

# INSTINCTIVE

a horror role-playing system

## I. The human condition

*It takes courage and instinct to change fate. But courage comes in short supply and only at the expense of your instincts. To replenish what is lost, one must let go, forget about reason and give in to their instinctual passions and impulses.*

What you just read is a summary of all the rules. Read it one more time. Then, continue to the next section to see how to create your character.

## II. Characters

A character is a combination of courage and instincts. Let's go over both of them.

### Courage

Courage refers to the willpower, morale, determination or whatever other form of mental and physical stamina a character has. The amount of courage a character has is represented with points. Courage can be spent to veto, and is increased by showing resolve.

For example, Jane is about to trip and fall while being chased by some unnameable horror. She does not have any relevant instincts but can still try and prevent herself from falling. After spending as many courage points as the veto's level dictated by the GM, she does not fall.

By default, a new character starts play with 0 points of courage.

## Instincts

An instinct is a combination of narrative, emotion and behaviour. When you come up with an instinct, it's practical to give it a short title to identify it by. Each of your character's instincts has a rank.

Both you and the GM can add new instincts to your character at any time. However, the rank of new instincts must be 0.

An instinct can be used in three ways:

**Changing fate:** A challenge to the GM's narration in order to have things your way.

**Showing resolve:** A sacrifice of part of the instinct to replenish courage.

**Being impulsive:** A conscious decision to complicate your character's life in return to replenishing the instinct.

For example, Chris has an instinct titled "*Run!*" with a rank of 6. He can always decrease that rank as much as he wants and increase his courage points by the same amount. In addition, if the story puts him in a situation where he is chased and is about to get caught, he may challenge his fate and even change it outright without spending any courage, if the veto's level is less than or equal to 6. Finally, if things are turning scary, he may elect to run away. This will complicate his life; he might fall into a trap and he will not be there when his friends need him. In return, he can increase that rank a bit, the GM will say how much, which will allow him to challenge fate when he really needs to.

By default, a new character starts play with as many instincts as they like with a total rank of 20.

## III. Gameplay

In general, players have absolute control over their characters' conscious decisions. Impulses may tempt them to make decisions they know are not in their benefit, but it is always up to them to give in or resist. The GM has absolute control over whatever the characters cannot affect. Therefore, the players narrate what their characters do; the GM narrates all the rest.

### Changing fate

There is one gray area in this matter. What about things that the characters can affect but are not their conscious decisions? Things like whether

a character hits the intended target when they shoot a weapon or faints when they lose too much blood. The GM narrates all these things too, but there is a catch: a character can *veto* the GM's decision and challenge fate.

Vetoing works like this:

1. You interrupt the narration and state the changes you want to make. (Please do not ask for changes that go against the spirit of the story.)
2. The GM decides the veto's level and announces it to you. The value depends on the difficulty of the change you asked for and how different it is from what the GM originally narrated.
3. You may select one relevant instinct of yours. The GM will advise you concerning which of your instincts are eligible in the situation.
4. You may spend some of your courage points.
5. Your changes take effect if the sum of the instinct's rank and spent courage points is greater than or equal to the veto's level.

## **Showing resolve**

Where does courage come from? It comes from the heart. To be more precise, it comes by squeezing it out of your instincts, ruining them in the process. At any time, you may decrease the rank of an instinct by any amount and increase your courage points by the same amount.

Showing resolve will usually occur when you attempt to change fate and realise that you do not have any relevant instincts or that your instinct's rank is not high enough, which will mean you will have to use some courage points to make up the difference. When that happens, you may come up with a reason your show of courage comes at the expense of an instinct, for example, your character might get physically wounded or emotionally scarred.

## **Being impulsive**

No one likes to lose. Characters will tempt their fate again and again and when things go awry they will hopelessly and willingly use up their courage and weaken their instincts to turn the tables. Sooner or later, they realise their resources are finite and they are all out. Thankfully, impulses allow you to feed and strengthen your instincts in exchange for giving up a tiny portion of your free will.

So, how do you actually give in to an instinct? It works like this:

1. You come up with a behaviour that is dictated by the instinct. The GM can give you suggestions.
2. Eventually, the impulsive behaviour runs its course and leads to a complication.
3. You then increase the instinct's rank. The amount depends on the size of the complication and can be agreed in advance with the GM.

## IV. Summary

Each character has 2 types of resources: *courage* and *instincts*. Courage is very ephemeral, instincts less so.

There are 3 primary game mechanics: *veto*, *resolve* and *impulse*. *Veto* consumes courage and uses instincts to produce favourable narrative outcomes. *Resolve* weakens instincts in exchange for courage. *Impulse* complicates the narrative to strengthen instincts.