

A Long Time Ago...

A tiny little Star Wars-ish game by Bill Garrett <garrett@peppermile.com>

Create a Character

Pick a name (e.g. "Han"), an occupation (e.g. "Smuggler"), and some notes on appearance, habits, and backstory (e.g. "scruffy-looking, pilots the Millennium Falcon, on the run from a crime boss").

Pick six or so beats: skills, careers, signature equipment, etc. The Force, lightsabers, smuggling, escaping, your personal starship, etc. are beats. Assign numbers between +2 and -2 to each beat. No specific beat can be at zero. The total of your beats must sum to zero.

If you have a beat that talks about the Force, you are Force-sensitive, aligned either to the Light or Dark depending on whether it's positive or negative.

You start with any signature equipment from your beats, plus anything else you'd logically have. If you need extra gear later, tell the GM and decide together if it requires an action to get.

Balance

The Force is a continual struggle between Light and Dark. Each of your actions has a starting and ending Balance, measured in shades, from this list:

- **White** - redemption, justice, goodness, and mercy.
- **Light** - reinforcements, positive feelings, hope.
- **Gray** - neutral, uncertain, chaotic.
- **Dark** - danger, loss, menace, pain, harm.
- **Black** - tragedy, great loss, death.

Emotional Moments

When you hazard an emotional stake, introduce a moral issue, reveal a secret, confront a hard truth, make a cynical quip, engage in comic relief shenanigans, don't roll the action. These are the true moments of Star Wars. Instead, shift the Balance of the next action (yours or someone else's) up or down one shade.

How to Play

Narrate your action to the group. The GM determines if you need to roll. If so, the GM also determines starting Balance. You then roll 2d6. Add or subtract any beats that apply.

- *9 or higher*: one Balance shade lighter than you started (e.g. Gray to Light)
- *6 - 8*: Balance is unchanged
- *5 or lower*: one Balance shade darker than you started (e.g. Gray to Dark)

The GM narrates an outcome consistent with the resulting Balance. If you have a strong sense of how it should go instead, the GM can defer to your narration.

The lightness or darkness of a result applies to somebody; GM fiat or the specifics of the action decide to whom. If you can't decide, advantage goes to the PC if the dice are both even or both odd, or to the other side if one is even and the other odd.

Villains

If a villain would logically do something, the GM just says what they do. If this would impact a PC, the player gets to roll an action to see how it goes down for them.

If a bad guy is personally scary enough just by being in the scene, lower action Balances by one shade when interacting with them. Comic relief villains lighten the shade by one.

End of Session

At the end of every session, players can review and (if desired) rewrite or re-value their beats. Beats should continue to sum to zero. Individual beats should not exceed +2 or -2.

Characters who make a dedicated effort of aligning themselves to the Light Side can have beats that sum to +1 or +2, at the GM's option. Characters pursuing the Dark Side can sum to -1 or -2.

Conflicts

Small unit tactics, large open warfare, and anything in between. It's you vs. an opposing force, with blaster bolts and explosions everywhere. Starting Balance is typically Dark.

- Fight another force in a stand-up conflict
- Outflank or outmaneuver a stronger force
- Dogfight an enemy in space
- Place somebody else in peril or escape from it yourself
- Retreat successfully under fire

White: an enemy changes sides, a lost friend is found, peace (but not necessarily victory)

Light: moment of hope, escape routes are taken, lives are saved or spared

Gray: the situation changes but the battle rages on, or a costly victory

Dark: the other side (or yours) loses people or suffers injury

Black: a lasting injury, treachery, great loss, named people die

Lightsaber Duels

A contest between Force users, with the weapons of the Jedi and the use of the Force. Starting Balance is your Force alignment modified by your intent toward your opponent.

- Cross sabers with your opponent
- Use telekinetic tricks or attacks to distract, disorient, or harm
- Move to a new area or change the environment
- Inflict or avoid a lasting injury
- Escape to fight another day

White: redemptive victory or bloodless capture

Light: a successful defense, an appeal to your opponent's better nature

Gray: Duel of the Fates plays, the fight continues

Dark: opponent (or you) at a disadvantage, emotionally compromised, or hurt

Black: opponent (or you) seriously injured or killed, a moral or physical tragedy

Races and Pursuits

Any chase scene - rooftop parkour, pod racing, or escaping TIE Fighters. You want to get in or out, and somebody is interfering. Starting Balance depends on intent. Avoiding capture is Light, blowing up the other guy is Dark, competitive racing is Gray.

- Disable or destroy another chaser
- Make a risky move to advance your position
- Use a special feature of your vehicle or the terrain
- Elude pursuit or avoid detection

White: chase ends without drama for somebody, or some chaser gets a big advantage

Light: somebody escaped, avoided detection, or learned something interesting

Gray: mixed success, the chase goes on, random interruptions or obstacles in your path

Dark: off course, lost, damaged vehicles, lost something valuable in the chase

Black: serious crash, wrecked vehicles, physical injury

Infiltration and Search

You want to get a thing, enter a place, or know a thing. Others would prefer that you don't. Starting Balance is Gray, or Dark depending on risk or time pressure.

- Locate a lost or stolen MacGuffin
- Find a prisoner or someone in hiding
- Get into a secure area through an unguarded route
- Bluff the guards or hack the system
- Search your feelings with the Force

White: truth comes readily, you achieve your goal easily

Light: you avoided detection or got away, you found your target

Gray: you made it, but lost something (concealment, an important item, whatever)

Dark: guards died, you're compromised, your target can't move, awful truth or harmful lie

Black: a diabolical trap is sprung, somebody dies, objective permanently lost, party captured