

A Long Time Ago...

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

Create a Character

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

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

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

Balance

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

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

How to Play

Narrate your action to the GM. The GM determines starting Balance. You roll 2d6. Add or subtract any beats that apply.

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

Narrate an outcome consistent with the Balance that you ended up with. Note that none of these outcomes are necessarily better for you personally: they only favor a "lighter" or "darker" outcome for somebody. If you don't have a solid idea, or the GM overrules you, GM's narration takes precedence.

The GM can arbitrarily pick who ends up better off as a result of the action, or use this guideline: if the Balance changed thanks to the roll, ask if the PC follows along with the adjustment. If they do, the advantage is theirs. If not, the advantage goes to the enemy.

End of Session

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

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

Actions

Conflicts

Small unit tactics, large open warfare, and anything in between. It's you vs. an opposing force.

- Fighting another force in a stand-up conflict
- Outflanking or outmaneuvering a stronger force
- Dogfighting an enemy in space
- Placing somebody else in peril, or escaping from imminent peril
- Making an orderly retreat or clean getaway

Starting Balance is typically Dark. Outcomes:

- White - an enemy changes sides, a lost friend is found, peace (but not necessarily victory)
- Light - moment of hope, escape routes are taken, lives are saved or spared.
- Gray - the situation changes but the battle rages on, or a costly victory.
- Dark - the other side (or yours) loses people or suffers injury.
- Black - a lasting injury, treachery, great loss, named people die.

Lightsaber Duels

A contest between Force users, with the weapons of the Jedi and the use of the Force. Often mixed with a set of Moral and Emotional Moments.

- Crossing sabers with your opponent
- Using telekinetic tricks or attacks to distract, disorient, or harm
- Changing the location or circumstances of the duel - the fight moves to a new area, for example.
- Escaping to fight another day
- Dealing a lasting injury

Starting Balance is your Force alignment plus your intent for your enemy. Outcomes:

- White - redemptive victory or bloodless capture.
- Light - a successful defense, an appeal to your opponent's better nature.
- Gray - Duel of the Fates.
- Dark - opponent (or you) at a disadvantage, emotionally compromised, or hurt.
- Black - opponent (or you) seriously injured or killed, a moral or physical tragedy.

Races and Pursuits

Any chase scene, whether a rooftop chase, pod racing, or TIE Fighter escape. You want to get to somewhere or away from somewhere, and somebody is interfering.

- Disabling or destroying another chaser.
- Making a risky move to advance your position in the chase.
- Eluding pursuit or avoiding detection.

Starting Balance depends on your intentions. Avoiding capture is Light, blowing up the other guy is Dark, just racing is Gray. Outcomes:

- White - chase ends without drama for somebody, or some chaser gets a big advantage.
- Light - somebody escaped, avoided detection, or learned something interesting.
- Gray - mixed success, the chase goes on.
- Dark - off course, lost, damaged vehicles, lost something valuable in the chase.
- Black - serious crash, wrecked vehicles, physical injury.

Infiltration and Search

You want to get somewhere that's guarded, find something that's lost, or learn something that's kept secret.

- Locating a lost or stolen macguffin
- Finding a prisoner or person in hiding
- Sneaking through a secure area via the sewers, access vents, or whatever
- Bluffing or hacking the guards or other defenses
- Seeking answers by trusting the Force

Starting Balance is usually Gray, but can go Light or Dark depending on how risky or precarious the situation is. Outcomes:

- White - truth comes readily, you achieve your goal with no fuss or muss.
- Light - you avoided detection or got away, you found your target and all's well.
- Gray - you made it in or through but lost something in the process (your concealment, an important item, whatever).
- Dark - some guards had to die, you're compromised, your target is hurt or otherwise can't be moved without effort, awful truth or harmful lie.
- Black - a trap is sprung, entire party captured, somebody dies, objective permanently lost or false, stormtrooper HQ blown up with all inside, deceit or terrible truth.

Moral and Emotional Moments

Making a connection to somebody else, facing a difficult moral choice, confronting fears or doubts, all those great interior experiences.

- Hazing an emotional stake
- Revealing a secret
- Confronting a hard truth
- Making a cynical or amusing quip
- Trying to emotionally sway your friends or enemies
- Making a heroic sacrifice (of yourself or something important)

Rather than rolling Balance, these actions shift the Balance of your (or somebody's) next action in the appropriate direction.