

# INSTINCT & EVOLUTION

by Nathan Knaack  
based on *Lasers & Feelings*  
by John Harper

You are the heroes of a prehistoric tribe, tasked with protecting and providing for your people. The world around you is savage, full of hungry predators, contested resources, and inclement weather. Without your help, your people will perish, but with a blend of primal instincts and the advantages of evolution, they might just thrive.

All you need is pencils, paper, a handful of six-sided dice, and some friends to play. One person becomes the narrator, who will set up the adventure and administer the rules. Everyone else creates characters, individuals who will undertake adventures in support of their tribe. Everyone works together to weave an interesting story.

## Each Player: Create Your Character

- 1 Choose (or roll) a style for your character: 1) **mighty**, 2) **agile**, 3) **sturdy**, 4) **clever**, 5) **wise**, or 6) **inspiring**.
- 2 Choose (or roll) a role for your character: 1) **warrior**, 2) **hunter**, 3) **shaman**, 4) **tamer**, 5) **builder**, or 6) **speaker**.
- 3 Choose your nature, represented by a number from 2 to 5. A high number represents a good **INSTINCT** (reflexes, passion, intuition, etc). A low number represents an advanced **EVOLUTION** (planning, reason, learning, etc).
- 4 Give your character a simple but evocative prehistoric name, like *Thaco*, *Umlau*, *Rika*, *Ooyidu*, *Lulah*, or *Uhg*.

**Choose your gear:** Your clothing is **threatening**, **stealthy**, or **hardy**. Your weapon is either a **heavy** club, a **throwable** spear, or a **long-range** bow with three retrievable arrows. You have enough dried meat and berries for a few days in the wilderness, a sharpened rock that serves as a crude knife, and a warm animal fur to sleep on or wear in cold weather.

## All Players: Create the Tribe

Give your tribe a good, descriptive name. The players' goal is to ensure the survival of their tribe. This includes a variety of challenges, such as fighting nearby groups for territorial dominance, hunting for food, finding water sources, building settlements, and dealing with dissent within the tribe.

Your tribe needs 1) **food**, 2) **water**, 3) **clothing**, 4) **shelter**, 5) **safety**, and 6) **morale**. These resources each begin at a value of 3 and can go as high as 6. If any fall to 0, your tribe perishes. Each adventure your group of heroes undertakes can raise one or more of these values, but could also have a cost from others. The exact values are up to the narrator.

At the start of each season, roll one 6-sided die to determine how many points of resources your tribe loses, then roll for each point lost to see which resource is decremented in the order they're listed above. Each resource can only lose one point this way per season, so reroll any duplicates.

### The Elder

The tribe is led by an elder whose decisions on individual subjects are determined by the votes of all the players. Whenever a situation arises that requires making a decision for the entire tribe, such as where to travel or major projects to undertake, all the player vote and the result is the order given by the elder. Most of the non-player characters follow this direction, but the players are free to make their own decisions with potential consequences.

### Strengths and Weaknesses

Pick one (or roll two) strengths of your tribe: 1) **mobile**, 2) **brave**, 3) **storage**, 4) **herd**, 5) **guided**, or 6) **numerous**. Also, roll one weakness: 1) **superstitious**, 2) **sickly**, 3) **hated**, 4) **disorganized**, 5) **young**, or 6) **old**. While this problem can be circumvented by the players' actions, it can never be fully alleviated. If an adventure or season affects a resource related to your tribe's strength or weakness, that resource might increase or decrease by 1 extra point.

## Players: Roll the Dice

When you attempt something risky, as the narrator if it requires **INSTINCT** or **EVOLUTION** to succeed, then roll one six-sided die to find out how it goes. Roll an extra die if you're **geared** (*your clothing, weapon, or some other tool is appropriate for the action*), another if you're **skilled** (*if your style or role are relevant to the action*), and another if someone else uses their action to help. Finally, the narrator can add or remove one of your dice (to a minimum of one) to account for any other **advantage** or **disadvantage** you have. Compare the results of all your dice to your **nature**.



If you're using **INSTINCT**, you want to roll **under** your nature to achieve a success.



If you're using **EVOLUTION**, you want to roll **over** your nature to achieve a success.

0

If none of your dice succeed, it all goes wrong. The narrator describes how bad things get.

1

If one die succeeds, you barely manage to scrape by. The narrator inflicts a complication, harm, or cost.

2

If two dice succeed, you accomplish what you set out to do.

3

If three or more dice succeed, you achieve your goal and then some. The narrator will describe what that is.

## Narrator: Create the Adventure

Roll on (or choose from) the table below to create a plot for the adventure. Halfway through the adventure, roll another die for a plot twist. On a 1-3, reroll the detail in that category. You can also create your own adventure and put the twist wherever you want. The important thing is to combine different plot elements in a way that challenges and entertains.

### DURING...

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. An exceptionally cold and snowy winter   | 2. A season of raging wildfires                        |
| 3. A scorching drought                      | 4. A rainy season of monsoons and flooding             |
| 5. The month of a prophesized solar eclipse | 6. An enduring darkness from the eruption of a volcano |

### A THREAT...

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. A warlike neighboring tribe of fire-wielders           | 2. The brutish Neanderthal horde             |
| 3. A pack of aggressive predators tamed by a bitter rival | 4. A shadowy group of cannibalistic stalkers |
| 5. An ambitious witchdoctor and their followers           | 6. A mysterious traitor within the tribe     |

### WANTS TO...

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Kill the tribal elder and assume leadership    | 2. Chase the tribe out of the region                     |
| 3. Destroy the tribe, every man, woman, and child | 4. Start a massive conflict with a powerful third tribe  |
| 5. Absorb the tribe into another as slaves        | 6. Abduct all the tribe's children to raise as their own |

## Narrator: Running the Game

Present the players with challenges and opportunities, encouraging them to work together to accomplish their goals. Put them into situations and ask them what they do. Call for rolls when the situation is uncertain. Don't try to tell the whole story, let them add to it with their actions and fill in the narrative blanks whenever possible.

Players can undertake two adventures in spring, three in summer, two in autumn, but only one in the winter. Each adventure should give the players an opportunity to increase one or more of their tribe's resources, but also include a cost or risk of other resources. For example, a raid on an enemy's stronghold could increase the tribe's food, safety, clothing, and/or morale by a point each, but costs one point of water to initiate and, if failed, could cost them a point of morale instead. Before each adventure, players should carefully consider which resources their tribe needs most.