

# Let's Get Physical

## Tips and Tactics

[Owen K.C. Stephens](#)

The *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* is easy to learn, but it can be difficult to master. With that in mind, we present "Tips and Tactics," a monthly column designed to help you get the most out of your *Star Wars* roleplaying! Each month, Owen K.C. Stephens (author of [Starships of the Galaxy](#) and co-author of the [Rebellion Era Sourcebook](#), [Alien Anthology](#) and [Tempest Feud](#)) will show you how to use various rules together, suggest new ways to use old rules, and clarify complex rules.

In the eleventh installment, Owen shows you how to make sure that your hero's physical ability scores - Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution - are being put to best use for your character.

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Most everything a character does is influenced in some way by his or her ability scores. Combat, negotiation, Force powers - anything a character is likely to attempt uses at least one ability modifier. Coupled with the fact that abilities are harder to enhance in the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* than in many d20 games (since the setting has no magic, which means no arcane spells or magic items to boost these scores), this dependence on ability scores makes choosing and maximizing a character's abilities an important part of hero design.

On some level, it's easy. Each character class has a section devoted to what ability is most important to typical members of the class and why. What's somewhat less obvious is how to maximize a high score in a particular ability once you have it. A character's selection of weapons, armor, skills, feats, and tactics can enhance the usefulness of a high score and minimize the damage of a low score. In this column, we'll look at the three most physical abilities - Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution - and examine ways to get the most out of what you've got.

### **Only the Strong Survive**

Strength is not as important to combat in games with blasters as it is in games limited to swords and bows. While it is mentioned in the ability section of fringers, soldiers, and Jedi guardians, most players don't worry much about having a high Strength score. The best ways to minimize the limitations of a low Strength score are to avoid melee combat (unless you've made some other choices; see the section on Dexterity, below) and to buy a droid strong enough to carry large loads and break open doors. Soldiers who feel their Strength score is too low should start saving their credits for a Corellian powersuit.

Characters who do have high Strength scores should get the largest two-handed melee weapon possible. A vibro-ax works particularly well for this, though a quarterstaff is good, too, and far less likely to be outlawed in civilized areas. If you haven't chosen a species yet, seriously consider being a Wookiee, which gives you not only another +4 Strength but also access to Wookiee rage. A character who rolled an 18 Strength, then decided to be a Wookiee, then went into Wookiee rage would have a Strength score of 26 and would deal 2d10+12 points of damage with a vibro-ax (with an average damage of 23, more than a blaster cannon). If the character is a soldier, the feats Power Attack, Cleave, and Great Cleave augment melee combat effectiveness.

## The Fast and the Furious

Having a high Dexterity has obvious advantages in combat -- your defense is higher and your ranged attack bonus better. Most high-Dexterity characters stick to light armor and ranged weapons to maximize these advantages, and that's a good way to go. But with careful selection of feats and skills, a high Dexterity can make a big difference in melee combat, too.



To maximize Dexterity for a melee fighter, you need to stick to fighting with a cestus, combat glove, double-bladed lightsaber, force pike, knife, lightsaber, unarmed strike, vibroblade, or vibrodagger. These are the weapons that you can select with the Weapon Finesse feat, so your attack bonus is now based on Dexterity rather than Strength. Follow this with the Combat Expertise and Combat Reflexes feats (most easily accomplished by a soldier or high-level character). Now your high Dexterity increases your melee attack bonus and the number of attacks of opportunity you get each round (which is especially useful if you can get close to characters who depend on ranged attacks). Additionally, you can sacrifice some attack bonus to increase your defense, thus increasing your survivability. And if you're a Jedi with the Force skill Enhance Ability, raising your Dexterity score increases the benefit of all these choices.

Characters with low Dexterity scores and many skills based on Dexterity need to concentrate on just a few skills, buying the maximum number of ranks and using feats to augment their total bonus. A hero who wants to be an amazing pilot, for example, but who has a Dexterity of just 11 shouldn't expect to be great at Balance, Escape Artist, Move Silently, Sleight of Hand, and Tumble as well. If he chooses two feats focused on improving his Pilot score (Skill Emphasis and Spacer), he more than makes up for a low ability score. In fact, a 1st-level Human with a Dexterity of 11 can buy 4 ranks of Pilot, take the Skill Emphasis and Spacer feats, and start with a bonus of +9!

## Toughing it Out

A high Constitution score is especially critical to characters who expect to see a lot of combat. Constitution determines your wound points and increases your vitality points, and it also increases your Fortitude saving throw, making it less likely that you'll be knocked unconscious from wound damage or bleed to death when unconscious. If a character is a Force-user, a few ranks of Battlemind and Enhance Ability make sense with a high Constitution.

Characters with low Constitution scores should seriously consider the feats Toughness (much more useful than the feat of the same name in d20 games using hit points) and Stamina (which doubles the rate at which a hero recovers vitality points). They'll improve the odds of survival much more than would buying up a Constitution score, thus freeing the character to concentrate on maximizing his good ability scores. A handy supply of medpacs and the skill to use them well can also make up for a lack of staying power.

## To Be Continued

In the next installment of "Tips and Tactics," we'll look at the mental attributes -- Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma -- and ways they can be used for best effect. We'll also wrap up with final thoughts on where to increase ability scores as characters go up in level and how to assign starting ability scores based on character concept.

*Discuss this month's "Tips and Tactics" and share your ideas about putting the Star Wars Roleplaying Game rules to best use in the Star Wars [message boards!](#)*

# It's the Thoughts That Count

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In the twelfth installment, Owen shows you how to make sure that your hero's mental ability scores - Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma - are being put to best use for your character.

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In this column, we wrap up our look at characters' ability scores and how to maximize the effect of high scores and minimize the problems of low scores. Having covered the more physical abilities (Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution) in the [last installment](#) of "Tips and Tactics," we finish with an examination of the mental abilities (Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma).

One common misconception is that mental ability scores are less important or less valuable than their physical counterparts. This belief might be encouraged by the ability modifiers of the player races available in the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* [revised core rulebook](#). If you look at their bonuses and penalties, many increases in Strength, Dexterity, or Constitution that are balanced by a loss of Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma are weighted two to one in favor of the physical and vice-versa. Thus, a Cerean's +2 Int and Wis requires only a -2 Dex to be balanced out, while a Quarren's +2 Constitution is balanced by a penalty of -2 to both Wisdom and Charisma.

In truth, while the mental abilities have a less direct impact on combat, they are critical in almost every other aspect of a character. A hero's training, motivation, career, and interaction with others all ties strongly to his mental ability scores. This impact is less obvious during game play than are things that show up during combat, but it's equally important to the development of a character.

### **It's All About What You Know**

Intelligence is the most far-reaching of all the mental abilities because it has a direct affect on how many skill points your character gets each level. It doesn't matter if you're playing a soldier, scoundrel, noble, or Jedi - you'll always want as many skill points as possible. Intelligence is especially important for tech specialists, who not only have a number of Int-based skills but also don't have all that many skill points to spread around.

Characters with high Int scores should seriously consider putting one rank in each of the Knowledge skills. Since Knowledge can't be used untrained, a single rank allows you to apply your high Int bonus in as many situations as possible. A combat-oriented character with high Intelligence should look at skills that help increase mobility, such as Climb and Tumble, and those that increase survival, such as Treat Injury. Characters with low Int bonuses need to concentrate on just a few skills rather than on buying one or two ranks of several, and they should use skill-boosting equipment, knowledge-storing datapads, and the Skill Emphasis feat to make up for their low scores. A level of scoundrel might be useful for picking up additional skill points, though obviously that's not as helpful for a character buying a lot of Force skills.

### **It's All About What You Notice**

Wisdom is the mental ability with the most direct impact on combat situations because it's the key ability for Listen, Spot, and Treat Injury. Fringers and scouts have the greatest need for high Wisdom scores, followed closely by nobles and various Force users. It's important to remember that Wisdom represents not only force of will but also perception, including the Sense Motive skill.

Characters with high Wisdom scores may be able to spend fewer skill points on Listen and Spot, though it's a good idea if someone in a group has high perception skills. Characters with low Wisdom scores have a more difficult time compensating than do those with most other low scores. Iron Will can be used to raise a dangerously low Will save, and electrobinoculars and a sensor pack can help some with Listen and Spot skills, but there's not much a Jedi with a low Wisdom and Farseeing can do except buy maximum ranks of the skill and perhaps take the Link or Skill Emphasis feats.

### **It's All About Who You Know**

A character's Charisma almost never has an impact on the outcome of a fight, but it can make a big difference on how often the hero ends up fighting. Social interaction is based on Charisma, making it especially important for nobles and scoundrels, and almost as important for Jedi consulars. Any character who wants to be able to negotiate a good deal, make friends, dig up information, or work with strangers should seriously consider getting as high a Cha score as possible.

Characters with a good Charisma bonus should take advantage of it, buying a few ranks in Diplomacy and Gather Information at the very least. Characters with low Charisma bonuses should consider taking the Fame or



Infamy feat, as a high Reputation score is one of the few things that may help with Charisma-based skills. Taking one multiclass level of noble can also raise a character's Reputation by a point.

### **Working With What You've Got**

In the end, almost any character concept can work with whatever ability scores you have. A dangerous soldier with low Str, Dex, and Con but a high Wis can be an alert master of survival who uses his surroundings to compensate for his physical frailty. A low-Int, high-Con tech specialist can be a simple but gruff mechanic who's unafraid to make repairs in the middle of a firefight. And a noble with a poor Cha bonus but high Str and Dex scores can always rely on "aggressive negotiations."

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# House Rules

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In the thirteenth installment, Owen shows you how to come up with house rules for your own *Star Wars* campaign that work well, close loopholes, improve the game, and are accepted by players.

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This month, we're going to take a slight departure from the normal subject matter of "Tips and Tactics." Rather than talk about using existing rules, we're going to look at how to develop house rules. House rules are new rules created by Gamemasters for use in their own campaigns. While there's nothing wrong with house rules in principle, ill-considered or badly designed rules can ruin the enjoyment of the game. The rules presented the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* products are carefully considered and playtested for balance - altering them can have unexpected consequences.

On the other hand, house rules allow a gaming group to change a game to more closely match their style of play. If characters rarely get into fights in your games and the players don't seem to understand how attacks of opportunity work, you may want to get rid of them. If everyone feels that their characters are short on skill points, you can pass out more to every class. Of course, both of these changes have a major impact on how the game plays, but with careful tweaking, you might end up with a game that you enjoy more fully.

## The Arm Severing Rule

As an example of the kind of things one must consider when designing a house rule, I'll explain how a house rule was developed for my own *Star Wars* campaign.

All house rules start with a feeling that the rules emulate something badly or fail to allow for it at all. In my case, the thing that seemed lacking from the *Star Wars* rules was the ability to cut off someone's hand or arm with a lightsaber. Obi-Wan severs Ponda Baba's hand in the cantina on Tatooine. Luke cuts off a wampa's arm on Hoth, and then loses his own arm to a blow from Darth Vader on Bespin. Anakin Skywalker loses his arm on Geonosis, and Vader loses a hand to Luke in the Emperor's throne room on the second Death Star. These dramatic moments in the histories of these characters are exactly the type of thing I'd like to have happen in my own games.

Unfortunately, there simply aren't any rules to cover it. So, I'll add a house rule - the Arm Severing Rule.

## A First Stab

Now that I know I want a house rule and what I want it to do, I need to define how to achieve that goal. Obviously, arm severing isn't universal, so it shouldn't happen in every fight. Also, there's no real evidence that opponents sever each other's arms on purpose. And even if they do, I don't want to give players the option to try to cut off a foe's hand. It would be very difficult to balance the penalties needed, and too much of my game would be taken up with figuring the penalties for such attacks (which players probably would attempt in every combat).

I also notice there seems to be a universal rule about losing hands in the *Star Wars* universe - when a foe's hand comes off, the fight's over. So, whatever house rule I come up with needs to take that into account.

Therefore, what I want is a rule that results in an occasional severed hand or arm, but I don't want players to be able to do it on purpose. Cutting off someone's arm sounds like a critical hit to me, so I decide I'll base the rule off critical hits. Since it's a pretty serious blow, I decide that any critical attack that deals maximum damage cuts off the target's arm. Since I don't want people shooting each other's arms off, I limit this rule to energy and slashing melee weapons. At first glance, this rule looks pretty good - it'll come up only occasionally, it doesn't require any additional die rolling, and players can't take up game time by deciding to do it on purpose.

## Looking for Loopholes

Any new rule needs to be carefully examined to see if it has side effects you didn't expect and don't want. The best way to do this is extensive playtesting, but often that's not a practical answer. Playtesting takes time, and most gamers would rather spend those hours actually playing their game than testing new rules for it. Without a playtest, a rule needs to be looked at very closely.

So, what does my proposed rule actually mean? Well, first of all, it's not going to accomplish what I want. Whenever someone suffers a critical hit, he or she becomes fatigued, but that doesn't really end the fight. That means some characters who lose a hand will keep fighting afterward -- except, of course, for those who drop to negative wound points and pass out, which also isn't what I'm looking for.





Another problem is that different weapons have different chances of dealing maximum damage. A Tusken Raider's gaderffii deals 1d8 points of slashing damage, so 12.5% of all its critical hits inflict max damage. On the other hand, a lightsaber in the hands of a master Jedi can deal 6d8 or more points of damage, so only one attack out of 262,144 does maximum damage. Do I really want a rule that makes Sand People more likely to sever arms than Jedi masters?

How can I fix this? Well, let's start with the result I want - after losing a hand or arm, a character should be able to talk (as Luke confronts Vader in *The Empire Strikes Back*) but basically be out of the fight. That comes pretty close to the description of what happens when a character is at 0 wounds. So, what if I change my rule to say that any critical hit dealt by a slashing or energy melee weapon that drops an opponent to exactly 0 wounds severs his or her arm?

Well, it's still fast and easy, and now a master Jedi is at least as likely to do it as a Tusken Raider. As an added bonus, I can even give players some control by saying that if a Jedi lands a critical hit on a foe that takes the opponent below 0 wounds, the hero can choose to sever an arm instead and drop the opponent to exactly 0 wounds. This provision might cause the rule to come into play more often, but it won't take up any added game time.



## Check Your Final Rule with Players

It's important that your players are aware of -- and agree to accept -- any new house rule. Even if you design the perfect house rule, players will be understandably upset if you spring it on them in the middle of a game. In my example, a player is likely to get upset if a critical blow drops his character to 0 wounds, and I blithely mention that his right arm has been cut off to boot. Not only should I be sure to mention the rule in advance, I should probably give all players a handout that carefully explains it.

Another reason to do this is that players may not like a new rule. While it's important that the GM is happy with his or her game, the players need to be happy, too. Often, a new house rule is well received by players, but ask for their input and make sure they're comfortable before proceeding. Sometimes, a player's style of play doesn't match a GM's style, and it's important to work out such issues before they come up during a game.

And if you do happen to cut off a character's arm in a game, be sure to let the hero obtain a cybernetic replacement soon. Having lost a limb can be a cool bit of character history, but having a hero run around a hand short for several adventures is much less fun.

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# Full Speed Ahead!

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In the fourteenth installment, Owen discusses ways to keep your games moving at a good pace. With a bit of preparation, organization, and the willpower to leave the rulebook *closed* now and then, you can spare your adventures from getting bogged down in minutia and focus instead on full-throttle action.

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### Be Prepared

It may sound obvious, but a number of Gamemasters and players make no effort to be prepared before a game session. A lot of this preparation falls to the GM -- Gamemaster characters should be written up, likely rules should be looked up, and the plot of the adventure should be written down. However, players have duties, too. Their character sheets should be available and up to date. Any rulebooks they need should be present. For everyone at a game, things like food (if the game is going to last that long), lighting, seating, and dice should all be taken care of beforehand. The fewer real-world concerns you have to deal with during the game itself, the more smoothly things go. Sometimes these duties can be handled by the same person each time (for example, the owner of the house where the group always meets arranges the seating), and sometimes the duties can rotate (for example, a different person orders the pizza each time).

A GM can use many tools to make game preparation easier and faster. The generic character write-ups in the core rulebook can be used for a broad range of characters the heroes meet during an adventure, so that a GM need only create major opponents from scratch. Online resources, such as Wizards of the Coast's [Star Wars Roleplaying Game site](#) or the award-winning [www.swrpgnetwork.com](#), can provide plot ideas, advice, and sometimes even fully fleshed out adventures and characters. Even material from other d20 games can be adapted for use in a *Star Wars* setting, from purple worms acting as sand slugs to magic items acting as unusual pieces of technology.

### Organize Information

Again, this mostly falls to the GM (though players should certainly know where they wrote down their starship's stats). When running an adventure, have all the major GM characters described on separate sheets of paper so you don't have to flip paper over or turn pages in a booklet to find someone. When running a fight, have an easy

way to keep track of the characters and their initiative order (I use index cards, placing each character's name and initiative on a card and shuffling them around as needed). If a particular rule is going to come up often in an adventure, bookmark its place in the rulebook.

Using a grid map and figures or counters can also speed up the game. A visual representation of where everyone and everything is allows people to understand the situation at a glance. This need not be limited to fight scenes, either. If heroes are investigating a town, a quick map of the location with counters to indicate where each character is can prevent misunderstandings, and less confusion means faster play.

## Look It Up Later

Although rule continuity is important to the long-term health of an ongoing campaign, little bogs down play as much as looking up an obscure rule does. Sometimes it can't be helped -- if a Jedi tries to use a Force power untrained for the first time ever, you may need a moment to flip through the skills section and read its entry. The delay this causes can be kept to a minimum by requiring that all players have their own copies of the core rulebook, that they look up any new power, equipment, or maneuver before using it, and that they tell the GM the page number of the relevant rule.

But sometimes things come up in the middle of a player's turn, or no one knows exactly what rule applies to a particular situation or where relevant information can be found. If a Wookiee wants to throw a stormtrooper over a railing, how is that handled? Can you fight with a lightsaber in one hand and a blaster in the other, and if so, can you switch back and forth between the two when making a full attack action? How big is a baby bantha, anyway?

In cases like this, it's often best for the GM to make a ruling based on gut instinct and warn players that the ruling may be changed later. That way, the GM can keep the game going without losing momentum, and he or she can look up the answer later when it won't interfere with play. Also, sometimes the rules don't contain an answer to a particular question, in which case the GM should decide how to handle the matter in future games and inform players at the next game session. Occasionally, this may result in an incorrect rules call during play, but it keeps games fast-paced and fun.

## Use Your Best Judgment

Every gaming group has its own style of play, and only by spending time together at the table can a group decide on the best pacing for a game. Some groups like to limit out-of-character discussion because it's too distracting, while others see a game as a good opportunity to catch up with friends. If any of the methods offered here for speeding up games upset your players or get in the way of having a good time, ignore them. But always keep an eye out for problems that slow down the pace of your games and seek ways to solve them.

Remember - *Star Wars* gaming is at its best when it can go full throttle!

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# Save Yourselves!

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In the fifteenth installment, Owen spotlights the often-overlooked saving throws -- three little numbers that could mean the difference between life and death for your hero.

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Effective characters need to be a careful mix of combat abilities, out-of-combat skills, contacts, equipment, and resistances. Obviously, soldiers and Jedi guardians will be more focused on dealing and taking damage than scoundrels and nobles will, but generally, well-balanced characters are the most fun to play. They allow players to have some input in any situation and have more to offer a group. In past installments of "Tips and Tactics," we've looked at skill selection, ability scores, equipment, armor, and character development. Like many players, however, we've so far failed to consider the importance of three little numbers -- saving throws.

Saving throws are easier to figure than many combat statistics used in the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game*. Just add base saves from class, ability modifiers and any relevant feats, and perhaps a species bonus, and you're done. A character's saves rarely change much during a game, and no maneuvers or special circumstances have much effect on them. Saving throws are one of a character's most important attributes, however, as they determine if he's smashed, dazed, seduced, sickened, frozen, or blown up. Players who don't think about a character's saves are often taken aback when their hero is suddenly disabled or killed as the result of a single failed roll.

Here, then, are some quick thoughts on what the three saves are used for, how to increase low saves, and what to do to mitigate the effect of low saves.

## Reflex Saves

Reflex saves are used most often to avoid some portion of an area attack, such as a thermal detonator or Force Lightning. This is useful, but ultimately, it's little more than a way to avoid damage. Characters who rarely get into fights, or those with lots of vitality or good armor, can actually forgo high reflex saves without suffering too serious a set of consequences.

The main exceptions to this rule are scouts. Because their evasion ability allows them to avoid any damage from

attacks that allow Reflex saves, it's in the best interest of a scout to boost his Reflex save as high as possible. Luckily, most scouts have good Dex bonuses, anyway.

## Will Saves

Will saves are used to resist mind-affecting attacks and conditions, such as Frightful Presence, Affect Mind, and Illusion. Most effects that allow a Will save don't directly harm a character, but they can eliminate him from a fight or even cause him to become a hindrance to his allies. Many warriors and knaves ignore Will saves, and this is a mistake. While Will saves come up in play less often than other saves do, failing one generally has serious consequences.

## Fort Saves

Fort saves are used to resist poisons, diseases, environmental conditions, and stun weapons. Fort saves are more common than Will saves and, in some cases, about as frequent as Reflex saves. The good news is a failed Fort save isn't likely to take a character out permanently. The bad news is it can result in lost ability points, long-lasting penalties, and even a few minutes of unconsciousness.

Fort saves are particularly important for characters who spend a lot of time in the wilderness or who engage in melee combat regularly (thus exposing themselves to attacks from stun batons and force pikes). Other characters can survive with lower Fort saves, but they should be wary of strange weapons, creatures, or environments that may test their mettle in new ways.

## Dealing with Low Saves

The simplest way to deal with a low saving throw bonus is to raise it. There are three feats that do just that -- Great Fortitude, Iron Will, and Lightning Reflexes. Spending an entire feat for a +2 bonus to one save may seem expensive, but the character gains the bonus on every save of that type, and it would take a 3 to 4 point increase in the hero's ability score to gain a bonus that high. Of course, a character can also raise an ability score, either through character advancement every 4 levels or (if Force-sensitive) with Force skills such as Enhance Ability (for Reflex saves) or Force Defense (for saves against Force-based attacks and powers). Other feats -- such as Endurance, Headstrong, Rugged, and Steady -- can give a smaller save bonus in conjunction with other benefits or add a larger bonus in certain circumstances.

Multiclassing is another way to raise saving throws. A 3rd-level noble with a Constitution of 12 only has a Fort save of +2, and it isn't likely to improve until the hero reaches 6th level at the earliest. But a single level of soldier grants another +2 Fort bonus, as well as access to a new feat, a d10 vitality, +1 class Defense bonus, and a +1 base attack bonus. Just two levels of scout adds +2 to all of a character's saves. In some cases, a starting hero can improve a save with his choice of species, such as deciding that a Jedi consular character will be an Ithorian, granting a +1 species bonus to Will saves.

If you still aren't satisfied with a character's saving throw bonuses, there are a few steps that can be taken. For low Reflex saves, a character can seek to maximize his vitality and perhaps even wear armor to soak up damage dealt by area attacks. Characters with Fort saves that are nothing to write home about can gain some relief from environmental effects by wearing items like all-temperature cloaks or a padded flight suit.

Sadly, next to nothing can be done to compensate for a low Will save. A player who's worried about his character's Will bonus can avoid confrontations with Force users and make friends with strong-willed allies, but no equipment or skill is going to help avoid the types of things that call for Will saves.

## Be Part of a Group

Of course, a player who focuses all of his efforts into getting good saves may end up with a character who's hard to hurt or fool, but not much use. It's impossible to be good at everything, and it's not a bad idea to have heroes in a group specialize in different saves. This allows the soldier with a good Fort save to tackle the web weaver, the scout with a good Reflex save to rush into the building that may explode, and the noble with a good Will save to face down Sith lords.

This also promotes teamwork within the group, making the game more fun to play -- which is, after all, the whole point.

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# Techies

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In the seventeenth installment, Owen K.C. Stephens looks at ways to approach the tech specialist class -- the heroes who get to fiddle with and make really cool stuff!

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Though there were many important changes between the previous rules and the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* revised core rulebook, one of the most obvious is the addition of the tech specialist class.

Tech specialists are designed to be good at a broad range of technical skills. In addition to the 4 skill points per level (likely augmented with a high Int bonus), tech specialists gain Skill Emphasis early on, allowing them to excel at one core technical skill. With the addition of research at 2nd level, the tech specialist becomes the obvious go-to person when new or unusual technology is discovered. How useful this ability is depends strongly on the style of game the tech specialist is in, but consider this -- *someone* had to analyze the plans of the Death Star for a weakness.

Tech specialists are also better at picking up new knowledge and technology skills than other characters. The instant mastery and expert class features allow an expert to get high bonuses on select skills very quickly, which is handy in games regularly introducing new technologies or superweapons.

A tech specialist may not be the best negotiator, warrior, pilot, or tracker, but in his areas of proficiency, he is second to none. A tech specialist needs to know when to stay back, hold down the fort, and back his teammates' plays, and when to rush forward to prevent them from blowing up a ship's reactor. If a more cerebral character is appealing to you, tech specialists may be your cup of tea. If you'd rather just blow things up or browbeat your foes, you should look elsewhere for a character class.

## Maximizing Tech Specialties

Six times during a tech specialist's progression, he gains access to a tech specialty. These special abilities are the crux of the tech specialist's usefulness after the low levels, and a player should carefully consider which specialties to take. They're not available very often, and in some cases, they grant abilities that cannot be gained otherwise.

First, let me recommend against taking Computer Specialist, Mechanic, or Medical Specialist. Each of these grants a bonus to the use of a single skill, but at best, that's only a +3 bonus, which can be achieved through the use of the Skill Emphasis feat. While it's true that these bonuses stack, there's little practical reason to go for skill checks that high. An 11th-level tech specialist with an 18 Int who maximized Computer Use, took 3 levels of Computer Specialist and Skill Emphasis with the skill would have a total bonus of +24 (allowing him to get 35 if he takes 10). In most cases, there's not going to be much he can accomplish with a +24 he couldn't manage with a +21.

Surgical Specialist is a different matter. When creating a medic character, taking as much Surgical Specialist as you can is an excellent idea. Unlike the other specialties mentioned, it gives you something no feat can -- extra wounds when healing people, and unlike Mastercrafter, there's no experience point cost to use it. A tech specialist who can heal better than anyone else is a real boon to a party, especially in games with few or no characters able to Heal Another.

For tech specialists who aren't medics, no tech specialty makes more sense than Mastercrafter. With this, a tech specialist can augment weapons, armor, and various kinds of electronics. Although there is an XP cost for making such items, they can provide an edge that is difficult to acquire through other means. This is especially true for tech specialists able to make +2 or +3 mastercraft items, which are not normally available on the open market. The character who can make armor with a Damage Resistance of normal +3 (or better) is not going to have trouble finding acceptance with more rough-and-tumble characters.

## What to Mastercraft

A tech specialist only gains six total tech specialties in his career. And since there are six possible categories of Mastercrafting with three levels of proficiency in each, choices need to be made. Most tech specialists begin with either weapons or armor and may never take another category. There's nothing wrong with this approach, but it can be rather limiting.

The most important consideration when choosing a type of item to Mastercraft is what you want your character to be doing. For example, you might want to play a tech specialist who's a famous droid designer. Of course, droids aren't a type you can Mastercraft, so you might feel out of luck. But most droids carry sensors of some kind, so you could decide to Mastercraft sensor packs, and just perform that task mostly on droids. Similarly, if you want to play a data slicer or high-tech thief, it would be very useful to be able to make Mastercraft security kits. Once a medic has taken three levels of surgical specialist, Mastercrafting medipacs falls neatly in the same character concept.

Once you know what types of things you want to Mastercraft, you must decide what level of Mastercrafter you want to take with each. Because the XP cost of Mastercraft items increases as the bonus increases, I recommend arranging things so you can make +1 versions of everything you want before taking any to the +2 Mastercrafter level. This gives you the most versatility without costing a huge number of XPs. Once your character reaches higher levels, you'll get more XP per adventure anyway, so the higher cost won't mean as much in terms of slowing level advancement.



## Rounding it All Out



As I've said in many of these columns, character concept is the most important guiding force when making a character, and this is just as true for tech specialists. For example, if what you really want is a master burglar, you may want to take both tech specialist and scoundrel levels, combining electronics expertise with more stealth-related skills. A demolitions expert might be part tech specialist and part soldier, allowing him to comfortably wear the heavy armor required by such an occupation.

And don't forget to add a few quirks. For some reason, engineers and genius scientists always seem to have an unusual accent, a penchant for odd forms of music, or bad long-term memories. Not only do such personalities make your character more memorable, but if you can make +2 blaster pistols, other players won't complain about them. Not much, anyway.

*Discuss this month's "Tips and Tactics" and share your ideas about putting the Star Wars Roleplaying Game rules to best use in the Star Wars [message boards!](#)*

# Feats, Do Your Stuff

## Tips and Tactics

[Owen K.C. Stephens](#)

The *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* is easy to learn, but it can be difficult to master. With that in mind, we present "Tips and Tactics," a monthly column designed to help you get the most out of your *Star Wars* roleplaying! Each month, Owen K.C. Stephens (author of [Starships of the Galaxy](#) and co-author of the [Rebellion Era Sourcebook](#), [Alien Anthology](#), [Tempest Feud](#), the [Power of the Jedi Sourcebook](#) and the [Arms & Equipment Guide](#)) will show you how to use various rules together, suggest new ways to use old rules, and clarify complex rules.



In the sixteenth installment, Owen K.C. Stephens looks at feats. Which ones should you pick, in what order, and for what purpose? It all depends on who you want your hero to be.

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Feats are one of the best ways to customize and specialize characters in the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game*. More than skills or equipment, feats represent unusual training and abilities at a character's command. Also, since feats are earned slowly, it's difficult for two characters to overlap quickly by accident. Two soldiers might both decide to buy many ranks of Demolitions at the same level, but if one has Dodge, Mobility, and Shot on the Run and the other has Power Attack, Cleave, and Combat Expertise, they're going to act very differently in combat.

In two earlier articles, we looked at feats that are particularly appropriate for characters focusing on melee or ranged combat. Those previous installments of "Tips and Tactics" were written before the release of the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* revised core rulebook, but most of their points are still applicable. But what about noncombat feats? Everything from Alertness to Force Sensitive is a possibility, and every feat taken moves a character in a certain direction. What feats are the most effective, and when is the best time to take them?

## Feats to Take Early

When selecting feats for a low-level character, a player should ask herself two questions: What are the feats prerequisites for, and how useful are they right now?

The first question will have the longest-lasting impact on a character. Some of the most powerful feats (for example, Great Cleave, Shot on the Run, and Whirlwind Attack) are available only after several other feats have been taken. A 9th-level Jedi guardian who decides he wants Spring Attack but has none of the prerequisites can't get it until 18th level at the earliest (unless he takes a few multiclass levels of soldier, which seriously retards his mastery of the Force). Similarly, many prestige classes have feat prerequisites that take several levels to earn.

Some players like to map out what feats they plan to take at each level, plotting their character's career a dozen

levels in advance. This is particularly useful for complex character ideas that involve a lot of multiclassing and/or have a prestige class as the ultimate goal. Other players don't like this level of bookkeeping and simply guess where they'll want to be in five levels. This type of player should seriously consider picking up feats (such as Dodge) that commonly serve as prerequisites to make it more likely they can choose things they'll want later.

Other feats are just more useful at lower levels, such as feats that increase skill rolls, which are a great way to focus a character. A Human scout who wants to be a master astrologer may be disappointed if his total skill bonus is +7 at 1st level. But if he takes Spacer and Skill Emphasis (Astrologer) as his two starting feats, that bonus jumps to +12! The same effect is much less pronounced at higher levels (at 10th level, for example, the scout is likely to have +13 without the feats and +18 with it), but for starting characters, these feats can mean the difference between success and failure nearly every time the skill is used.

## Feats to Take Later

Other feats become more and more attractive as a hero reaches higher levels, or simply aren't available to beginning characters. For example, Heroic Surge is nice for a 3rd-level character, granting one extra partial action per day. But to a 13th-level character, Heroic Surge is a great bargain, granting that extra action four times a day! Power Attack also can be more attractive later in a character's career, since the value that can be subtracted from attacks and added to damage is limited to a character's base attack bonus (BAB). A 1st-level soldier may not notice the difference with +1 damage, but a 15th-level soldier certainly notices a +5, +10, or even +15 point increase (though it may be hard to hit anything at the upper end of that range).

Feats with many prerequisites or that rely on high BABs include Advanced Martial Arts, Improved Critical, Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Shot on the Run, Spring Attack, and Whirlwind Attack. Even at high levels, it's difficult to qualify for more than one or two of these powerful feats, and a character should be set up to take advantage of them in advance. There's no point, for example, in taking Spring Attack unless you have a good movement rate and a high melee attack bonus. Improved Critical is useful to any combat character, but before you select that feat, make sure you're going to keep using the same weapon later in your career.

## Feat Combinations

Some feats work well together, even if they aren't prerequisites for each other. For example, many low-level characters feel that Dodge isn't worthwhile, since it only grants a +1 Defense against a single foe. However, a 1st-level Human soldier who takes Dodge, Martial Arts, and Defensive Martial Arts gains a +2 dodge bonus to Defense and another +1 against whoever seems the most dangerous. That doubles the hero's +3 class bonus to Defense!

Burst of Speed works particularly well with Heroic Surge (allowing a Jedi to move a vast distance and still attack). Surgery works particularly well with any skill that improves Treat Injury. Dissipate Energy works particularly well with Great Fortitude. Combat Reflexes and Great Cleave can be a devastating combination (especially when used with a lightsaber, and they're doubly effective if mixed with Improved Critical).

## Choose Wisely

Players can get the most out of feats by carefully considering what they want their characters to be good at, what feats help in that area, and when they'll gain access to which feats. It doesn't have to be a daunting

process -- there's nothing wrong with picking a feat just because it sounds cool. But with a little extra effort, characters can become the heroic figures that *Star Wars* roleplaying is all about.

*Discuss this month's "Tips and Tactics" and share your ideas about putting the Star Wars Roleplaying Game rules to best use in the Star Wars [message boards!](#)*

# Fame and Followers

## Tips and Tactics

[Owen K.C. Stephens](#)

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In the eighteenth installment, Owen K.C. Stephens looks at the rules for a hero's Reputation and followers. After all, sometimes it's fun to throw your weight around. And who *wouldn't* want an 11th-level soldier as a bodyguard?

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Under the revised rules for the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game*, Reputation is a simple bonus that can be added to Bluff, Diplomacy, Entertain, Gather Information, and Intimidate checks when the situation calls for it. Having a high Reputation is most useful to characters that thrive on interaction with others, though a bounty hunter with a +10 Reputation may be able to intimidate targets so well that he can bring them in without a fight.

Because Reputation is tied to a character's class and level, it's never very high at low levels. Players shouldn't think Reputation is useless at low levels, however. On the contrary, because low-level heroes can't have many ranks of the skills that Reputation adds to, even a small +1 or +2 bonus potentially becomes very useful.

## Maximizing Reputation

A player can't do much to increase her character's Reputation. Obviously, the Fame and Infamy feats each increase it by +3, which is particularly impressive at low levels. A 1st-level noble with the Infamy feat already has a Reputation of +4. Even assuming that the noble has a Charisma score of 18, his Diplomacy check, for example, can't be higher than +8. But in situations where his Reputation is relevant, this rockets to +12, much higher than that for any other 1st-level character.

A hero can't take both feats, however, so there's a cap of +3 on how much she can increase her score above that allowed by her class and level. A Gamemaster who wanted to permit characters to have much higher Reputation scores at lower levels might let a hero take an additional feat that increases her Reputation by another +2, but after that, it's just not balanced to let feats add to the total further.

The only other way to maximize Reputation is to multiclass or take prestige classes, though this is advisable only for someone who sees a high Reputation as a critical part of her character concept. Take the most levels of the noble class, which has the highest Reputation of the core character classes. An 11th-level noble still only

has a Reputation of +3, though -- not much to show for 11 levels of dedication. With the Fame feat, that rises to only +6.

To increase this slightly, a player can create a multiclass hero with 1 level of Jedi consular and 2 levels of soldier, taking the Infamy feat at 1st or 3rd level. Then, she switches to noble, spending skill points to maximize her Bluff, Diplomacy, Gather Information, and Sense Motive skills. Once she has 8 ranks in each (5th level at the earliest), she can take levels of crime lord. An 11th-level character that is Jedi consular 1/Soldier 2/Noble 2/Crimelord 6 (and therefore has the Infamy feat) has a Reputation bonus of +10!

## Followers

Once a character reaches 10th level, a new benefit can be gained from a high Reputation score -- followers. A hero may make a Reputation check (DC 20) to attract followers, gaining loyal servants, guards, allies, or disciples. However, since the total number of followers you can have at one time can't exceed your Reputation bonus (with professional characters counting as only one-half their level), many players don't see the point to having them. For the most part, they don't add much to a party's power level, so why bother?

Of course, the higher your Reputation, the more attractive a single mega-follower might seem. Our theoretical 11th-level crime lord could have an 11th-level soldier bodyguard, for example. Better yet, since you can replace followers you lose, the crime lord can pick up a new guard if his old one dies.

Another use for followers is support personnel. The same crime lord could have a 4th-level Force adept (for seeing into the future and healing the crime lord), a 6th-level expert (a pilot for the crime lord's ship), four 1st-level thugs (guards for his palace and/or ship), and a 4th-level diplomat (a major domo to run his business and keep track of his money). Since these characters are loyal as long as they aren't massively mistreated, the crime lord can depend on them to handle his funds and watch over nonfollower hirelings.

In fact, allowing followers to serve as managers, officers, and overseers is an excellent way to expand their utility. A noble with a Reputation of +8 can decide to have a single 6th-level soldier as captain of his guard and four 1st-level experts as managers of his ship's crew. Since he can depend on these characters, he can hire more personnel to fill other roles, letting his loyal followers monitor the activities of the other employees. Followers used this way can also represent their leader in meetings with dangerous factions, or simply stay behind and watch over the ship when the noble is out. A character can use his followers to expand his influence and awareness, if not his direct power.

Furthermore, a GM can let followers represent some kind of alliance or influence of which the character isn't even aware. A scoundrel with Fame and a +8 Reputation may find that a number of petty criminals throughout the galaxy revere him and are likely to aid him if he gets in trouble. Rather than assign them in advance, the GM simply waits for the scoundrel to slip up, and then makes a Reputation check to see if a 1st-level scoundrel or 2nd-level expert is around to help. If the number of followers meets the scoundrel's Reputation, he'll need to learn to depend on old friends instead of new ones, but by then he'll already have enjoyed the benefits of his fame several times.

## Working Out the Details

More than most rules, using followers requires a lot of communication between player and GM. While a few extra characters won't bog down most games, a GM is well within his rights to decide that a bounty hunter can't

have twenty 1st-level thugs to flush out prey in every fight. The player and GM need to agree on how many followers a character can have, who's going to run them, what equipment they start with, and just how loyal they are to the character's orders.

Once all that's been settled, followers can be used to enhance the feel of a character's growing influence and flesh out the background of a campaign. As long as they don't take center stage themselves or slow the dramatic pace of game play, followers are great additions to mid- and high-level *Star Wars* games.

*Discuss this month's "Tips and Tactics" and share your ideas about putting the Star Wars Roleplaying Game rules to best use in the Star Wars [message boards!](#)*

# Rebellion Era Jedi

## Tips and Tactics

[Owen K.C. Stephens](#)

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## I am a Jedi, Like My Father Before Me

Without a doubt, the most popular character idea for a *Star Wars* campaign is a Jedi. This is only reasonable -- Jedi are one of the defining aspects of the *Star Wars* universe, one of the unique things that sets it apart from other science fantasy settings. However, when used in a game set in the Rebellion era, Jedi characters become more difficult to justify. To represent this, characters are restricted to Jedi guardians and first must start with a level in another class.

So, Jedi in Rebellion era games have one more decision than in other campaigns: what class to start with. This is a critical decision that not only impacts the Jedi at low levels but also affects what direction he is likely to choose at later levels. In this article, we'll look at the pros and cons of the various multiclass combinations for Rebellion era Jedi characters.



## My Ally is the Force



The most common multiclass choice is soldier/Jedi guardian, a combination with obvious advantages. First, it gives the character the same base attack bonus he'd have as a straight Jedi guardian, and it also gives him a secondary attack at 6th level (any other combination has to wait until at least 7th level). The soldier also has the best vitality die, which is useful for powering Force abilities as a Jedi. Add in the broad collection of starting soldier feats and the fact that a second level of soldier can be taken at any time for a bonus feat, and this combination becomes the best bet for combat-oriented Jedi.

Of course, not every Jedi is combat-oriented. While it's not possible to play a Jedi consular in the Rebellion era, that doesn't mean you can't play a Jedi who focuses on solutions other than conflict. A noble/Jedi guardian has an excellent combination of class skills, combat ability, and a high Reputation bonus. In fact, these classes mesh so well that a player may consider taking more than one level of noble, perhaps splitting his levels evenly. Such a character is a much better fighter than a straight noble and can use Force skills to augment his powers of persuasion.

An often overlooked combination is Force adept/Jedi guardian. This represents a character who started in some other Force tradition, perhaps as a Kilian ranger or the *Jensaarai*, and then received training as a Jedi. This combination has numerous advantages. First, it grants the character some Force abilities immediately, which helps offset the high cost of buying them later. Second, it gives the hero the Force-Sensitive feat for free, which means he needn't select it as his sole Jedi guardian starting feat at 2nd level -- leaving him free to take Exotic Weapon Proficiency (lightsaber). It also means that the hero's Force level is equal to his character level, allowing him to take Burst of Speed at 3rd level (rather than having to wait, as other multiclass Jedi do).

## Always In Motion Is the Future

Another consideration when choosing a multiclass combination is future character development. Jedi guardians have a very limited selection of skills, and a character's best chance to expand that selection is to pick a beginning class that offers a broader range. While it's true that cross-class skills cost double when a character buys them at a Jedi level, the total ranks the character can have remains level+3, rather than half that. The scoundrel is a particularly good skill-expanding choice, as it has plenty of starting skill points and a good selection of class skills. The fringer, noble, scout, and Force adept are also good choices, though they tend to be more specialized.

Taking a number of skills that are cross-class for a Jedi guardian can help a character qualify for a prestige class. A player who wants his hero to become a Jedi investigator eventually will have a much easier time if his first class is scoundrel, allowing him to buy ranks of Gather Information and Search. A Force adept/Jedi is more likely to become a Jedi master early.

Finally, consider how your character complements other players' heroes. No matter how differently they develop at higher levels, a group of four single-class Jedi guardians will seem one-dimensional. On the other hand, a group with a noble/Jedi guardian, a scout/Jedi guardian, a soldier/Jedi guardian, and a tech specialist /Jedi guardian is much broader, and the characters are less likely to overlap.

*Need some help dreaming up plots for your Star Wars game? Check out our [latest preview](#) of the Galactic Campaign Guide for ideas.*

# Ship Design

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[Owen K.C. Stephens](#)

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## I'd Forgotten How Much I Hate Space Travel

One common problem Gamemasters have when running a *Star Wars* game is getting the heroes from one planet to another. Obviously, it's possible to let them book passage on a ship or be given a ride by employers or allies, but these solutions aren't particularly satisfying for most players. Unless the person being hired to take the group somewhere is also a heroic character, it removes a lot of the fun of playing in the *Star Wars* universe. A better answer is to give the heroes their own starship. A well-designed, well-named ship becomes part of the story, almost another character itself.

## We Can Almost Buy Our Own Ship For That

The design of a heroic starship is very important and should match the tone of the game and the tendencies of the characters flying it. A heavily armed ship encourages heroes to fight, while a fast one makes it more likely that they'll try to outrun trouble. Similarly, a ship with 2,000 metric tons of cargo space is likely to get them thinking about trade goods and profit, while one with no cargo space forces them to travel light. And since it's likely to be a long time before the heroes can get a new ship, it's best if the vessel is designed well from the start.



If you want the ship to have a blueprint, draw it before you do any other design work on the ship. It's much easier to assign size and weapons to a blueprint you've already finished than to try to draw a ship to fulfill specific requirements. There are a number of resources available to help draw a ship deckplan, ranging from deckplan sections in [Starships of the Galaxy](#) to complete deckplans in *Star Wars Gamer* and at least one issue of Paizo Publishing's *Polyhedron*. Any good search engine should be able to locate sources of full starship deckplans on the internet, too.

When working on a deckplan, you should be sure to include a few things that will make your games go more

smoothly. First, make sure the ship has a sleeping area for all the characters, plus some extra space for people they pick up along the way. Figure out where the galley, refreshers, and entry ramps are. These things might not come up in play very often, but if you forget them, your players will eventually ask where they are. It's also a good idea to have a large lounge, so the heroes have a place to hang out together and discuss their next plan.

If your game will involve space battles, make the cockpit big enough for most of the heroes, and make sure everyone has a place to do something useful in combat. There's nothing wrong with putting a few characters in gunwells, but make sure your tech specialist has an engineering station and your co-pilot has a separate seat. (See Chapter Twelve in the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* revised core rulebook for positions you can create to give characters something to do in combat.)

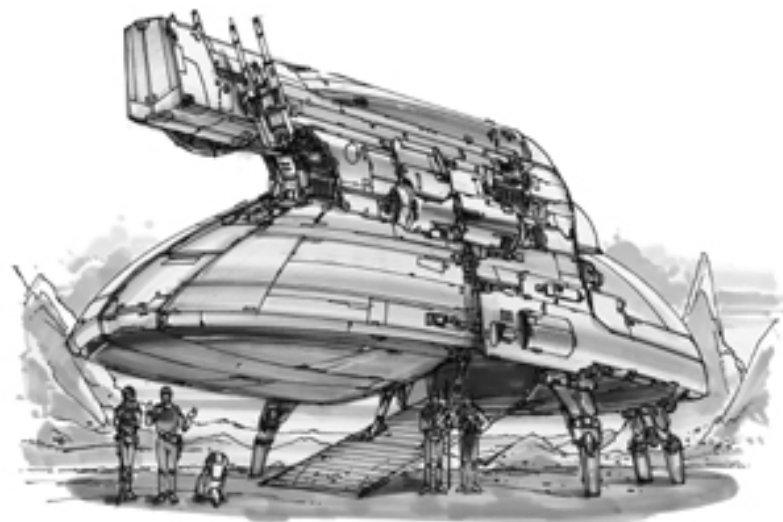
Try to allow for any equipment that you expect the heroes to acquire eventually. If one character is trying to become a starfighter ace, you can include a cargo area that doubles as a small hangar, or at least have an airlock and external docking clamps for one or more fighters. If you plan to give the heroes a walker or ground speeder, make sure one of the cargo areas has a ramp big enough to allow these vehicles to get in and out of the ship. It's not a bad idea to include a machine shop or droid repair bay as well, especially if one of the heroes is a tech specialist.

## You Came Here in That Thing? You're Braver Than I Thought

Of course, unless you're beginning your game at a higher level than most, the heroes can't possibly afford the magnificent ship you just designed. But you can find many ways around this problem. If the heroes all work for the same group, the ship could be on loan from the organization, or the heroes could be buying it over a long period of time. If the players aren't likely to get jealous, a single character could have it on loan.

Another option is to have the starship carrying vast debts that must be paid off. This need not be the purchase price, though it should be enough to offset the value of the ship. The owner could easily be indebted to a smuggler lord or even a legit repair facility and need to make regular payments or have his ship confiscated.

You can also reduce the value of a starship by giving it quirks and failings. A ship with plenty of lasers but only enough power to fire one at a time is obviously worth less. Such things as weak shields, slow hyperdrives, or bad navigation can bring down a ship's cost without reducing its ability to move a game's plot forward. In fact, troublesome or quirky ships are common in *Star Wars* games -- and often more popular than perfectly functioning vessels.



## She's Fast Enough For You, Old Man

Of course, you don't want players to regret getting their hands on a ship in the first place. A quirky vehicle that needs major upgrades, is painted a ridiculous color, or requires constant maintenance is an interesting element of a story and can lead to good roleplaying opportunities. But a real heap the heroes can never depend on and

are constantly pouring credits into isn't any fun. It drags down the enjoyment level of the game and draws focus away from the action that should be at the center of any *Star Wars* game.

The most important thing a starship should do is get the heroes to where the story is going. As long as they can depend on it to do that, they'll put up with numerous other failings. And, of course, as they gain experience and wealth, they can upgrade their ship to suit the more serious challenges they face until it qualifies as the fastest hunk of junk in the galaxy.

*Even the Jedi can use a hand sometimes, and the paramilitary group known as the Antarian Rangers live to serve the masters of the Force. Our final [preview](#) of the new Hero's Guide gives you the lowdown on the Rangers, including a new prestige class!*

# d20 Dipping

## Tips and Tactics

[Owen K.C. Stephens](#)

Looking for new ideas to jazz up your *Star Wars* game? You're in luck. With the flood of d20 roleplaying products, ideas are everywhere -- you just need to know what concepts to borrow and how to make them work in your game. In the nineteenth installment of "Tips and Tactics," designer Owen K.C. Stephens shows you how.




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One of the constant problems with creating official material for the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* is figuring out what part of the galaxy to describe. The vast scale of the setting makes it literally impossible to cover everything. There's no way you could describe all the flora and fauna on one inhabited planet, never mind a whole galaxy. If a published roleplaying product is too planet-specific, it gives the GM no help with the rest of the setting, but if it's too general, the GM could run out of material for a popular world after just a few games. While the team at Wizards of the Coast has done a great job with this balancing act, GMs inevitably must make up supplemental information about a person, place, or thing.

Luckily, since the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* uses the d20 system, a lot of material is available that, with a little effort and ingenuity, can be converted for a galaxy long ago and far, far away. Converting material from one game to another is an art, and we'll take a look at some of the most important considerations in this installment of "Tips and Tactics." The first thing to keep in mind is that nothing designed for a game other than the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* is going to mesh perfectly without some work.

## Keep it Simple

Don't do anything that requires a lot of rules conversions until you've had a chance to get a feel for how elements from different d20 games interact. You could conceivably port a good number of prestige classes, equipment, combat rules, and creatures over to your game, but if you take the wrong ones, or if you convert them badly, you could seriously damage the enjoyment your players get from your game.

Start slow, and begin with the easy stuff. The things you'll most likely need are plants and creatures to populate the worlds your heroes explore. While banthas do find their way onto an amazing number of worlds, your players will grow bored and suspicious if they keep running into rancors and nexu everywhere they go. Many *D&D* monsters translate easily into a *Star Wars* game. It's not hard to envision a purple worm moving through the sands of Tatooine or a remorhaz stalking the ice caves of Hoth.

At first, borrow only creatures that have few special abilities. Animals and beasts work well, as do some aberrations and humanoids. Avoid outlandish things (such as elementals and outsiders) and fantasy stereotypes (such as dragons and giants). You may find a special use for such creatures in a specific adventure -- using fire elementals as pure energy predators, for example, describing them as clouds of pulsing light rather than as having bodies of flame -- but for the most part, they have no place in your game.

As you become more comfortable converting creatures, you can select the ones with more unusual abilities. Stay away from things that are clearly magical; use only creatures whose powers could conceivably have a scientific or psychic explanation. On the other hand, don't be afraid to make a few really alien foes for your players. Certainly, native *Star Wars* creatures like the acklay and wampa seem monstrous, and there's no telling what kind of oddities the Yuuzhan Vong can breed.

## Quick Guidelines

When converting d20 material to *Star Wars*, most changes are pretty intuitive. Armor class becomes defense, Leadership becomes the Fame or Infamy feats, and a measurement of 6 feet is close enough to 2 meters. But sometimes the changes are more complex and require a bit more thought. Here are some examples:

- If you're converting something that uses hit points, you'll have to convert to wound points and vitality points. Use the creature's Con score for wounds, and convert its hit points directly to vitality. If the creature is Huge or bigger, double its wound points.
- If you allow healing rules from another d20 source (which you really should think twice about), all healing restores vitality damage first. If healing is used to restore wounds, the target can receive the benefit only once a day, and the process restores the minimum amount (or half, for things with no random number). For example, if you decide to use a *D&D* scroll of *cure light wounds* to represent a special, high-tech medpac, it can either restore 1d8+1 vitality, or 2 wounds once per day.
- Critical hits are much more deadly in the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* than in most d20 games, so you should change weapon threat ranges to half their value (minimum of 20) and ignore crit multiples (as criticals go straight to wounds).
- Armor should give DR instead of defense bonuses. High-tech armor grants DR equal to one-half the defense bonus it would grant, and low-tech armor grants DR equal to one-quarter its defense bonus. For creatures, you can leave natural armor bonuses granting extra defense, or you can convert them to DR (in which case, the creature always gets half its natural armor as DR).
- Equipment might need to be repriced and renamed. For pricing, compare new equipment to existing items, and set a similar value. If in doubt, assume that 1 gp equals 10 credits, and that an item's purchase DC x 100 equals its price in credits. Regarding names, unless you specifically want to present something as an archaic item, you should change its name and description to match the feel of the *Star Wars* universe.

## Don't Go Too Far

While there's nothing wrong with deciding you want to play a game with illithid Sith, dragon Jedi, and +1 *keen blasters*, that's not really a *Star Wars* game. So make sure you don't take too many elements or add things that change the tone of your game in ways you don't expect. Also, be sure to gauge the reaction of your players to each new element you introduce. If the evil psychic you built using the *D&D Psionics Handbook* doesn't go over well, don't use anything else from the book, and definitely don't start borrowing magic spells to represent new Force powers.

On the other hand, if your players love running across a broad selection of strange and wondrous elements introduced from other d20 games, don't be afraid to experiment further. Ultimately, the purpose of any

roleplaying game is for the participants to have fun, and there's no right or wrong way to do that.

*Discuss this month's "Tips and Tactics" and share your ideas about putting the Star Wars Roleplaying Game rules to best use in the Star Wars [message boards!](#)*

# Dare To Be Different

## Tips and Tactics

[Owen K.C. Stephens](#)

The *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* is easy to learn, but it can be difficult to master. With that in mind, we present "Tips and Tactics," a monthly column designed to help you get the most out of your *Star Wars* roleplaying! Each month, Owen K.C. Stephens (author of [Starships of the Galaxy](#) and coauthor of the [Rebellion Era Sourcebook](#), [Alien Anthology](#), [Tempest Feud](#), the [Power of the Jedi Sourcebook](#) and the [Arms & Equipment Guide](#)) will show you how to use various rules together, suggest new ways to use old rules, and clarify complex rules.

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One factor in the difference between good roleplaying game campaigns and great ones is the quality of the heroic characters. While it can be fun to use pregenerated characters for short campaigns or one-shot adventures, one of the thrills of a longer campaign is designing a character that matches your own style and goals, and then watching him or her grow and mature. Characters that are distinctive, memorable, and interesting not only are more fun to play but also can increase the enjoyment your fellow players and GM get from a game session.

Making such a character is often more a matter of luck than good design, but with some care, you can increase the odds of developing the Rodian rat-catcher who wants to be a bounty hunter that everyone is still talking about nine months later. Characters a little different from the norm give broad opportunities for in-character discussions and quick patter that keeps the action level high even when no one's shooting at you.

## Don't Be A Stereotype

One element that can make a hero interesting is his or her dissimilarity to the other characters. The *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* is set in a galaxy full of diversity, but there are an amazing number of Corellian smugglers and Wookiee scouts among player characters. Playing against type -- building characters that don't match what is commonly seen in the movies, books, and comics -- helps set your hero apart. Bothan law officers, Ithorian soldiers, Mon Calamari bounty hunters, and Trandoshan Jedi are more likely to stand out because they're not common combinations of species and classes.

However, you should be careful with this guideline. First, if you really want to play a noble from Alderaan, don't force yourself to make a character you'll enjoy less. Second, don't make a character that doesn't match the heroic tone of *Star Wars*. A Trandoshan philosopher is fine, but an apathetic Trandoshan nihilist who doesn't see the point in heroics or taking sides in any conflict won't be fun for others to play with.





## Make Unusual Choices

Even a normal character concept can be freshened up with a few unusual choices. For example, a soldier with a blaster rifle is simple to the point of boredom. A soldier who prefers a slugthrower, despite its less-effective stopping power, has a quirk that sets him apart. Of course, such decisions need not reduce a character's effectiveness. A soldier who focuses on using the best armor around rather than the biggest weapons may be just as useful in a fight, especially if he eventually ends up in GTU AV-1A assault armor.

If you aren't comfortable depending on something unusual for your character's main contribution to a group, think about adding something odd in a secondary capacity. Our example soldier may well carry a blaster rifle, having trained with Rebel troops. But he's also spent time with the Nosaurians of New Plympto. He still carries his tree-claws and folding harvest blade, which he uses as a back-up melee weapon. This detail affects game play only occasionally (though a melee weapon with a 4-meter reach may prove useful more often than you'd think), but it goes far to make the character descriptive and unique.

## Emphasize Your Weaknesses

Sometimes, what your character is *bad* at sets him or her apart in interesting and entertaining ways. For example, there's nothing particularly special about a Wookiee with a bowcaster. It's the weapon we see Chewbacca carry in the movies, and it's an iconic choice for Wookiee characters. There is, however, something interesting about a Wookiee who's a very bad shot with his bowcaster.

For example, picture a 5th-level Wookiee tech specialist. Having focused his ability scores on Intelligence and Strength, he has a Dexterity of only 8. He decides his character has earned the right to carry a bowcaster, but he doesn't take the feat needed to be proficient with it. With a base attack of only +3, that means he makes bowcaster attacks with a -2 penalty (+3, -1 Dexterity, -4 nonproficiency). However, using the bowcaster in preference of other weapons is a point of honor for the character. Friends and foes alike may duck when he begins firing, but the hero is more memorable for focusing on something he's bad at. Additionally, the character can concentrate on noncombat talents to be more useful to the group, since he's not spending any effort on learning to shoot.



## Don't Play Everything For Laughs

It's fine to be interesting, but play it carefully. There's nothing wrong with having a few humorous elements in a character, but never forget that *Star Wars* is, at its heart, heroic fantasy. If you take a desire to be different too far, you'll create a character who is a buffoon or clown. Not only does this change your hero from "memorable" to "annoying," it can ruin other player's enjoyment of their more serious character concepts.

The same advice applies to any character trait. A Rebel soldier who was once a peaceful forest guide on Alderaan and now hates the Empire with a passion is a fine character idea. A suggestion that he was once a happy joker who pulled pranks on his co-workers to set off his now-grim demeanor makes him more interesting and affords plenty of opportunities to roleplay. But if he's so melancholy that he never talks to his comrades, and

if he hates the Empire so much that he'll practically commit suicide by attacking a hundred stormtroopers, his character traits have crossed the line, and the presence of the soldier interferes with everyone's fun.

As a rule of thumb, don't have your character act in ways that would annoy you or that would seem inappropriate for the protagonist of a movie you'd enjoy. Consider the impact on the GM and the other players, and you can develop a character that everyone will remember -- without going so over the top that no one wants to see your hero again.

*What happened in a secret meeting between Princess Leia and Darth Vader on the banking world of Aargau?  
Find out in the [final installment](#) of August's "Planet Hoppers" series.*

# Rule Call

## Tips and Tactics

[Owen K.C. Stephens](#)

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Part of the joy of a roleplaying game is that characters can attempt to do anything. One of the drawbacks is there aren't always rules for every action, and the rules that do exist can be hard to find. One of the most important roles of the Gamemaster is to act as game referee, both interpreting existing rules and making up new rules to handle situations the rulebooks don't cover. Experienced GMs generally learn how to do this through trial and error, but this installment of "Tips and Tactics" offers tips for newer groups who may still have problems with these situations.

## Be Familiar With The Game

The first and best piece of advice is to be familiar with the game. This means not only knowing the rules (though that's part of it) but also understanding the adventure you're running and the characters being played. If you know your scenario pits the heroes against a Sith lord on a balcony above a power core, and one of your players runs a strong Wookiee who likes throwing things, it's not a stretch to guess that you may need to decide how far a Wookiee can toss a Sith lord. By making these kinds of decisions in advance, you can save a lot of time at the gaming table.



Encouraging the players to know the rules also speeds up a game. You can ask anyone using a feat or skill to look up the relevant page number in advance, so they can tell you where to look if you need to read the rule in question. The only danger here is that some players may see this as an opportunity to dictate how the rules should work. A GM needs to keep a firm grasp on the decision-making process. While it's fine for players to help and advise, it's the GM who must decide how things work in a campaign.

## Look For Similar Rules

One quick way to handle rules questions is to borrow a mechanic from a rule covering a similar situation. There may not be any rules to determine how far a Wookiee can throw a Sith lord, but lifting, jumping, and throwing rules exist. Any or all of these could be combined to make a throwing distance rule. Maybe you treat a Strength check to throw someone as a Jump check for distance. Or maybe you decide everything has a minimum range modifier of 2 meters and that any hero who wants to throw an opponent must make an attack roll. You might decide that heroes can only throw things that weigh less than their light encumbrance, or assign penalties for throwing heavier objects.

An easy example is a fight in a cantina, with characters picking up tables and chairs to hide behind or use as weapons. Hiding behind something clearly counts as cover or concealment (depending on the circumstances), and random blunt objects can be treated as clubs. If a character rips free a power cord and starts jabbing people with it, that can be treated as a stun baton. You could enforce a -4 nonproficiency penalty on anyone who attacks with a whole chair, rather than using a single leg.

## Don't Get Bogged Down

The *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* is at its best when the action is fast and furious. The pacing of a game can be seriously damaged by spending ten minutes looking for Defense modifiers for shooting at someone through an aquarium. If you can't find an appropriate rule, just make up something that seems dramatic and move on. Many situations can be dealt with by giving a +2 or -2 modifier to someone's d20 roll.

A good GM also needs to limit debate with players during the game itself. If a player doesn't agree with your ruling, give him a minute or two to explain why -- he may even be right. But if you're not convinced, just let the player know he'll have another opportunity to discuss the issue, but you're going with a ruling for the moment to keep the game going. There's plenty of time to have a lengthy rules discussion later.

## Be Consistent

A GM is more than the person who sets up encounters and plays nonheroic character roles. The GM is the interpreter of reality, the lens through which players see how the game universe works. In order for players to make plans and learn how the game universe works, the GM needs to be consistent in his rulings. If a GM decides that a Wookiee can throw a Sith lord with a Strength check the same distance the Wookiee would cover with a Jump check of the same value during one game, that distance needs to be the same the next week. Otherwise, the Wookiee's player may increase his character's Strength just to improve his Sith-tossing skills and be upset when the GM tells him throwing distance is now a flat 4 meters.

The corollary to this rule is that if you do need to change a rule, be sure to tell your players. Sometimes a GM makes a quick decision at the game table and later decides it was a bad call. There's nothing wrong with that, but be sure to inform your players of the new ruling as soon as you can. If possible, tell them before the next game session. This lets players know that you won't change your ruling without advance notice and demonstrates that you think about your rulings carefully.

## Don't Worry Too Much

The ultimate goal of a GM is to have fun and help the players enjoy themselves. It's all right to occasionally misuse a rule or made a bad call when handling an odd situation. No one should spend so much time and effort worrying about the rules that the group forgets to have fun. While the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* is complex and involved, it's just a game. The first rule should be to have a good time, and all other rule calls should support that idea.

*Everything you ever wanted to know about ion weapons but were afraid to ask -- answered at last in the latest installment of "[Jedi Counseling](#)"!*

# Dead Eye For the Jedi

## Tips and Tactics

[Owen K.C. Stephens](#)

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Without a doubt, the most respected and feared warriors in the *Star Wars* universe are Jedi. Able to augment themselves with the Force, deflect blaster bolts back toward their attackers, and leap into a fight before a foe even reveals himself, Jedi are often seen as too powerful to defeat. Without a Force-user to counteract their abilities or massively overwhelming numbers of enemies, many Gamemasters assume that a Jedi character realistically can't be challenged in a fair fight.

In truth, Jedi have numerous weaknesses. Perhaps the greatest of these is the fact their abilities are well known. Any enemy who realizes he faces a Jedi can prepare to avoid such abilities as deflection and the Jedi mind trick. With a little planning, even fairly typical thugs can give a Jedi a run for his credits, and an experienced bounty hunter can expect to capture one dead or alive.

## Keep Your Distance

The lightsaber is the weapon of the Jedi, and it's very effective. It is, however, less useful for dealing with snipers 800 meters away. Additionally, a number of Force powers -- including Affect Mind, Force Lightning, Force Strike, and Move Object -- have ranges of 10 meters or less. By staying away from a Jedi, an attacker neutralizes many of his foe's best weapons.

Of course, sometimes it's a good idea to get a Jedi to use his best weapons. Most of a Jedi's powers cost him vitality, and by encouraging him to use those skills, you reduce his effectiveness later. Often, Jedi are willing to use violent Force abilities on nonliving targets. Thus, a wave of attack droids at close range may well tempt the Jedi to waste his energies early, before the real fight begins. Even a few used courier droids with bolted-on blasters are likely to encourage a little wasteful Force use. Young Jedi in particular are easily goaded into showing off when their targets aren't living.

## Keep the Battle Moving

A lot of Jedi powers (especially deflection) require action on the Jedi's part. If you can make an attack on a Jedi

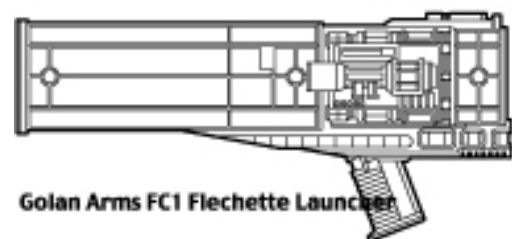
in a running battle, you reduce the amount of action he can devote to attacking you and defending or healing himself. Even Jedi Masters who can use many abilities as free actions burn more vitality doing so, wearing them down more quickly.

One good way to force a Jedi to fight and move is to threaten nearby innocents; for example, throw thermal detonators into crowds in a constantly shifting pattern. Even if the Jedi can easily counter such tactics, he must move around to do so. And to capture you, he must follow if you run. Even if a Jedi decides to allow you to escape, at worst you've managed a draw.

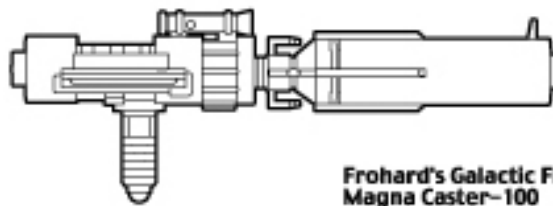
Of course, some Jedi try to overcome this limitation with Burst of Speed. By taking a full round to activate defenses or augment powers and then using Burst of Speed on his next move, a Jedi can keep up with most opponents without leaving himself exposed. You can use this to your advantage as well, by having the battleground you run away into prepared in advance. A Jedi using Burst of Speed can't examine an area carefully, and he can be lured into a minefield, an ambush, or even a pit covered by a holoprojector image of flooring.

## Avoid Blasters

With Jedi able to deflect, redirect, and absorb blaster bolts, a smart foe simply doesn't use blasters. Against Jedi with Dissipate Energy, it's best to stick to slugthrowers, frag grenades, and stun grenades. If you allow the use of items from the [Arms & Equipment Guide](#), dart pistols, flechette launchers, magna-casters, wrist-rockets, chemical load and glop grenades, and shatter guns are also good choices. Of course, it may be difficult to know if a particular Jedi has Dissipate Energy or not, but a few waves of cheap attack droids with blasters are useful for exploring your foe's powers as well as draining his vitality.

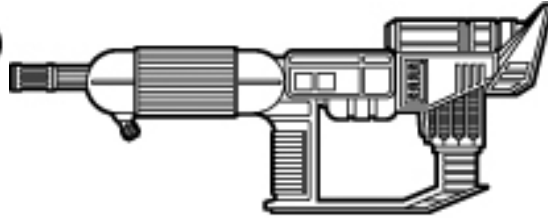
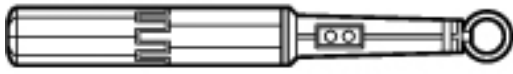


Golan Arms FC1 Flechette Launcher



Frohard's Galactic Firearms  
Magna Caster-100

Merr-Sonn WW-41  
Cryoban Grenade



Merr-Sonn Model CR-24  
Flame Rifle



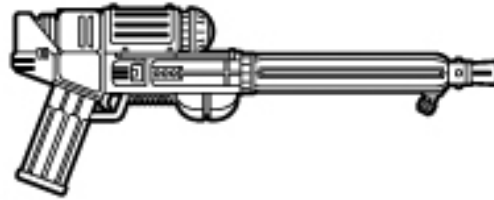
Merr-Sonn C-14  
Stun Grenade



Czerka Spore/B  
Stun Grenade



Merr-Sonn C-20  
Glop Grenade



Merr-Sonn Model C-22  
Flame Carbine

If a Jedi doesn't have Dissipate Energy, flamers and sonic weapons become good choices to use against him. Flamers require an attacker to get closer than is usually wise, but the advantages of an area-effect weapon may overcome this concern. In addition, a truly dedicated and wealthy foe may have specific anti-Jedi weapons built. One clever suggestion made in JD Wiker's "Jedi Counseling" column is [cortosis bullets](#), though thugs prepared with knockout gas, glop mines, and droids filled with explosives that detonate when hit by a lightsaber are also effective.

## Don't Overdo It

There's nothing wrong with having an occasional foe be ready for a Jedi hero character, and a really clever enemy may be a good choice for an ongoing villain, but don't overdo it. Most thugs in the galaxy are armed to fight other thugs, not Jedi. Worse, if a Jedi character never gets to shine, his player is likely to be justifiably annoyed. These anti-Jedi tips are best used in moderation and have greater impact when they're the exception, not the norm.

*The final installment of this month's Planet Hoppers series on the world of Carida brings you "[Cadets Gone Wild](#)," as Imperial Academy cadets Myrette Davani and Shira Brie go out for a night on the town they'll never forget.*



# Hard-Wired Heroes

## Tips and Tactics

[Owen K.C. Stephens](#)

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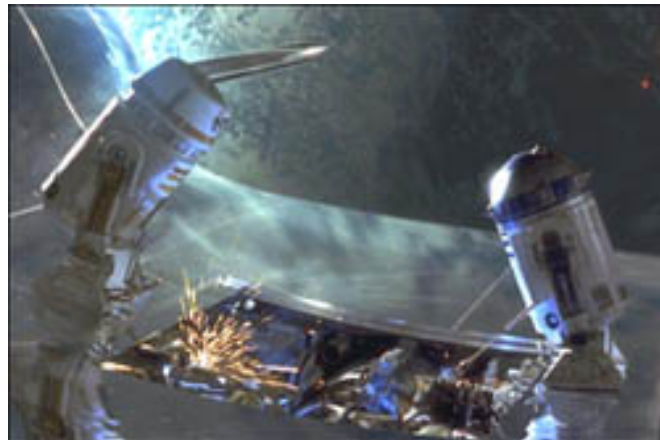
Droid characters are popular with many groups, but they have some special issues that don't come up with other character types. The first of these is how they are viewed by others. Not only are droids generally considered property in the *Star Wars* universe, but they're defined more by what they are than by what they do. No one would think of defining a Wookiee diplomat primarily by her species, but to most people, a 3PO is a 3PO, even if it has 7 levels of scout.

If that kind of prejudice and social limitation isn't enough to dissuade you, let's look at some considerations for making droid heroes.

## Thoughts, Thumbs, and Equipment

Droids can have limitations that biological heroes don't. Some players find these drawbacks an entertaining challenge, but most will just be annoyed by their character's inability to do something when it's important. The two biggest considerations are hands and untrained skills.

Though droids can have a fair amount of built-in equipment, there's a limit to how much you can cram into one chassis. Additionally, numerous kinds of equipment, such as starship controls and even door mechanisms, are stationary. For this reason, most players should select a droid model that has hands rather than claws or tool mounts. The manipulator hands of an R2 unit can operate doors, fire weapons, and pick up items. But an EG-6 has no hands of any kind and, unless heavily modified, will be difficult to play despite being allowed as a heroic character.



In a similar vein, droid characters cannot use most skills untrained without a heuristic processor. This may not seem like a big deal, but any player who wants to do things on the fly needs to buy one rank of nearly every skill or get the upgrade. Of the models allowed as heroes

in the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* revised core rulebook, only the 2-1B and R2 units have built-in heuristic processors.

One skill every heroic droid should buy is Computer Use. Because a droid's skill points can be reassigned with a Computer Use check, having this skill at a good value is like having many different skills. A droid can reprogram himself for every mission, buying up Knowledge skills and technical or social abilities based on the things likely to be encountered. This is one of the greatest advantages droids have, and a smart droid doesn't depend on others to take advantage of it.

## The Force and Other Biological Advantages

Droids can't use the Force, nor can they be healed by it. This is a bigger drawback than is first apparent. While it's true that a droid need not fear Fear, for example, they are no more immune to Force Lightning or Force strike than anyone else. Having a Jedi aid them is not as useful, however, as they can't gain the benefit of Heal Another. Worse, most droids can be shut down by Drain Energy, and there's no comparable light-side power to negate it. Droids can't even use Force Points, making them far less likely to succeed heroically at an adventure's climax.

Similarly, a droid gains no benefit from a medpac. It's true that droids can be repaired, but doing so is generally a long-term project. A droid may well go on adventures with numerous unhealed dents and dings if a good tech specialist isn't part of the team.



## Higher-Level Droids

For the most part, higher-level droids aren't appropriate heroic choices. For a beginning game, having a lot of levels and abilities in a droid character can cause numerous problems. First, players with traditional 1st-level characters are likely to feel overshadowed by the droid's large attack and/or skill bonuses. Secondly, the player with the droid character doesn't gain any new skills or feats until the campaign has caught up to the droid's level. This can mean a long wait before any real character development occurs for the droid, which is tiring.

However, this rule of thumb has at least two possible exceptions. If you're adding a new character to an ongoing higher-level game, or if you're starting characters at higher than 1st level, a more powerful droid hero may be fine. It's best to stick with droids similar to those allowed in the revised core rulebook (a World Devastator technically may be considered a droid, but it's never a good heroic character) and to limit the droid to the actual level of the campaign (unlike starting droids, which may have several professional levels even in a 1st-level game).

## Check and Double-Check With Your GM

The most important thing a player wanting a droid hero needs to do is check with the game's GM. Of course, a GM gets to approve of any heroes before they're added to his game, but droids are much more likely to be excluded. That's because many *Star Wars* fans feel that droids aren't really "people" and, thus, aren't good alter-egos for players. This opinion is far from universal, but it is widespread enough that the first edition of the d20 *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* rules didn't even include droid heroes as an option.

Additionally, droid heroes just aren't appropriate for some campaigns. For example, games focusing on Force-sensitive characters or plots that require the heroes to interact with the Yuuzhan Vong aren't suitable for droids. A GM may not want to outline his plans for a game at the time of character creation, but if he says that droids aren't a good choice, it's best to believe him.

Even if a GM approves the idea of droid heroes in general, it's wise to double-check his expectations for your character. Some GMs see droids as support characters only and not the focus of the story. This is a legitimate point of view; in the *Star Wars* movies, droids help their biological masters or simply obey orders. Many players actually prefer this kind of character, getting more enjoyment from acting around the center of attention than from being in the spotlight. But if you want your droid hero to be just as important as the flesh-and-blood heroes, you'd better make sure the GM is okay with that idea. Sure, it can be annoying to learn that the GM has different ideas about a droid's role in a campaign, but it's best to find out earlier rather than later.



If a GM doesn't want your kind of heroic droid, you have two options. First, you can discuss the GM's decision with him and try to come to a happy compromise. For example, the GM may not like droid soldiers but will accept a droid tech or diplomat. A GM also may object to a specific piece of equipment and allow a droid if it comes without the offending tech. It's fine to explore these ideas, but don't push the point.

If you can't reach a compromise, you can try to build a similar character using a more typical species. A GM might be fine with a Jawa or Bimm technician who can fulfill a lot of the same roles as an R2 unit. It may not be exactly the character you envisioned, but the additional challenge of playing something else may increase your overall enjoyment of the game.

*If Darth Maul had head-butted Obi-Wan, would his head spikes have dealt the Jedi extra damage? Find out in the latest "[Jedi Counseling](#)"!*

# From Concept to Character

## Tips and Tactics

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In many of the previous "Tips and Tactics" columns, I've warned that a character concept should always be the guiding vision when building a hero. It's not always easy, however, to know how to build a character concept from a collection of classes, skills, and feats. So if you need help turning your idea into a playable character, check out this column's suggestions.

## Roles and Rolls

The first step is to have a clear vision of your character concept. This can be as simple as a one-word job description (doctor, slicer, trader, thief, and so on) or be supplemented with a mythic role (tragic hero, coward forced to overcome his fears, villain turned savior, local boy made good, and the like) and perhaps a bit of history or personality (ex-military pacifist, Imperial-hating farmer burned out of home, smuggler's son who loves adventure, etc.). The idea here is to pick a role, not a character class. You may decide to emulate a character from fiction, or pick a profession or role you've always been interested in. The concept is the most important part of a character's development, so be sure to give it careful thought.

Once the character concept is firmly in mind, it's time to build the character's game stats. In some cases, the choices are obvious—a mercenary who has known nothing but war should be a soldier, and a third-generation senator who's never fired a weapon in anger should be a noble. If you're building a character at higher than 1st level, you have even more options—the third-generation senator might be from a marsh world and have a level of fringer. As the character develops, you'll need to choose new classes, skills, and feats in keeping with your concept. It's easy to lose track of where you wanted your character to go, so it's a good idea to form a plan of advancement before you actually earn future levels.

## Borrowing a Blueprint

When designing a hero, a good place to start is Character Archetypes in Chapter 14 of the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* revised core rulebook. That section offers blueprints for about 30 character types, ranging from civil administrators to Yuuzhan Vong warriors. In some cases, these can be used as-is to plan a character's advancement, matching the skill, class, and feat selection as closely as you desire. The doctor and slicer archetypes are good examples of how to take the same character class (tech specialist) and use skill, ability, and feat selections to produce two very different characters.



Many of the character archetypes in Chapter 14 use professional classes, which generally aren't a good choice for a heroic character. For the most part, it's easy to replace the professional classes with heroic classes that fill the same role. Diplomat levels become noble levels, thug levels become soldier levels, and so on. Of course, if one of the archetypes isn't exactly what you're looking for, you may wish to replace diplomat levels with fringer levels, or thug levels with Jedi guardian.

Swapping out levels works for archetypes made of heroic classes as well. A military doctor might replace a few tech specialist levels with soldier or noble levels. You can also replace prestige classes with heroic class levels. A big game hunter might have the same class combinations as a bounty hunter, but not take the actual bounty hunter class, instead continuing to switch between scout and scoundrel. A blueprint is helpful, but don't feel constrained by it.

## Fine Tuning

If a character doesn't turn out just as you'd like, don't worry. You'll have plenty of opportunities to fine-tune your hero and move him or her closer to your concept. Sometimes, a character's flaws become apparent in the first game or two—for example, a doctor might have no ranks of Knowledge (medicine)—and it may be worthwhile to ask your GM if you can move a few skill points around. Flaws discovered later should be fixed when you next advance in level.

One good way to help focus a character is to keep a list of things you'd like to be able to do as they come up in play. For example, if a doctor runs across an experimental bacta tank but can't decipher how it works because he lacks ranks of Knowledge (technology), make a note that you'd like to buy at least one rank of the skill at your next level. As your list of desired feats, skills, and abilities grows, you might come to realize that what your character really needs is a different class.



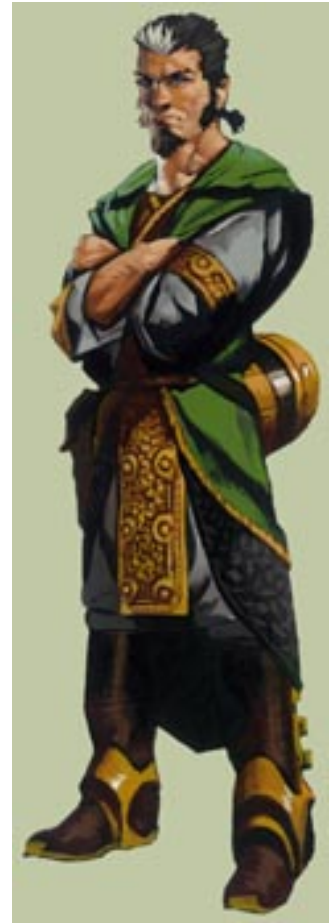
This is also a good time to plan for any prestige class you want your character to take. Prerequisites often take several levels to fulfill, and a list of what you need can help you stay on track. A map of the classes, levels, and feats you plan to take with each advancement can form a blueprint much like a character archetype, helping you know at what level you can finally take levels of crime lord or bounty hunter.

## Don't Forget the Fun

Keeping your character true to your concept is important, but it's also crucial to make sure that your hero remains playable. No matter how good a sewage treatment worker is at his job, he may not be much of a hero. (Unless, of course, dianogas are a common problem where he works.) So strike a balance between adhering to your character concept and building a hero who is helpful to the group and appropriate to the *Star Wars* universe. Otherwise, you may end up with a perfectly conceived character that's no fun to play.

And what would be the point of that?

*Come back to the planet Zeltros one last time for the bittersweet story of [Dani](#), a Zeltron smuggler looking for love in all the wrong places--and unable to avoid tragedy once she finds it.*



# Game Prep

## Tips and Tactics #24

[Owen K.C. Stephens](#)

The *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* is easy to learn, but it can be difficult to master. With that in mind, we present "Tips and Tactics," a monthly column designed to help you get the most out of your *Star Wars* roleplaying! Each month, Owen K.C. Stephens (author of [Starships of the Galaxy](#) and coauthor of the [Rebellion Era Sourcebook](#), [Alien Anthology](#), [Tempest Feud](#), the [Power of the Jedi Sourcebook](#) and the [Arms & Equipment Guide](#)) will show you how to use various rules together, suggest new ways to use old rules, and clarify complex rules.



Don't you hate spending hours preparing a cool site in your game that the heroes never visit? Or when they head off in a direction that you *haven't* prepared? In this installment of "Tips and Tactics," learn how much to prepare, what kinds of things to prepare, and what to do when your plans blow up.

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## Don't Prepare More Than You Need

One of the things that can overwhelm a *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* GM is the vast scope of the *Star Wars* universe. A GM who attempts to prepare every possible location the heroes might visit will have to worry about thousands of worlds and can't focus on the adventure plot. Not only does this increase the workload and decrease the fun for the GM, but much of the design work is never seen by the players and becomes wasted effort.

A GM should focus on preparing things likely to come up in the next gaming session only, being aware of resources to fill in gaps if the players go off on a tangent. Plenty of resources exist for *Star Wars* people, places, and names, including a vast quantity of nongame materials. Having a few of the *Essential Guides*, novels, or comics allows a GM to create settings and characters quickly if the game takes an unexpected twist. In most cases, when characters go someplace unexpected, the GM can get them back without needing to resort to game stats. If a fight does break out or an interaction occurs that requires the use of game mechanics, the GM can easily turn to Chapter 14: Allies and Opponents of the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* revised core rulebook, using a similar creature or character archetype as a stop-gap.

Even the main adventure doesn't need to be fully detailed before it's played. Most GMs have a good idea how much a group of heroes can accomplish in one game, and need only have this much prepared. While it's generally a good idea to have a rough outline for the direction of a plot (or at least to keep good notes about the hints you drop in earlier games), the exact details can be worked out before each game.

## Do Prepare Things With Many Uses



One way to avoid this problem is to have a few locations prepared that can be used in a variety of settings. Things like cantinas, major starports, and used starship dealerships are common sights throughout the galaxy. Having one or two written up in advance gives a GM locations he can place on any civilized world. The lower-scale and more shoddy the establishments, the more easily they can be placed, as even the richest world has a few seedier neighborhoods, while some worlds don't have any ritzy locales.

Another trick is to make one or two businesses especially appealing to the heroic characters, encouraging them to visit those places frequently. For example, a scruffy Duro weapons and gear dealer the heroes saved once may offer them a 20 percent discount on repairs and new equipment. Though his shop is on Dantooine, the fact that he's someone the heroes can trust and get a good deal from makes it likely that they'll go to him for their needs. If he's also an information broker or has a cousin who's a data slicer, the heroes are even more likely to turn to him first.

A twist on these ideas is to combine them, creating a friendly resource for the heroes that's actually mobile. A junk dealer who owns a huge transport ship that goes from world to world buying and selling can give the heroes an ally with many uses -- and can show up anywhere the heroes happen to be. Shadowports, criminal empires, rebellions, and legitimate businesses also provide wide-ranging resources the heroes can call on wherever they need to.

Similarly, villains can be designed to show up more than once. Rather than having the heroes fight a single dark-side Force warlock, design an evil cult with tendrils on hundreds of worlds. Not only does such a group have a more epic feel, but they also provide ready foes any time the heroes need something to spice up their current adventure. Bounty hunter guilds, evil empires, and most of the groups mentioned as potential allies all make for good foil groups.



## Always Have a Plan "B"

One of the secrets of keeping the flow of a game going is to always have a back-up plan. A side adventure, random encounter, or plot complication you can design in advance and save until you need it is preparation time well spent. If the heroes finish a game early, get totally off-track, or just grow bored with a long investigation, the GM can introduce a short, obvious encounter to get the excitement going and redirect the heroes back to the main plot.

In many ways, these are similar to the easily placed locations, allies, and enemies suggested earlier, but often it's best if these are more specific. A GM who knows he's going to run multiple games that involve investigating a murder that will end up pointing to a Senator's aide can design a single back-up encounter to be used any time during that plotline. An attack by guards who normally work for the senator or a clandestine meeting with a political opponent are good examples of plot-specific ideas that can be used any time. If the game slows down, a GM character can initiate one of these encounters. If GM characters offer important clues (to be discovered through diplomacy or taken from their smoking bodies), the players will be delighted to follow up and move back to areas the GM has designed in advance.

In a worst-case scenario, just have a group of black-clad dark Jedi attack. Players love defeating dark Jedi, and a good fight can eat up the rest of the game session. After the game ends, you can take the time to figure out

how the evil attackers are tied into the ongoing plot!

*When superstitious natives ask the heroes to help them complete a sacred ritual, will the characters have what it takes? Find out in our latest free miniadventure, "[The Wellspring!](#)"*