head.
4	A lamptorch with almost empty batteries.
5	The diary of a laboratory employee, its pages stained with blood.
6	The egg of an unidentified animal.
7	Building plans for a robot.
8	A voice recorder containing a troubling recording.
9	The building's evacuation procedures.
10	A locked suitcase.
11	A 5-number code, scribbled on a napkin.
12	A plastic bag, on which is written "Toxic", and which contains colored powder.
13	A complex mathematic formula on a tactile screen.
14	Rotting food, recently nibbled.
15	An experimental module which could be installed on a robot.
16	A notebook full of observations about the sexual mores of various animals.
17	The sketch of two of the PCs.
18	A human arm, torn off with precision.
19	A bunch of keys of various colors.
20	Pills hidden in a gun's magazine.
21	Instructions to build an artisanal bomb.
22	A leather pouch containing animal tails.
23	A bag of fertilizer for ultra-fast growth.
24	A miniature replica of one of the PCs: an automaton set off with a key.
25	A jar full of swarming larvae.
26	Poisoned animal food.
27	A series of polaroids showing several places of the laboratory.
28	The casting of an animal print.
29	A few pages from an employee's private diary.
30	A plastic security pass, a little melted.
31	A powder bag on which is written "Add water to grow".
32	Little crystals which cause a strange noise when rubbed.
33	The fossil of an unknown species.
34	A formula to combine various chemical products; next to the formula, one can find all the necessary elements, except one.
35	Several blood samples.
36	A stillborn animal/plant hybrid.
37	A map of one part of the laboratory, hand-drawn; one of the rooms is circled several times.
38	A burnt out electronic chip, recently pulled off from where it was planted.
39	A symbol, similar to what is written on the PCs' robotic part, hastily drawn on a door.
40	A list of names: they are all struck out, except the last two.

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Detachable chicken

