Shapers and Bots

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*Shapers and Bots* is a role-playing game for children 8 and older inspired by *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, and every cartoon animal that ever walked upright and wore. The rules focus on storytelling rather than realism: dice rolls are kept simple, and there are no complicated tables showing how much damage a broadsword does compared to a katana.

## Background

Centuries ago, the Makers mixed their DNA with those of animals to create dozens of thinking species, then vanished, leaving behind a world full of marvels: half-human creatures with strange powers, robots that are now their own masters, and a gathering evil that now threaten both.

In *Shapers and Bots*, you play a young animal adventurer or a newly-awoken bot in search of adventure. You can be a hero, a rogue, or an outright villain, and can travel alone or with companions. Your choices will determine how the game unfolds.

### Some Notes on Numbers

1. When we want to describe the specific numbers shown on dice, we will write them as 1, 2, and so on up to 6. When we talk about other numbers, such as the total score rolled on three dice, we will write them as 7, 11, and so on.
2. We sometimes write "3D+X" or "3D-X" to mean "the total on three dice plus or minus X". For example, suppose we roll 3D+1; if the three dice come up 2, 2, and 5, for a total of 9, the final score is 10 (because of the +1).
3. Remember that adding a negative number is the same as subtracting a positive one. For example, if someone has a bonus of +3 on a roll and a penalty of -4, their actual roll is 3D+3-4 or 3D-1, i.e., the total on three dice *minus* one point.

## How to Play

Each game has one or more [**players**](#g:player) and a [**Director**](#g:director). Each player takes on the role of one [**character**](#g:character), while the Director plays all the other characters, who are called [**extras**](#g:extra). The Director can be an adult, but children age 11 and older can also be Directors.

Before the game begins, the Director will either create an adventure or find one that someone else has created. Each player can create a character, or the Director can create characters for them.

Once the game starts, each player determines what their character does. When the player speaks, the character speaks in the game world; when the player says, "I'm going to kick down the door," their character tries to kick down the door. There are no takebacks—you can't un-kick down a door—and if the players spend two minutes arguing about what to do next, that's what their characters are doing in the game world.

## Character Features

Every character has strengths and weaknesses that determine what they're good at and what they aren't. We describe this by giving every character a [**rating**](#g:rating) for seven [**features**](#g:feature):

* **Size** (abbreviated SIZ): how large the character is. If the character is exceptionally short or exceptionally skinny, the character may list height and weight separately.
* **Fitness** (FIT): how strong and coordinated she is. Characters with a high fitness are good athletes.
* **Dexterity** (DEX): how good the character is with her hands. This determines how well she can pick locks, play musical instruments, or perform surgery.
* **Intellect** (IQ): how good she is at book learning and abstract reasoning. A character with a low Intellect isn't stupid—she just isn't good at logic puzzles.
* **Awareness** (AWR): How well the character notices things in their surroundings, which depends on eyesight, hearing, sense of smell, and actually paying attention (which any parent can tell you is very different from just seeing or hearing). If the character has exceptionally good or bad eyesight, hearing, or a sense of smell, they may have a separating rating for that, just as they do for height and weight.

So what is a rating? It's simply a number: 0 if the character is average, positive if they're higher than average, and negative if they're lower. A positive rating is sometimes called a [**bonus**](#g:bonus), and a negative one is sometimes called a [**penalty**](#g:penalty).

*Gertrude is big and healthy, so she has bonuses for Size and Fitness, but she's not good with her hands, so she has a penalty for Dexterity. Like most elephants she is somewhat near-sighted, which means a penalty for Awareness as well. Her ratings are:*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *SIZ* | *FIT* | *DEX* | *INT* | *AWR* |
| *+3* | *+1* | *-2* | *0* | *-1* |

Every character also has a feature called **Strength** (abbreviated STR) which is the sum of their Size and Fitness ratings: big characters tend to be stronger than small ones, but characters who aren't fit aren't as strong as characters who are.

*Gertrude's strength is +4. Her cousin Norwin has a Size of +4 (he's bigger than Gertrude) but a Fitness of -2 (he never exercises), so his Strength is only +2.*

## Challenges

A [**challenge**](#g:challenge) is something a character might want to do, like climb a wall or pick a lock. Every challenge has a rating as well: difficult challenges have negative ratings (penalties), while easy challenges have positive ones (bonuses).

If a character tries to do a challenge, her player rolls 3D, totals the results, and then adds their rating and the challenges's rating as well. If the total is 10 or less, they have failed; on 11 or more, they have succeeded.

*Gertrude is trying to take apart the clockwork timer on a small bomb. The challenge's rating is -1 (it's a little bit harder than average) and her Dexterity is -2, so her roll is 3D-3. She rolls 3 dice and gets 5, 4, and 2 for a total of 11; after subtracting 1 for the difficulty and 2 for her poor Dexterity, her total is only 8, so she has failed.*

*Panicking slightly, Gertrude decides to try smashing the timer. The Director decides that the difficulty is 0 (it's neither particularly tough or fairly fragile). Gertrude's Strength is +4, so she needs to get 11 or more or 3D+4. She rolls 3 dice and gets a total of 11 points once again. After adding 4 for her Strength her total is 15, and the delicate clockwork is now so much scrap metal.*

If the total adjustment for a challenge (i.e., the character's rating plus the challenge's difficulty) is positive, and the outcome isn't critical to the game, the Director can decide that the characer gets an [**automatic success**](#g:automatic-success). This rule helps keep the game moving.

*Gertrude wants to lift a crate of chocolates. Gertrude's Strength is +4 and the challenge's difficulty is -1 (the crate is larger than average, but not remarkably so). The total bonus is +3, so the Director decides Gertrude's player can skip the dice roll.*

### Flukes and Fumbles

Sometimes it may seem like a character has no chance at all of doing something, but since *Shapers and Bots* is a story-telling game, there is always hope. If a player rolls 17 or 18 (that is, 5-6-6 or 6-6-6) their character automatically succeeds, but probably not in the way they expected. This is called a [**fluke roll**](#g:fluke).

*Zitter had never even seen a laser pistol sixty seconds ago, but as the deranged one-eyed crocodile pirate charges toward her, she picks up the one she just found and frantically starts pushing buttons. The Director decides that finding the right combination of buttons has a rating of -10. Zitter rolls three xies: somehow, her fumbling fingers found the right buttons and she put a neat hole through the surprised crocodile.*

*A moment later, another crocodile pirate comes around the corner, sword in hand. Zitter rolls again and gets a score of 17. The Director rules that her lucky shot has gone wild and brought a branch crashing down between her and the angry pirate.*

Fluke rolls work in reverse as well, because it's always possible for something to go wrong. If a player rolls a total of 3 or 4 (that is, 1-1-1 or 2-2-2) they automatically fail at whatever they were trying to do in some hilarious, embarrassing, or fatal way. This is called a [**fumble**](#g:fumble).

*Another day, another angry crocodile pirate… Zitter thinks she has figured out how to use her laser pistol, but when she takes a shot, her player rolls a total of 3 points. "Self-destruct initiated", the Director says in a mechanical voice. "Ten… nine… eight…"*

## Contests

A situation in which one character is trying to out-do another is called a [**contest**](#g:contest). In this case, both players roll dice and add their ratings, and whoever has the higher score wins. If there is a tie, the Director rules on whether the contest continues or whether something unusual happened.

*Gertrude and Norwin are arm-wrestling. Gertrude rolls 8; her Strength is +4, so her score is 12. Norwin's Strength is +2; he rolls 10, giving him a score of 12 as well, so the Director decides that they are still locked in combat. When they re-roll, they both get 11's. After adding their Strengths, Gertrude's score is higher, so she wins.*

## Combat

Once a fight starts, everything happens in turns that are 5 seconds long in game time. In each turn, characters act in order of Fitness, with highest Fitness going first. If two or more characters are tied, use a contest once at the start of the fight to see who goes first for the duration of that fight.

In their turn, a character can take two actions. Each of the following counts as one action:

* Attack someone.
* Defend against an attack (see below).
* Pick something up. (Dropping something doesn't count as an action.)
* Draw a weapon.
* Run from one place to another (see below).

Characters can only attack once per turn, even though they have two actions.

Reloading a weapon counts as one or more actions depending on the type of weapon. For example, getting another arrow from a quiver counts as one action (which means archers can fire one shot per turn, since shooting counts as their other action). Reloading a crossbow, on the other hand, requires several actions, and so takes several turns.

For each attack, the attacker declares who or what they are attacking, and the target says whether they are going to use one of their actions for defense. If the defender *isn't* using an action for defense, the attacker succeeds if they win a regular roll. If the defender *is* using an action for defense, the attack succeeds if the attacker makes their roll *and* the defender misses a roll. This is different from a regular contest roll: the attacker doesn't have to beat the defender's roll—the attacker has to succeed and the defender has to fail.

*Yoshi has a rating of +3 for fencing and her opponent Lin has a rating of +1. Yoshi attacks first and rolls a total of 6. Even with her +3 bonus, that's only 9, so she has missed and Lin doesn't need to roll for defense.*

*Now it's Lin's turn. She rolls a total of 11; adding her bonus of +1 gives her 12, so she has hit. Yoshi rolls 10; adding her bonus gives 13, so she has parried the blow.*

*Yoshi attacks again in the next turn. This time she rolls 12, for a total of 15—a hit! Lin rolls 5, for a measly total of 6: her parry has failed, and she has been hit.*

There are a few special cases:

1. If an attack is a complete surprise, the defender doesn't get a defense roll.
2. If the target hasn't had their turn yet, their defense uses up an action for that turn (i.e., if they defend themselves against an attack, they can only use one other action when their turn comes around).
3. If the target has already used all of their actions, they can borrow an action from their next turn to use for defense.

Flukes and fumbles count when attacking and defending: a fluke attack always succeeds, while a fumble always misses. (And yes, if someone gets a fluke when attacking and their opponent gets a fluke when defending, the defense has succeeded.)

## Health and Injury

Every character starts the adventure with a number of [**health points**](#g:health-point) (HP) equal to STR+3. (If a character's Strength is -3 or less, they still get 1 HP.) Every time a character is injured, their character must win a challenge roll with their HP *before* the injury as a bonus and the amount of the damage as a penalty. If they fail the roll, they have been knocked out. Regardless of the roll's outcome, they always lose that many HP. A character dies when their HP goes negative (so someone with a Strength of -3 or less won't survive a single hit).

*Alouenne is a kangaroo with a Strength of +2, so she has 5 HP. As the tunnel collapses around her, she is hit by a falling rock that does 1 point of damage. She needs to win a roll with a +4 bonus to stay conscious: +5 for her HP before the hit, and -1 for the damage. She rolls 9 on 3D, giving her a score of 13. She has won her roll, but is now down to 4 HP: remember, even if the character wins their roll, they still take damage.*

*A second, larger piece of rock now drops on her head and does 2 points of damage. She needs to win a roll with a +2 bonus; she rolls 7 for a score of 9, so she fails and is knocked unconscious. She is also now down to 2 HP.*

*The rocks keep falling. The next one to hit her does another 2 points of damage, bringing her down to 0 HP. One more rock and Alouenne will be out of the game…*

*Pietro is trapped in the same tunnel. He is already down to 3 HP after a previous fight, and a particularly big rock lands on him. It does 4 points of damage, so Pietro is a goner.*

### Healing

Someone who is knocked unconscious can try to regain consciousness by winning a challenge roll with no bonuses. It's up to the Director to decide how often they get to do this.

*While Gertrude is going through Alouenne's gear to see if she has anything worth stealing, Alouenne's player rolls three dice and gets 13, which is enough for her to regain consciousness. Quietly, she reaches for her dagger…*

## Weapons

Weapons do damage (that's kind of the point), and bigger weapons do more damage than little ones. To find out how much damage a weapon has done, the attacker rolls the number of dice shown below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Weapon** | **Dice** | **Description** |
| Punch | 1 | Or kick, or headbutt, or thrown rock |
| Small | 2 | Knife or arrow (or punch or from someone with a black belt) |
| Medium | 3 | Sword, spear, ax |
| Large | 4 | Two-handed sword, Bertha the Big Spiked Club |

Each 4, 5, or 6 counts as 1 point of damage (unless the target is wearing armor, as discussed below).

*Zephrod hits Gertrude with her ax. She rolls 3 dice and gets 4, 2, and 5, for 2 points of damage. Gertrude counter-attacks with her knife and also hits. She rolls 2 dice and gets 1 and 2: she has given Zephrod a superficial cut but hasn't done any real damage.*

## Armor

Armor protects against damage. If someone is wearing Light Armor, their attacker must roll a 5 or 6 on each die to do damage. If they are wearing Heavy Armor, their attacker must roll a 6 for damage.

*Suppose Gertrude had been wearing Light Armor in the fight above. When Zephrod rolled 4, 2, and 5, she would have done 1 point of damage rather than 2, because only the roll of 5 would have counted. If she had been wearing Heavy Armor she would have taken no damage at all.*

## Species

Every living character belongs to a [**species**](#g:species). They all stand upright, speak, and have hands, but they also have fur (or feathers) and their feet look like animals' feet. Different species have different default values for the seven features, which are shown below.

All animals are either vegetarian or omnivores; those marked as "carnivorous" simply have a particularly strong liking for meat. Eating intelligent animals is considered cannibalism.

### Bear

Bears are deeply spiritual animals, apt to halt in the middle of combat and ask, "But truly, what is the point of such strife?" Of course, if you were this big, you could afford to be philosophical too.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SIZ | FIT | DEX | INT | AWR |
| +2 | 0 | -2 | 0 | -1 |

* Fur counts as Light Armor (but without any attack penalty).
* Claws and bite count as small weapons.

### Bison

Bison are rarely found on their own—in fact, most suffer from acute isolophobia (a fear of being alone). They are naturally protective of weak members of their "herd", which can include their workmates, neighbors, and fellow adventurers.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SIZ | FIT | DEX | INT | AWR |
| +2 | 0 | -4 | 0 | 0 |

* Thick hide counts as Light Armor (but without any attack penalty).
* Horns count as small weapons.

### Crocodile

Crocodiles are slow moving, except when they're not, and incredibly patient—particularly when it comes to their favorite sport: revenge.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SIZ | FIT | DEX | INT | AWR |
| 0 | 0 | -2 | -1 | 0 |

* Carnivorous.
* Thick hide counts as Light Armor.
* Can hold their breath for 15 minutes.

### Crow

Crows are the fast-talking deal-makers of the animal world. Their feathered appendages make them somewhat clumsy, and they are fascinated by shiny objects. Crows cannot fly by default but are able to learn.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SIZ | FIT | DEX | INT | AWR |
| -4 | +2 | -2 | +2 | +1 |

### Komodo

These lizard people are most at home in the depths of the jungle, and are fiercely protective of the nesting grounds where they incubate their eggs. If they are shapers, they start with an ability of -2 rather than -4.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SIZ | FIT | DEX | INT | AWR |
| -1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | +2 |

* Carnivorous.

### Eagle

"As proud as an eagle" is a common saying. Natural aristocrats, eagles are quick to take offense, and their keen eyesight makes them natural guards and scouts. Eagles cannot fly by default but are able to learn.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SIZ | FIT | DEX | INT | AWR |
| -2 | +4 | -2 | 0 | +3 |

* Carnivorous.

### Elephant

Elephants naturally form a matriarchal society: females are in charge of government and business, while most adult males skulk around the sidelines trying to find ways to be useful. Young males often go on quests to try to win glory; they are natural story-tellers and have exceptional memories.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SIZ | FIT | DEX | INT | AWR |
| +3 | 0 | 0 | +2 | -1 |

* Can use their trunk as a clumsy extra hand (though it's rude to do so in company).

### Fox

As cunning as crows, foxes are nimble-fingered, quick-witted, and always looking for their next deal.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SIZ | FIT | DEX | INT | AWR |
| -2 | 0 | +2 | +2 | 0 |

* Carnivorous.

### Goat

Goats are completely average in every way except for their horns. (Telling them this is a good way to upset them.)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SIZ | FIT | DEX | INT | AWR |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

### Kangaroo

Kangaroos are the happy-go-lucky clowns of the animal world. Townies often dye their tails in bright colors; those who live in the wild will camouflage theirs instead.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SIZ | FIT | DEX | INT | AWR |
| 0 | +2 | 0 | -1 | 0 |

### Lion

Like elephants, lions form matriarchal societies, and their young males often go adventuring to try to win enough glory to attract female attention.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SIZ | FIT | DEX | INT | AWR |
| 0 | +2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

* Carnivorous.

### Monkey

Smart, curious, and mechanically minded, monkeys are constantly tinkering with gadgets (or breaking them). They are often less respectful of robots' personal space than they should be.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SIZ | FIT | DEX | INT | AWR |
| -2 | 0 | +4 | +2 | 0 |

* Can use their tails as a clumsy third hand.

### Parrot

The only birds still capable of actually flying, parrots are also gifted mimics.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SIZ | FIT | DEX | INT | AWR |
| -4 | +4 | -2 | 0 | 0 |

### Rabbit

It's easy to make fun of rabbits' small size and near-sightedness, but nobody who has ever seen a fluffle of rabbits go bersek in battle is likely to do so. Whenever a rabbit is wounded, it loses control on a roll of 4, 5, or 6 on one die. After that, it gets an extra action each round which it *must* use for attacking and gains +2 on all attack rolls, but does not defend itself.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SIZ | FIT | DEX | INT | AWR |
| -3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | +1 |

### Raccoon

Raccoons are the only competition monkeys have for the title "most likely to get themselves into trouble". They are very inquisitive, but sometimes have trouble concentrating on—hey look, a butterfly!

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SIZ | FIT | DEX | INT | AWR |
| -3 | 0 | +4 | +2 | 0 |

### Rhino

They are not the largest animals, but they are certainly the grumpiest. Like bison (the only other animals they have much time for) they prefer to stay with their herd, and are fiercely protective of its weaker members.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SIZ | FIT | DEX | INT | AWR |
| +3 | +2 | -4 | 0 | -2 |

* They can charge their enemies (treat their horn like a small weapon).
* Their sense of smell is +1, not -2.

### Sloth

Slow-moving but quick-witted, sloths are sages and healers. Some trim their long claws to improve their Dexterity, but most accept their lot.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SIZ | FIT | DEX | INT | AWR |
| 0 | 0 | -2 | +4 | 0 |

* If a Sloth is a shaper, they start with a -2 rating instead of -4.

### Tiger

As proud as eagles, tigers are scornful of creatures that live in herds or packs, including lions—*especially* lions.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SIZ | FIT | DEX | INT | AWR |
| 0 | +2 | 0 | 0 | +1 |

* Carnivorous.

### Turtle

Slow-moving, short-sighted, and natural shapers: their ability starts at -2 rather than -4.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SIZ | FIT | DEX | INT | AWR |
| -2 | -2 | +2 | +2 | -3 |

* Shell counts as Heavy Armor.
* Can hold their breath for 15 minutes.

### Wolf

Fast, strong, and brave, wolves usually travel in packs of half a dozen, and their alphas are often community leaders.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SIZ | FIT | DEX | INT | AWR |
| 0 | +2 | 0 | 0 | +1 |

* Carnivorous.

### Zebra

Zebras have a remarkable ability to hide themselves, which is described below under "Skills".

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SIZ | FIT | DEX | INT | AWR |
| -1 | 0 | -2 | 0 | 0 |

## Customizing Characters

Animals of the same species can be quite different from one another. When a player creates a character, she can spend a total of 5 points raising the character's ratings. She can do this by adding 2 points to two ratings and 1 point to a third, or by adding 3 points to one rating and 1 each to two others, and so on, so long as she doesn't raise any rating by more than 3 points.

Players can get extra points to distribute by *lowering* ratings as well: they may lower any rating by 1 or 2 points, so long as the total lowered is no more than 3 points.

*Garree is a 15-year-old goat. Her default rating is zero for everything, but her player decides to lower her Size by 1 point and to distribute 6 points evenly across Fitness, Dexterity, and Intellect:*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *SIZ* | *FIT* | *DEX* | *INT* | *AWR* |
| *-1* | *+2* | *+2* | *+2* | *0* |

*The same player makes different decisions for Garree's brother Gruff. His Awareness is reduced 2 points and his Intellect by 1 point, which gives him 8 points to distribute to other features.*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *SIZ* | *FIT* | *DEX* | *INT* | *AWR* |
| *+3* | *+3* | *+2* | *-1* | *-2* |

### Skills

Every character has [**skills**](#g:skill). Some are automatic: for example, almost everyone can try to throw a rock. Others are not: trust me, nobody can play the oboe if they've never seen one before.

Just like features, skills have ratings. Positive ratings mean that characters are better than average. negative ratings mean that they find even simple tasks difficult. Some common skills are listed below, along with a character's initial rating:

* If the initial rating is "None", the character has no initial ability at all, and must rely on fluke rolls to accomplish tasks.
* If a number is given, the character starts with that rating.
* If a feature is given, the character's initial rating in the skill is equal to their rating for that feature. For example, every character's initial rating for Brawling is equal to their Fitness.
* If a formula is given, their initial rating is whatever the formula calculates. For example, if a Fox has a Size of -2 and a Fitness of +1, their initial rating for Acrobatics is +3, which is Fitness *minus* Size. (Being small is an advantage when doing flips and walking a tightrope.)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Skill** | **Rating** | **Explanation** |
| Acrobatics | FIT - SIZ | walking a tightrope, doing a somersault, etc. |
| Animal Handling | INT | calming a frightened horse or an angry cat |
| Boating | -3 | managing a small boat or canoe |
| **Brawling** | STR | hand-to-hand combat without weapons |
| Camouflage | -3 | disguising objects |
| Camping | -3 | setting up a tent and making a fire |
| Charisma | INT | persuading people, fooling them, and acting |
| **Climbing** | FIT - SIZ | walls, ropes, and what-not |
| Computers | None | handling anything with a digital brain |
| Dancing | FIT | being graceful on the dance floor |
| Driving | None | wagons and motorized vehicles alike |
| Escapology | DEX | getting out of ropes or handcuffs |
| Farming | -3 | growing food |
| First Aid | -3 | handling broken bones and wounds |
| Gambling | 0 | cards, dice, and bluffing |
| **Hiding** | INT - SIZ | not being noticed when not moving |
| Hypnotism | None | putting people into a trance |
| Mechanics | None | making and fixing things, picking locks |
| Medicine | None | handling disease and infection; see First Aid |
| Navigation | None | finding your way by the stars and other signs |
| Picking Pockets | DEX - 3 | taking things without being noticed |
| Riding | FIT | bicycles and horses |
| Sailing | -5 | handling a large ship |
| Singing | HER - 3 | making music with the voice |
| Skating | FIT - 3 | handling yourself on metal runners |
| Skiing | FIT - 3 | handling yourself on lengths of wood |
| Stage Magic | None | juggling, sleight of hand, etc |
| **Stealth** | FIT - SIZ | moving without or being noticed |
| **Swimming** | STR - 3 | keeping your head above water |
| **Throwing** | FIT | how far and how accurately |
| Tracking | AWR | or the best of their sight or smell |
| Trapping | -5 | making traps that work |
| Tunnelling | -3 | digging tunnels that don't collapse |
| Ventriloquism | None | throwing your voice |

It's worth figuring out a character's skill at the skills marked in **bold**, since they come up so often in adventures. Note that some skills like Climbing, Hiding, and Stealth get *better* if the character is *smaller*. For example, if a character's Fitness is +2 and their Size is +1, their Stealth is +1, but if their Size is -1, their Stealth is +3.

*Garree's features are:*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *SIZ* | *FIT* | *DEX* | *INT* | *AWR* |
| *-1* | *+2* | *+2* | *+2* | *0* |

*so her initial ratings for the commonly-used skills are:*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Brawling* | *+1* | *Stealth* | *+3* |
| *Climbing* | *+3* | *Swimming* | *-2* |
| *Hiding* | *+3* | *Throwing* | *+2* |

### Skill Categories

These four "skills" are actually categories. Specialties within each must be mastered separately:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Skill** | **Rating** | **Explanation** |
| Craft | None | sewing, woodwork, baking, metalwork, etc. |
| Fine Art | None | sculpture, drawing, painting, music, etc. |
| Lore | None | history, a language, mathematics, etc. |
| Weapon | FIT - 5 | sword, spear, pistol, bow, etc. |

### Choosing Skills

When a player is creating a character, she can spend INT+10 points improving the character's skills. For example, if a character has an INT of +3, they have 13 points to spend on raising skills. If their INT is -2, on the other hand, they only have 8 points to spend on skills (they're a slower learner).

* Raising a skill from None to -4 costs 1 point.
* Each raise thereafter costs 1 point, up to an increase to +3.
* Every raise after +3 costs 2 points.

*Garree's features are:*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *SIZ* | *FIT* | *DEX* | *INT* | *AWR* |
| *-1* | *+2* | *+2* | *+2* | *0* |

*so she has 12 points to spend on her initial skills. Her adjusted ratings for the common skills, and her ratings for other skills her player has chosen, are:*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Skill*** | ***Initial*** | ***Points*** | ***Final*** |
| *Brawling* | *+1* | *2* | *+3* |
| *Climbing* | *+2* | *1* | *+3* |
| *Hiding* | *+2* | *1* | *+3* |
| *Stealth* | *+2* | *3* | *+4* |
| *Swimming* | *-3* |  |  |
| *Throwing* | *+1* |  |  |
| *Bow* | *-4* | *3* | *-2* |
| *First Aid* | *-3* | *2* | *-1* |

The Director may allow players to choose Skills that are not in the master list. For example, piloting a hot air balloon is different enough from Boating and Driving that the Director may decide it's a skill in its own right.

### Leveling Up

After each adventure, the Director may allow a player to raise a skill they used in that adventure by one level. A player may also find a teacher to help them learn a new skill. It is usually pretty easy to find someone who can teach the lower levels of common skills, though lessons may come at a price. Finding someone who can teach a character how to raise a skill beyond +5 can be a quest in its own right.

### Species Skills

* **Crocodiles** and **Turtles** start with a Swimming skill of 0.
* **Kangaroos** have a natural Jumping skill of 0, and automatically get +1 on Brawling (they're great natural boxers).
* **Parrots** start with a Flying skill of 0. **Crows** and **Eagles** start with None, but can raise it using the usual rules.
* **Parrots** also have a starting level of -3 in Ventriloquism.
* **Sloths** have a "sixth sense" that warns them of danger. (It's hard to imagine how they'd survive without it.) Their initial rating is -3, and they can improve it with practice.
* When **Zebras** are standing still, they can change color from black-and-white stripes to almost anything else in order to blend into their surroundings. This gives them an extra +2 Hiding at no cost.

## Shaping

A small number of animal characters have psychic powers that let them control or [**shape**](#g:shaping) the world with their mind. Characters who can shape typically start with a rating of -4, which improves with practice and training. The six known kinds of shaping are:

* **Earth**: dirt and stone. Very experienced earth shapers can also shape metal.
* **Air**: wind and sound.
* **Light**: create (silent) illusions and wrap themselves in shadows.
* **Water**: in its liquid form. Very experienced shapers can also shape ice.
* **Luck**: increase or decrease the chance of something happening.
* **Time**: slow things down or speed things up.

The Director decides case by case how hard it is to shape something. As a guide:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Shaping** | **Easy Task (no penalty)** | **Hard Task (-3 penalty)** |
| Earth | Slide a pebble across a table | Open a hand-sized hole in a brick wall |
| Air | Puff of air to blow out a candle | Gust of wind to knock someone over |
| Light | Dim light to read by | Illusion of a tree |
| Water | Slosh water around in a cup | Wave capable of swamping a canoe |
| Luck | Increase next roll by 1 point | Lower enemy's roll by 3 points |
| Time | Take initiative in combat round | Four actions in one combat round |

These bonuses and penalties assume that the shaper is concentrating hard and doing nothing else.

*Larrapin is an air shaper. Before her grandfather passed away, he taught her what little he knew, so her score is -2 instead of the default -4. She needs to distract some guards, so she concentrates hard. Her player rolls 14, giving her a score of 12. The guards hear a whispering voice somewhere in the bushes and go to investigate it, giving Larrapin a chance to sneak into the armory.*

Note that:

* It is *extremely* rare for someone to be able to do more than one kind of shaping.
* Using water shaping to control a living creature is extremely difficult and also a serious crime.
* Nobody can stop time or reverse it, and nobody can see the future (though unscrupulous time shapers sometimes pretend that they can).

## Bots

The Makers built bots to do everything from cleaning floors to mining the ocean floor. Since they disappeared, the bots have repaired themselves however they can to keep themselves going, and made new bots whenever they can find the right parts. The result is that no two bots look or think exactly alike. One might have six short legs and a pair of mis-matched claws for arms, while another might use two rotor fans to fly, but have only a single slender manipulator to pick things up.

Like living characters, bots start with 0 ratings for Size, Fitness, Dexterity, and Intellect. A bot with low fitness is probably rusty or missing parts, while one with high fitness looks brand new (and will therefore be a target for other bots in need of parts).

Bots' Awareness is also 0 by default, but only a few bots have any sense of smell. (Most think smell is gross and wish living creatures wouldn’t talk about it so much.)

Bots naturally have Light Armor.

By default, every robot character has either tracks, wheels, or legs to move with, two arms (which don't have to match), cameras, a microphone (for hearing), and a speaker (for communicating). The player can then give it two features from the list below, *or* three features as long as it takes a penalty from the second list.

### Bot Features

* **Accelerator**: can move very quickly for brief periods.
* **Arm**: each extra arm counts as one feature.
* **Armor**: Light Armor counts as one feature, Heavy Armor counts as two.
* **Camouflage**: hard to see (though jungle camouflage is pretty noticeable in the desert).
* **Cart**: some kind of large bin to carry things in.
* **Coldproof**: able to function in extreme cold.
* **Cutting laser**: counts as a small weapon but drains power quickly.
* **Display screen**: useful for displaying maps and pictures as well as communicating.
* **Drill**: can be small or large.
* **Electromagnet**: for picking things up (such as armored opponents).
* **Extensible arm**: good for reaching into difficult places.
* **Fireproof**: able to withstand flames.
* **Flotation**: airtanks or some sort of inflatable attachment.
* **Furnace**: allows the bot to run on wood or alcohol.
* **Gas bag**: when inflated, allows the bot to fly.
* **Grapple**: a hook on a winch.
* **Grinder**: counts as a small weapon.
* **Heavy equipment**: a bulldozer blade, hydraulic jack, or other construction gear.
* **Legs**: additional ones.
* **Liquid storage/dispenser**: a spray and a bottle.
* **Microphone**: super-sensitive hearing.
* **Power leech**: can drain energy from other bots.
* **Powered flight**: a rotor or wings and a propellor. All drain power very quickly.
* **Radio**: for long-range communication with other. Does not work underground or under water.
* **Sawblade**: counts as a small weapon.
* **Searchlight**: useful at night, underground, and for blinding opponents.
* **Solar panels**: fold-out panels for recharging.
* **Submersible**: not just watertight, but capable of "swimming".
* **Speakers**: in addition to the default ones.
* **Tracks**: heavy-duty tank treads (in addition to whatever is chosen by default).
* **Vacuum**: for sucking things up—usually extensible.
* **Wheels**: in addition to the default means of getting around.
* **Windmill**: a retractible wind turbine for generating power.

### Bot Penalties

* **Armless**: no way to pick things up and manipulate them.
* **Blind**: no cameras.
* **Buggy**: will freeze or behave inappropriately under stress (e.g., in combat).
* **Cannot communicate**: no screen or speakers.
* **Conspicuous**: very noticeable (e.g., squeaky, or brightly painted).
* **Deaf**: no microphone.
* **Fragile**: flammable, parts easy to break off, etc.
* **Immobile**: no way to move around on its own.
* **Not waterproof**: and susceptible to shorting out.
* **Obedient**: programmed to follow orders from anyone with a keyword or controller.
* **Slow**: cannot move quickly.
* **Thin-skinned**: no natural armor.
* **Top-heavy**: unable to right itself once turned over.
* **Weak battery**: needs frequent recharging.

## Extras

If an extra is important to the plot—for example, if they are a player character's sidekick—the Director may give extras ratings for two more features:

* **Courage** (CRG): how brave the character is.
* **Honesty** (HON): how likely the character is to tell the truth.

Player characters don't have ratings for these features because being brave and telling the truth (or not) are part of the game.

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## Glossary

**Automatic success**: accomplishing a task without bothering to roll dice.

**Bonus**: a positive rating.

**Challenge**: something difficult that a character wants to do. The result is determined by the sum of three dice plus the character's rating and the challenge's difficulty.

**Character**: an animal or bot in the game.

**Contest**: a situation in which success depends on beating another character's dice roll (plus appropriate ratings).

**Damage dice**: rolled to determine how much damage a weapon does. Each die does 1 point of damage on a roll of 4, 5, or 6 unless the target is wearing armor.

**Difficulty**: how hard a challenge is. The difficulty determines the target for a challenge roll.

**Director**: the person running the game.

**Extra**: a character played by the Director.

**Feature**: an intrinsic characteristic such as fitness or dexterity.

**Fluke**: a roll of 17 or 18 (automatic success).

**Fumble**: a roll of 3 or 4 (automatic failure).

**Health point**: how much damage a character can take.

**Heavy armor**: provides two points of protection against each damage die.

**Light armor:** provides one point of protection against each damage die.

**Penalty**: a negative rating.

**Player**: someone who is playing the part of a character in the game.

**Rating**: a bonus or penalty for a character's feature or a challenge's difficulty.

**Shaping**: the psychic ability to control one of the six elements.

**Skill**: a character's ability to do something.

**Species**: a kind of intelligent living character.