

STAR WARS EDGE OF THE EMPIRE



NEW GAME MASTER GUIDE

BY TIMEQUAKE

**STAR
WARS**
ROLEPLAYING

CREDITS

WRITTEN BY

Timequake

LAYOUT

robus

COVER IMAGE

Battle of Jakku Concept Art by Dylan-Kowalski
<http://dylan-kowalski.deviantart.com/>

INSIDE IMAGE

Disney/Lucasfilm

GRAPHICS

Fantasy Flight Games



NEW GAME MASTER GUIDE

"I've been GMing FFG Star Wars for a few years now, other games since I could toss a d20, and I have the death sentence on twelve systems."

—Timequake

INTRODUCTION

I've gotten enough experience (and I've garnered requisite interest) for a guide to help GMs acclimatize to this system and get started running games. I'll cover what I see as the biggest pitfalls GMing, some tips to help out with immersion, and some more in-depth tactics for writing content. Hopefully there'll be helpful thoughts both for seasoned RPG players and utter newbies.

DISCLAIMERS

I use DM and GM interchangeably. I'm a D&D boy. Also, these are all personal preferences. My group is interested in deep-immersion roleplaying, but that's no reason to sacrifice a

firm command of the rules -- in fact, it necessitates it. Hopefully, this is useful for groups and GMs of many playstyles (though it might not be very pertinent to the farcical one-off style of GMing). This is also not specific to any one of the three core books; it's broad enough to be useful for all of them. Finally, this is intended to be supplementary to the released rules and GMing sections of the core books. Please read them. It is oh!, so invaluable to do so. I'm happy to elaborate on anything here, but I do reference mechanics a lot.

Let's get started.

PART I

DESIGNING THE GAME

PLANNING A CAMPAIGN

Let's begin with some lingo: Sessions refer to single group meetings. Adventures are slightly larger stories that usually span multiple sessions. Campaigns are multiple-adventure spanning stories that involve recurring allies, villains, plot threads, and, of course, PCs. To extend the analogy, a session might be the Battle of Hoth, an adventure The Empire Strikes Back, and a campaign might be the Original Trilogy. I realize that this might not align perfectly with FFG's definitions, but this is the scale I'd like to use.

SO, HOW DOES ONE PLAN A CAMPAIGN?

You don't. Seem contradictory? Let me explain...

Being set in one of the most grand, romantic fictional realms of all time, and given the fact that we have a soon-to-be-9-part saga from which to draw inspiration, it is pretty dang tempting to try and craft a huge, sweeping tale of your own. And that's all well and good in theory -- sometimes even in practice. But for the majority of you, it is a tactic that will doom you in the long run. There are a few reasons why:

It will take ages to finish. Once you have it in your head that your group is going to embark on a galaxy-spanning escapade on the scale of the movies, complete with A-plots, B-plots, hexadecimally-ordered-plots, big villains, small villains, loyal allies, traitors, a few emotional deaths, and lasting implications for the galaxy, you'll find yourself writing a novel. But let's do the (contrived) math here. If you meet once a week for, say, 4 hours, and you've got a campaign the size of a Tibanna gas refinery with 6 episodes each with 10 sessions of brilliantly planned gibberish, chances are that 2.5 of your players will die of old age in the process. In all seriousness, you cannot hope to finish something this grand in scope. There's not enough time.

IT WILL GET BORING

It may take you getting three sessions into your lesser-villain spinoff mashup adventure to realize this, but the players are going to get bored. Likely, so will you. There's impossibly little variety in plodding your way through a labyrinth of intrigue and rubbish. Especially if you've got one villain all the way through, the players are going to get tired of the buildup to the climax you've been planning, and they're going to stop caring about it. It's just the way of things. You can't expect people to stay interested in a plotline you made before you even knew the characters.

IT WILL FALL APART

The real problem here is that all roleplaying games are attractive due in part to their dynamic nature. You never know what'll happen next, and, of course, anything can happen

next. Attempting to force your players to adhere to a grand scheme suddenly robs them of any agency in their characters' futures. If you've got it all planned out from the start, then why are they even playing it? Why isn't this just a novel, anyways? Why shouldn't they try to break your world and derail your plotlines and kill your precious NPCs?

A critical but pragmatic assessment, to be sure. But let's be clear here: I'm all for campaigns. I love campaigns. I love having a cast of familiar characters that actually grow over the course of several adventures. I love large stories.

But you'll never get that if you try to plan everything beforehand.

LET THE PLAYERS GUIDE

So, I suppose it's more accurate for me to tell you to think big and build epic stories as long as you let the players guide the campaign.

This way, the players have all of the freedom they want, but, suddenly, their old friend comes back with a new mission, and the enemy they despise so is back at it, causing trouble. The characters have vendettas, histories, and intricate relationships, all without the help of a pre-planned falsities. Additionally, you have the freedom to tailor-make your campaign to the players' interests. If the sneaking-into-an-Imperial-aristocratic-party-in-disguise session was the highlight of your adventure, heighten that aspect of play for the future! The players will thank you for it, and you'll have a better idea of how your players will react to certain situations.

Again, planning for a larger goal towards which the characters are making progress is good, especially if they're motivated and into it. Villains work well with ridiculously elaborate plots. Just don't let it take away from what's happening at the table. That's the most important thing.

Alright, so I've beaten you over the head with that. You get the point -- don't make a detailed plan and try and get your players to stick to it. But one of the best parts of the game is bringing back old things. It gives your universe consistency, continuity, and familiarity. The players can visit an old bartender from years ago and find that he's renovated the cantina. Woo-hoo! Your world is consistent and dynamic. What a pro. We love our GM. Of course he can borrow some cash.

It's all a process.

DESIGNING AN ADVENTURE

This section will be a bit more practical. Designing an adventure is something that'll probably take some practice to perfect, but it's key to having a campaign with forward momentum.

Let's return to the analogy of an adventure as a Star Wars movie. Rarely will it need more than three or four acts, and you don't want it to drag on. Keep referring back to this if you're questioning the length of the film.

The essentials:

A GOAL

Make sure that the characters have a clear goal ahead of them. You want it to be clear what they're gunning for. It can be good to have a nuanced plot, but any story will suffer from an obfuscated goal. As a rule of thumb, you should be able to summarize the goal of the adventure in one sentence. For instance: "Fend off the Imperial ground assault long enough for the transport ships to clear the system." "Acquire the plans to the Imperial superweapon." "Kill the Sith Lord." You can (and should) establish sub-goals from there, but they all need to get you a bit closer to achieving the ultimate one. Now, quick disclaimer: you can delay revealing the true goal of the adventure for a session or two. Maybe they investigate a slaving ring and discover that it was actually part of a larger criminal operation. This is alright. Just don't put it off for too long. You want achieving the goal really to pay off in the end.

A CAST!

No adventure ever will ever be ever a ever success ever without good characters. Ever. Allies, enemies, and (most interestingly) what's in between them. You should probably have a main villain or set of villains. Something like 'The Exchange' or 'The Empire' is too broad to give the players any sort of emotional stake in the action. If the Empire has the secret plans, yeah, fine. But if the increasingly-volatile director of the project has hidden them in a massive data vault? That's good. Even better, the director has history with the players or their organization. If there isn't history, make some. Generally, the final fight with the villain shouldn't be the first time they're seeing him/her/it. Beyond villains, include some allies. It's always nice to have somebody running logistics for the group, gathering info and doing the nitty-gritty work that will allow the players to do the exciting stuff. If you can, though, give them a distinctive voice, a cool piece of backstory, and some depth. If the players care about keeping their friends alive, it'll encourage more cautious and realistic play. Finally, get some characters with no clear-cut moral conscience or allegiance. A henchman who can be bribed. An ally who just might be an Imperial informant. An ally who's increasingly protective of a secret possession. This'll help give your story some variety. See **Designing Characters** sidebar.

A TWIST!

The plot doesn't need to be complicated. There's truly nothing wrong with needing to kill an Imperial officer for an adventure, and spending a few sessions gathering supplies

DESIGNING CHARACTERS

As for designing characters, there's some information in the core books, and I could write endlessly about it. For now, I'll say this: take inspiration from characters from books or cinema or anything, and steal relentlessly. It can be really difficult to come up with something new for a character, but if you watch the pros do it, sooner or later you'll get the hang of it. On a very basic level, give characters a distinctive voice and at least one distinctive trait if you want them to stand out. You never know who your players will latch on to.

you'll need for the operation. But you might want to consider adding one plot twist -- perhaps that's too grand a term -- one unexpected element that'll spice up the game. Maybe some equipment fails, or the enemy has reinforcements, or there was a mole in your ranks. Whatever it is, it'll make things a whole lot more interesting and give the group a greater sense of achievement at the end from overcoming some unforeseen adversity. Think back to the movies if you need ideas. Though you don't need an 'I am your father'-level twist, the fact that the Empire knew the Alliance was coming in Return of the Jedi certainly raised the stakes of the final act of the film. The Alliance didn't see it coming, and it didn't change the goal, but it definitely threw up some extra barriers.

SOME TREASURE!

Yarr! Seriously, though, unless you're GMing a group of moral paragons who are okay with risking their lives for something as vague as 'the greater good', you need a reward for the group. Nothing wrong with credits, especially if it's a bounty. Maybe they'll get their hands on some new tech. Maybe they'll get revenge on a nemesis or bolster their reputations. You can even have it be a matter of necessity -- what'll happen if they don't succeed. Combining that with another reward is especially effective. Make the reward just as clear as the goal, for both are going to keep the characters going. Players who really want what's waiting for them on the other side of the rainbow are going to fight harder and smarter for it, which'll give you lots of material and energy around the table.

Now, an oft-recited word of warning: do not make it too long. Two to five well-designed sessions should be quite enough for an adventure. The game needs to be fast-paced and cinematic, and grinding through too much preamble to the main conceit of the adventure will have similar effects to forcing your characters through an impossibly lengthy campaign. If you're afraid that your villain won't have enough buildup, then you could have him/her/it escape at the end of the adventure, shaken but not stirred, bruised but not beaten. Like I said, the best way to give characters history with a villain is just to play it out. Keep it simple.

DESIGNING A SESSION

Here we go. This is the bread and butter of GMing. Designing a session. Brace yourself for some reading.

In this section, I refer to the minutia and detailing that comprises what actually happens at the table. This means designing encounters, minor NPCs, and the plot details. This section will lend itself best to further division into two sections: Encounters and Plot. As you'll soon discover, I have a lot more to say about Encounters.

ENCOUNTERS

Any time the players encounter (cringe) something that will probably require rolling dice (meaning that it's at least somewhat challenging), you've got an encounter on your hands. Encounters are hands-down the most important part of the game. I don't care if you've got a three-dimensional Oscar-winning calculus-based narrative structure hiding behind the ol' GM screen. If the encounters aren't fun, the game won't be fun. If you master encounters, then... well, get back to that narrative structure thing. That sounds fantastic.

There are a few different kinds of common encounters. By an infinite margin, the most iconic kind of encounter is a combat encounter. That's what you built your characters for, right? Well, sort of. I have a bit of a love-hate relationship with combat encounters. By which I mean that I love them until I have reason to hate them. By and large, you're gonna want to have combat at the most crucial points of the campaign, especially the end. At some point, it's gotta devolve into a riotous shootout. That's crazy fun. But seriously, seriously, seriously, do not let combat encounters be your fallback. The galaxy is not a warzone. Most of the galaxy lives in quiet desperation and subjugation. Look for other options. Another common kind of encounter is the social encounter. These can be wicked fun when executed properly, because chances are somebody in your group's got some ranks in Deception that they're desperate to abuse. Social encounters can be a lot harder to design than combat because they're not a focus of the rules. But that doesn't make them any less important. Negotiating with a baleful Hutt for passage through his turf, talking your way out of arrest by the Empire, or just trying to get information out of someone... these situations are critical to real fun. Your party can't shoot their way out of every situation. The final common kind of encounter would be a skill-based encounter, which is intentionally broad so as to include most things that aren't combat or social. Chase scenes, navigating deadly environments, playing sabaac, and slicing -- these are all excellent ways to spice up the game.

Ideally, your campaign should include some of each. If you're a real wizard, you could make a hybrid encounter. For example, one party member is discreetly slicing through a security door so that another party member can sneak through while the charmer of the party is talking up a horde of angry Gamorreans. This could go any way, but anyone would agree that it's a lot more interesting than 'kill everyone in the room then blow open the door'.

So, let's make a handy-dandy list of things I want to touch on, in no particular order.

DIFFICULTY

This can be something that's tough to manage with an encounter. You've probably read that you should have enemies (I'm going to use that term broadly) that have about the same amount of proficiency dice as the party. That's a pretty shaky metric. In the galaxy, you're going to encounter problems that range from trivially simple to near impossible, and I think encounter difficulty should reflect this to some extent. The intended tension and drama of the encounter should determine the difficulty. Players will get seriously frustrated if every enemy in every encounter is a chore to bring down, or if every encounter requires dipping into limited party resources like Destiny points, healing equipment and other consumables, and wound/strain. One thing that you should keep in mind is how close together your encounters are. Don't give the party a nearly group-wiping boss fight and then expect them to perform at full capacity for a room full of minions. Vary the difficulty of encounters. Additionally, don't confuse 'designing encounters with the group in mind' with 'designing encounters to combat the group'. If a party is unusually proficient in combat, you don't need to amp up the difficulty of every encounter. You shouldn't chuck difficulty and challenge dice out just to make things interesting. It won't. In fact, doing so will demoralize the party. You need to let them shine at least every few encounters, let them slaughter some stormtroopers and show off their Wookiee Marauder brokenness. Then you crush their souls with a social encounter. Heh heh heh...

CIRCUMSTANCE

I will cyber-kick the next GM who puts a fighting encounter in a hallway. Hallways are the death of fun. Honestly, you can't make a hallway bereft of description interesting, no matter what kind of encounter you have. Also avoid deserts, wide-open empty boss chambers, space combat in the middle of nothingness, and anything that you're getting bored trying to picture. Have the party fight whilst balancing and leaping between thin pipes that spurt poison gas over a river of chemical runoff. Have them make Athletics checks every round to maintain their grip on the face of a cliff as they pursue Imperial spies. Have them battle for the attention of the Hutt with a Gungan bubble opera. These will make the encounters so much better. Uh... avoid Gungans, though. You'll thank me later.

ENEMIES

I really hope that you've read this far, because this is something I've struggled with for a long time. It is hard to design interesting enemies. It's also really tempting to jot down a wound/strain/soak threshold, an attack skill, a gun, and call it a day. But something I've realized is that enemies are as interesting as you design them to be. Give your enemies special talents and skills that aren't just pertinent to the encounter, because it'll actually inform how you play them and use them. Also... if you want your players to trust you as a GM, for the love of all that is holy, have consistent stats. It is HARD to recover from one of your players realizing that the enemy would've had to have Yoda-level Discipline to resist such-and-such, or that you're not actually keeping track of enemy wound/strain... and your players will find out. And if they do, then they'll ask themselves why they're keeping meticulous track of their characters if you, the GM, don't have to? Please, just bear this in mind. Keep track of the stats of your enemies. If you build them interestingly, then the group

TIPS FOR CREATING COMPELLING ENEMY NPCS

COOL TALENTS

Give your NPCs cool talents. It'll make things so much better. For example, the Bodyguard talent, which allows an NPC to spend a maneuver and suffer strain to increase the difficulty of attacks against an ally... is AMAZING. I use it all of the time. And it makes sense! Bosses have henchmen. So to prevent a party from bull rushing the baddie from the get-go, the baddie has some protection. That is a completely legal and worthwhile use of the rules. Don't be afraid to use the Adversary talent -- it's quite good -- but, also, if you can find something more distinctive, go for it. For inspiration, just look at the talent trees that correspond with the NPC's type, but don't be afraid to redesign/repurpose aspects of them to suit you better. You don't have to keep track of XP; you don't have to build your NPCs according to PC rules. But talents are a surefire way to make them more interesting and competent.

VARIETY

Give groups of competent NPCs variety. If you've got a gang of criminals against the party, try not to give them all Generic Blaster Rifle Number One. It drags down the encounter. Instead, give one of them a vibro-ax, one of them a pair of pistols, let one of them have been caught unawares and be unarmed, etc. This'll strengthen the tactical aspect of combat. An exception would be minion swarms. They're intended to be in the background.

SKILLED

Have skilled NPCs. Make one of them a medic and one of them a mechanic. There's no reason an NPC group can't be as diverse as a PC party.

MINION SWARMS

This is a lovely mechanic. You can find it on page 400 of the Edge book. Read it. Read it again. Memorize it. Feed it. Love it. And, most importantly, USE IT. Nobody wants to fight individual stormtroopers. That's mind-bogglingly dull. Instead, have a minion swarm surrounding an officer who's barking commands as some knife-wielding mercenaries are creeping up from behind.

BOSS BATTLES

Man, oh, man. I could write another guide just on this. Maybe I will one day. But I'll try to keep this brief. Before you set a boss battle in the empty temple inner chamber with the Sith Lord standing in the center by himself, actually watch some Star Wars battles. I think the quintessential

example is the Vader fight at the end of Empire Strikes Back. Consider this: Luke meets Vader in the carbonite chamber, drives him back... then meets him twice more in completely different environments. Vader doesn't start using the Move power to throw stuff at Luke until the second phase, and he surprise-attacks him before the third (if memory serves).

Multi-phase boss battles are seriously awesome. Don't have your baddie throw out his baddest moves right at the top. Have him wait a bit, feel out the opposition, toy with them, even. You can have him be driven back, only to retreat to another location to gain the upper hand again. And boss battles need cool environments even more than other encounters. You may have designed a seriously cool big bad with some awesome abilities and some narrative climax, but without dynamic, shifting combat, it's going to feel like a grind. One other thing: it's a real shame to see your bad guy get gunned down by a big party of PCs in one round after getting to take just one turn.

There are a few ideas for this. One, in the GM kit, there's an optional rule to introduce an additional bad guy turn at the end of each round. This is cool for hands-on bosses who are going to get up-close and personal and are going to be throwing around a bunch of damage. Another idea is to put a minion swarm nearby, or some guards. The Squad rules (I believe they're in the AoR GM kit/screen) allow swarms of enemies to take damage for the boss. Combine that with some Palpatine-esque royal guards with Bodyguard 3, and you'll find that the group has to be a lot more tactical. Finally, consider the fact that the boss often knows the setting of the encounter better than the players, and could pull some nasty trickses on them if need be.

BACKSTORY

Remember, more than half of enemy building is character building. Jot down some notes about their backstories, motivations, and personalities. Same deal as making interesting NPCs. Make them distinct if they're important.

TROPES

Avoid tropes. The sulky, silent Sith Lord clad in black robes is dull for everybody.

MOTIVATION

Finally, just be aware that enemies aren't always going to fight to the bitter end. Sometimes, they'll want to run away. Play that up when you can, and know which ones are loyal enough to stick around when things get rough.

can start playing more tactically, being able to monitor and speculate about the enemy stats. See **inset** for tips on creating compelling enemies.

GOALS

This can be as simple as 'getting across the room' (try to avoid doing that too much, though). The best encounters, however, have more complex rewards. One example would be to have the enemies have hostages in an situation in which the party needs to steal some codes. Maybe the big bad is also getting antsy and is prepared to make a run for his ship. Now, the party's got to balance a few things: they want to get to the hostages without the baddies hurting them, nabbing the codes from the computer, and stopping the big bad from

getting away. The party will likely need to divide their attention, and this'll make for interesting fights.

SKILLS

This was touched on earlier. Just keep in mind that your party is (ideally) going to have a lot of different players with different skill sets. Though you don't want to be so blatant as to give each player an encounter tailored to their skill(s) of choice, try to avoid a long stretch of fighting encounters for players with non-combat skills. Everyone needs a time to shine, so include complex and nuanced encounters that allow one or more players to be a real asset to the group and actually further the mission.

Whew! Now, let's design an encounter!

SAMPLE ENCOUNTER

PREMISE

A small-time but seasoned spice dealer on Nal Hutta, Mul Guddura, was recently informed that there were some bounty hunters after him. Suspecting his rival, Wonog, Mul hired a crew of mercenaries to act as his bodyguards as he retreated to an abandoned, derelict refinery in the swamps. The party, starting-level, is looking for Mul, not to kill him, but to get information about Mul's history with a recurring enemy of the campaign. The party successfully navigated the dangerous, poisoned swamp, and they've arrived at Mul's refinery. We're going to build the final encounter -- when they find him in the main treatment zone. Little do they know that Wonog has a pair of dangerous hunters that have also located Mul, and they're ready to kill him on sight -- and anyone who gets in the way. Let's get started!

ENVIRONMENT

The treatment zone is a large, long chamber laced with pipes, turbines, ventilation ducts, and large units of machinery, all in great disrepair. Mul has made camp around the control dugout, which offers plenty of cover from long-inoperative computer terminals. Once the party enters the room, Mul will flip on the power grid, causing some of the machinery to churn back to life and spew noxious fumes. The party will need to make Resilience checks to avoid taking setback dice on all actions. Additionally, the fastest way to Mul involves climbing over some of the machine units. If the party elects this option, Athletics and Coordination checks will be required to navigate the facility safely. The party could try and slice into the grid to give themselves advantages, such as dumping chemicals on enemies or using the ventilation system to clear the fumes, but it wouldn't be easy. The GM would now sketch out a map of the room, decide on the range bands of the room (we'll say Mul starts at Long Range).

ENEMIES

Mul Guddura: Mul's a portly Chagrian. His species-specific starting Characteristics are:



so we'll say that he's worked hard to improve his natural sluggishness, but that he's most effective in a brawl. Additionally, his time in the criminal underworld has increased his natural cunning. So, in total:



Now, for skills. We don't need to select a Career, per se, but we'll pick a few relevant skills for him. He'll have Ranged (Light) 2, Brawl 3, Deception 2, Resilience 2 (factoring in his racial benefit), and Skulduggery 2. A real pirate. Finally, we'll select his talents. We'll give him Adversary 1 to reflect the fact that he's been in the business for a while, Feral Strength 2 and Knockdown to reflect his brawling aptitude, and Knowledge Specialization (Underworld) given to him by his race. He's wearing padded armor for 2 additional soak, and wields a heavy blaster pistol. We'll bolster his wound from 14 to 18 by giving him the Toughened 2 talent, keep his soak at 5, and keep his strain at 13.



Finally, Mul is not afraid to run if things go south.

Mul's Pirates: We don't need to focus on these enemies very much. In fact, because they're a pretty generic minion swarm, we're going to use the **Street Tough** (EotE p. 396) adversary for the swarm, giving him 4 pirates. You'd want to add flavor for them just in case. They'll be armed with pistols.

Mul's Pirate Lieutenant: A Twi'lek named Dolnaga. She's the head of the mercenaries, and unlike Mul, she's a good shot with her rifle. She'll be the main reason why the party will want to close the distance quickly. We'll bump her characteristics to:



Ranged (Heavy) 3, Ranged (Light) 2, Skulduggery 2, Negotiate 1, and Deception 2 (again, racial). Adversary 1, Lethal Blows 2, Enduring 1, and Deadly Accuracy (Ranged (Heavy)). She'll use a rifle with a marksman barrel, have a hold-out blaster for emergencies, and wear padded armor for 2 soak. 11 Wound, 4 Soak, 13 strain.

Wonog's Bounty Hunters: These'll be two nasty-looking Trandosians. They will actually end up being the hardest part of this fight, given that their arrival will be unexpected and that they're far more expert than any of Mul's lackeys -- or Mul himself. Here are some stats using the above methods:



Ranged (Heavy) 3, Melee 3, Stealth 2, Brawl 2, Perception 2, Adversary 2, Bodyguard 1, Feral Strength 2, Durable 2, Toughened 1, Grit 2. Dual vibroknives each, a rifle with a

targeting scope each, +2 soak and +1 defense from armor. Wound 18, Soak 6, Strain 14, 1 Melee/Ranged defense. Wonog's hunters will stop at nothing to kill their prey.

SUMMARY

When the party enters, Mul will activate the power grid, forcing each of them to make Average Resilience checks to avoid taking two setbacks on every roll of theirs for the next three rounds. After that, he will order his crew to kill the party. The party will likely approach Mul in the dugout, since they'll take a setback if they try to shoot through the machinery, and it's already Long Range. So they can try to climb directly or take the longer route around. Either way, if things start to go south -- especially if Dolnaga is killed -- Mul will try to make a run for the back entrance. The party could use the barely-operative computer terminals in the dugout to seal him off, but that'd require Mechanics and Computers. Regardless, 4 rounds later, Wonog's hunters arrive, and will shoot indiscriminately at the closest targets as they cleave a path towards Mul.

The interesting nature of this encounter comes from this: Mul is simply afraid of Wonog. If the party can prove that they're not with him through the fray (especially after the hunters have arrived), Mul might call his crew off and help them fight off the hunters. Either way, the encounter will likely be followed by a social encounter in which they interrogate Mul or a skill encounter in which they chase him through the narrow corridors of the inner refinery.

Now, this is a pretty statistical sample. In practice, you'd want to have mapped Mul's character out much more, since he's a central character for the session and probably the adventure. But looking only as far as a single encounter, this would likely be a success.

PLOT

Perhaps you forgot there was another section to come? Don't worry; this one'll be MUCH more brief.

Plot can be defined as everything that happens in between encounters. When designing a session, just keep in mind that the main purpose of plot is to propel the group forward to encounters. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't have them enjoy a good conversation with an ally, or RP with some locals, but you should make sure that you get a few encounters in every session at least, even if they're not combat encounters.

Plot, then, becomes a mechanism for 1) getting the group to encounters and 2) tying together the session. You can develop intrigue, but the bulk of important intrigue should happen in social encounters. It's smart to let the group plan together about upcoming encounters, too. Also, you can help embellish the setting or fill in parts of the story. Remember, though, don't have too much of this. Most groups want to roll some dice. Let 'em.

As far as tying together the session is concerned, just make sure that, before you leave, you end on a note that indicates clearly what progress has been made. Remind everyone about the state of things, the current progress of the main adventure, and the implications for next session.

PART II

RUNNING THE GAME

So, you've designed your session, you know how it ties into the main story, and you're ready to go! Well, sort of. But running the game is also where the real difficulty is introduced -- and also where it'll become clear that your 'preparation' did not prepare you for anything.

Running the game is where your knowledge of the rules, your party, your players, and your own adventures come into play. You'll need to improvise, compromise, and hurriedly pencil in additions, and, hopefully, by the end, something will have gone right. If it doesn't, then, as any GM will tell you, that's alright. In fact, sometimes the players come up with things more interesting than you planned.



Keep the action going. Do that, and you will have succeeded to some degree. Do not let the game grind to a halt over a rules dispute, and don't give up. There is no try. The players will trust you as long as you're confident and they're having fun. And for them to have fun, you've gotta be having fun, too.

Without further ado....

RULES

You've really got to know the rules. It's alright if everyone's new to the game to have a rough start, but as a GM, players will look to you for rulings, and you have to make them quickly and decisively. Generally, if you make a call, take it back quickly and fairly, or just let it reign throughout the session. You don't want to get hung up on rules in the middle of combat. It'll kill the action. Take care to familiarize yourself with player's talents and specializations, too, so that you can help them along as well.

BOOST/SETBACK

Say it with me, kids. 'BOOST! SETBACK! BOOST! SETBACK!' Seriously, you can bust those things out like aspirin and just lob 'em at something to make it more interesting. No lie. This is how you get your players involved. You can reward them for ingenuity and good planning and make them regret charging in unprepared. Few rolls should occur that don't have a boost  and setback  on them. This is also where the game gets cinematic; this is the blending of narrative and rules. Encourage players to describe how they position themselves to get boosts, and don't be afraid to knock them down a peg for overconfidence.

DESTINY POINTS

Use them! Encourage frequent expenditure. Players need points for many of their abilities, so the GM needs to spend them freely. Likewise, it's always a chilling moment when the

GM flips a destiny point... it means things are about to get real. Savor the moment. The destiny pool is there to keep things dramatic and tense. Don't ignore it -- it'll augment your plot. Also, nobody likes it when the GM just lets the players run out of points and then doesn't use any himself. You really shouldn't let all of the tokens be dark unless there's some reason for the Dark Side to be endlessly prevailing at the moment.

BEWARE THE GMPC

For those of you who know not to what I refer, the GMPC (Game Master Player Character) is a character that tags along with the party and acts like a PC... but they're controlled by the GM. Usually, this is a thinly veiled ploy intended to railroad the plot or keep the players on track -- somehow, this GMPC just has all of the answers. Or maybe the party is struggling with a fight, and they need some well-timed assistance. I'll tell you right now... DON'T DO IT. It's a terrible idea, and it will probably ruin everything you love for eternity. Basically, the GMPC is an indicator of poor design somewhere along the way. If an encounter is too hard, make it easier, or at the very least have a good reason for such a hopeless predicament. If the party's going off the rails, then you probably haven't properly motivated them to stick with your plot. Anyway, I include this in the play section because this is where the difference between an NPC and a GMPC becomes clear. If you have a forward contact who briefs the party, gives them equipment, and is present for an encounter, sure, that's fine. If you have a secret Jedi Knight who's here to help the party along, and is at the forefront of every encounter, then you've failed. The GMPC tends to overshadow players and prevent them from being creative themselves as they try to navigate the world. If you have an NPC who's not doing that, then you might be ok, even if he/she/it is following the party around. Beware the GMPC. It is often difficult to catch before it is too late.

EXPERIENCE

Just always keep in mind that your players put serious thought into their characters, and while progressing the story is all well and good, they want to be rewarded. Awarding XP is a great way to keep characters growing. Always award XP after a session. Even a session that ended on a sour note, or where not much action happened, deserves a reward of some sort. As far as the rate of awarding XP, that really depends on the group. If you have a group that meets twice a month for some casual Star Wars, go ahead and give them 20 XP for a 4-hour session. 5 XP an hour is a reasonable rate for these kinds of groups, plus bonus XP for completing plot arcs or especially excellent RPing. However, if you have more involved group, say, that meets once or twice a week, that enjoys deep



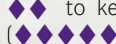



RP and long plot arcs, then you will want to award XP at a lower rate. On average, you should award 15 XP per player per session, 10 for a particularly lax session, 20 or more for a particularly involved one. That way, players are progressing, but not so much that they're growing too powerful too quickly. Remember, you can never take XP away (just don't), and it'll only get harder to challenge the players over time. If you're in for the long haul, don't award too much XP. That said, it's a bit insulting to award fewer than 10 XP points.

And now for a few miscellaneous points.

XP

It's alright to give players additional XP at the beginning of the game to boost them along. However, do keep in mind that it's going to be tougher to challenge them. Unlike starting XP characters, they're likely going to have maxed out some skills, and they're probably going to be pretty good at lots of different things. Knight Level XP is 150, and that's the absolute limit to what I'd recommend giving a group unless you're running a truly unusual campaign (even then, it'll probably get old). It's fun to make powerful characters, but it's always more fun to have weak ones grow into powerful ones.

DIFFICULTY

Be sparing with assigning difficulty to tasks. Sometimes, when you're faced with a player who's got  on a roll, you're tempted to make everything they do  to keep things challenging. Don't do that. Formidable () is described as being the difficulty of 'finding food and shelter on a planet with no breathable atmosphere'. So don't throw a bunch of difficulty dice at everything just because you want things to be challenging. Instead, be creative. Spend Destiny points to upgrade Difficulty dice  to Challenge dice . Of course, throw on some Setback die  if the circumstances warrant it. But most importantly, if a player has devoted the resources to become so expert at something, you should allow them to excel at it. An absolutely brilliant mechanic isn't going to find something that's terribly challenging all that often, and it'll make the moments when challenge does present itself much more tense. Remember: any time there's a roll, there's a chance for failure, threat, and despair. Something could go wrong. If a task is mundane, especially when being attempted by a highly proficient character, consider letting it happen without a roll.

MOTIVATE, DON'T RAILROAD

You might be perplexed by the fact that if your players were to get their hands on a ship, they could go anywhere, and you'd be woefully unprepared for it. Or maybe you're scared by the fact that there's a HoloNet that renders knowledge checks obsolete. Don't be. It's sci-fi, sure. But if your characters are motivated enough, they'll stick to your plotline. Trust it. As for space travel, don't take away their ship for no reason other than to keep them confined... instead, give them a reason to stay on the planet. The HoloNet is regulated by the Empire, and perhaps it's been stripped of 'dangerous information'. But if the players really are desperate to fly offworld or hack a planetary defense

grid... let them go for it! If they're truly determined and serious, you can come back having planned for it. Elasticity, though it shouldn't be without bounds, is a boon for any GM.

DEADLINESS

You may find the system particularly deadly -- or perhaps you think that it's too difficult for someone actually to die. The truth is, the system can be unforgiving, but this just encourages players to take their choices more seriously. Unless you're a Jedi Knight, it's unlikely that a band of pirates isn't reason for some concern. I'd advise against trying to alter it too much. As for the difficulty of death, it's true that death can only occur on a severe enough critical injury roll. But your goal isn't to kill the characters. Having them be captured is usually more interesting, and depriving them of their reward, taking their gear, or killing an NPC ally can be just as exciting or devastating as losing a player (and likely less contentious and rage-inducing). The whole party going down is going to have serious consequences. Keep in mind that if someone continuously shot an unconscious body, they'd kill the target in a matter of a few rounds. If you're hellbent on blood, however, there are options. There are instances where you shouldn't need the rules to declare a PC dead. Falling off of a ship and plummeting to the rocks below is death. Getting shot full-on by a vehicle-scale weapon is (usually) death. The vacuum of space is death. In these instances, unless the PC is particularly brawny or resilient, you can just have them die. If you elect to kill a PC, there are a few rules of courtesy: 1) the player should be present, 2) it should mean something/help the party along, 3) it should be reasonable, not inevitable. Sometimes, the party got themselves into a bad situation, and somebody's going to have to die for it. The exception would be that a player who's being a real brown-nosed fool with his character can die for something trivial and stupid if they play them stupidly. Consequences, kids.

"CREATIVE" PLAYERS

There will always be the player, even if he's not yet in your group, who takes the relative independence of being a player and runs with it. There's a difference between optimization and abuse of the system. If you notice a player that's performing particularly well, and perhaps has a sly grin on their face, don't hesitate to take a peek at their character sheet. Maybe you'll find that they've been lucky. Or maybe you'll find that they're chock full of characteristic-increasing cybernetics that they haven't explained narratively plus fully optimized mods for all of their equipment. Giving equipment is your job, not theirs, and you should keep an eye out for this. Also, if something seems wrong to you, it probably is. After all, you're a heat-seeking homing missile with a history of reading rulebooks for casual entertainment. Players probably know less about the system than you do. Make sure that they're doing things correctly. Keep 'em honest. Remember, if you didn't see the dice hit the table, it didn't happen.

POWER SURGE

Realize that giving an enemy a stupid powerful weapon means that, when they're gone, the PCs will have that stupid powerful weapon. Qualities like Cortosis and Concussive are incredible, and should be very difficult to obtain.

CHARACTER FIT

A player who plays a crazy character as crazy should meet in-game resistance. A munchkin troll murder-hobo player who disrupts the game world? Maybe you should chat with them about what's going on.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO SAY NO.

The consequences are insignificant compared to the consequences of saying 'yes' to everything. Put your foot down. This is your game. This is your house. You ordered the pizza. If they want Cortosis for their armor, then maybe next time they'll bring soda money.

Pfft. Freeloaders.