

FATE CORE STAR WARS PRIMER

So, we're going to do our Star Wars game using the *Fate Core* rules. This removes some of the restrictions on the type of campaign we can have, as well as the restrictions on character type. The *Fate* rules allow for very flexible, fast, cinematic action in play, and give players a great deal of narrative control over events. It's a bit of a new system for some of you, though, so I'm going to run down some basics about how the game is going to be set up and how character generation works.

For a lot of this stuff, I'm just going to hit the high points. The rest of it is covered in the *Fate Core* rulebook, and you all have .pdfs of that, right?¹

The basic overview of what's going to happen looks like this:

1. Setting creation session
2. Character creation session
3. Play sessions!

This little primer has sections on setting creation and character creation, as well as a section on how the Force is going to work in the game. Read it over and, as usual, let me know if you have any questions.

¹ You can get the .pdf of *Fate Core* on a pay-what-you-like basis [here](#).

SETTING CREATION SESSION

Star Wars is a great big universe, and we need to narrow down what our game is going to be like. The setting creation section of *Fate Core* rules starts on p17 and runs to p27, and covers the following steps:

1. Choose the setting
2. Choose the scale
3. Pick the issues
4. Create some NPCs and locations
5. Decide on skills and stunts available
6. Create characters

I expect the setting creation to take an entire session, as we brainstorm and decide on stuff. If we finish it early, we can do character creation the same session, but I'm not counting on that.

CHOOSE THE SETTING

Well, we all know we're playing in the Star Wars galaxy. This is where we decide when in the Star Wars history the game is set, and what it's about. So, if you want to play your band of cantina band musicians traveling around solving mysteries, this is where it happens. I sent out a list of possible settings via e-mail that I'm repeating below:

- Cantina musicians traveling from place to place during the Rebellion, solving mysteries, and definitely not being spies for the Rebellion, no sir, Mr. Stormtrooper.
- Jedis and their loyal clone troopers running for their lives after Order 66.
- A commando team of specialists during the Clone Wars.
- The last of the Rebels fleeing after the destruction of Yavin IV by the Death Star.
- Street kids and low-level criminals on Coruscant during the last days of the Republic.
- Mandalorian invaders waging war against the Old Republic.
- Soldiers of fortune during the Old Republic, looking for a way to make your names.
- Young people who were kicked out of the Jedi Academy.
- A group of young Jedi padawans secretly sent into the far reaches of the Rim by Yoda to avoid the destruction of the Jedi when the Republic fell.
- Loyal Imperial soldiers doing their best to mitigate the harm done by their commanders.
- Pretty much anything else you can think of.

CHOOSE THE SCALE

This follows on the setting. Here's where you decide if the game is going to span the galaxy and change the fates of worlds, or if it's going to be confined to a single neighbourhood on Coruscant and only affect the residents there. Or anything in between. This is also where we talk about power level of the characters, but I'm leaning towards the default power level, which makes for pretty kick-ass characters that still have room to grow and change.

PICK THE ISSUES

This is where we decide on what the game is really about. We choose what the big threats are, why they matter, and what problems they're causing. That's right – the whole group gets to pick what kind of trouble you're in, not just the GM. As Zuul said, "Choose and perish!"

CREATE SOME NPCS AND LOCATIONS

You guys get to help flesh out the setting by picking important NPCs and locations, tying them into the issues, and laying the groundwork for your characters. This step continues into the character creation session: as you flesh out your character's background, you may add new NPCs or locations to the setting.

DECIDE ON SKILLS AND STUNTS AVAILABLE

This is mostly my job, as GM, but I'll discuss things with you at this point, and you can raise any concerns about them.

CREATE CHARACTERS

You know what this part means. I'm going to go over the whole process in the next section.

CHARACTER CREATION SESSION

Character creation in *Fate Core* is a group activity. Not only is it necessary to do the phase trio that you'll see below, but having a group around to brainstorm aspects for your character is invaluable. Character creation is probably going to take a session to do, though if things move especially quickly and we stay focused², we may be able to get both the setting creation and character creation done in a single session.

First, I'm going to talk about the way character creation works, then I'm going to have a *How Do I...?* section to show you how to create certain types of characters.

CHARACTER CREATION PROCESS

In the rulebook, character creation starts on p29 and runs to p53. The basic process looks like this:

1. Create your high concept aspect
2. Create your trouble aspect
3. Go through the phase trio
4. Pick skills
5. Pick stunts
6. Calculate your refresh, stress, and consequences

I'm going to talk about each of these steps below, but one thing you'll notice is that the word *aspect* keeps coming up. Aspects are an important part of *Fate Core*. You can read more about them starting on p56 of the rulebook, and in [this post](#) on my blog³.

CREATE YOUR HIGH CONCEPT ASPECT

Your high concept tells people who and what you are. It's also your go-to aspect in play. You want it sum up your character in an interesting – though concise – way. It's the place where your character concept meets the mechanics of the game. So, Han Solo might have the high concept aspect of *Smuggler With a Conscience*, or *Scoundrel With a Heart of Gold*, or something similar. Darth Vader's is pretty definitely *Dark Lord of the Sith*.

CREATE YOUR TROUBLE ASPECT

The trouble aspect is how you most often get in trouble. This is important because, when it comes up and messes with your life, you get a Fate point, which is the power source for all your other aspects. Han Solo probably has a trouble aspect like *Price on my Head*, while Darth Vader may have *What is Thy Bidding, My Master?* or possibly *Still a Spark of Goodness*, depending on how you want to play it. Luke probably started with *Naïve Farm Boy*, but changed to *My Father's Son?* after *Empire*.

² I'm not holding my breath on that last point.

³ The blog post is for the *Dresden Files RPG*, but the points it makes about aspects are all applicable to this game.

GO THROUGH THE PHASE TRIO

The next bit is one of the most brilliant pieces of character creation rules I've ever seen. It helps flesh out your character, but also ties him or her into the group. You start by writing a short, two-sentence story of something your character did in the past, and picking an aspect that came out of that story.

Then – and this is the genius part – you hand that story to another player, who adds a sentence about how their character helped yours, and picks an aspect for his character based on that. You're doing the same thing to someone else's character, and creating a new aspect for your character based on how you helped.

And then you do it again. At the end of this, you will have a total of five aspects (high concept, trouble, and three phase aspects) and links to most (if not all) of the other characters in the group, as well as participation in three background stories.

PICK SKILLS

By default⁴, you get a pyramid of skills, peaking at Great (+4). That means one skill at Great (+4), two at Good (+3), three at Fair (+2), and four at Average (+1). All the rest of the skills are rated at Mediocre (+0). You get to choose which skill goes where. The skill list for this game is modified a little bit from the basic skill list, and looks like this:

- Athletics
- Burglary
- Contacts
- Deceive
- Education (was Lore)
- Empathy
- Fight
- Investigate
- Mechanics (was Crafts)
- Notice
- Physique
- Pilot (was Drive)
- Provoke
- Rapport
- Resources
- Shoot
- Stealth
- Will

PICK STUNTS

Stunts are tricks that your character has that change the way a certain skill works. You get to create your own stunts, and you get three of them for free. There are examples of stunts scattered all through the *Skills and Stunts* chapter, starting on p85 of the rulebook.

You can create more stunts for yourself, but each extra one costs one point of refresh. You start with a refresh of three, and MUST have a minimum refresh of one, so you can, if you choose, buy up to two more stunts.

CALCULATE YOUR REFRESH, STRESS, AND CONSEQUENCES

This last step is just math to finish out your character, the same kind of thing as calculating hit points or AC in *D&D*.

⁴ And this may change, based on what we decide in the setting creation stage.

HOW DO I...?

You can build any kind of character you like, as long as it fits into the game, as determined by the group. That said, there are some questions that I've anticipated and tried to answer below. You'll see some patterns in the stuff below that you can, if you wish, extrapolate to other, similar questions.

And remember that everything in *Fate Core* character creation is a negotiation – if there's something you want for your character, talk to me, and we'll work something else.

...PLAY A FORCE USER?

First off, we have to agree as a group that Force users are suitable for our campaign. If that happens, there are a few things you need to do:

1. Choose a high concept that indicates you are a Force user – *Jedi Knight in Hiding*, *Abandoned Padawan*, *Twi'lek Force Adept*, something like that.
2. Choose a trouble aspect that shows how the Dark Side tries to lure and tempt you – *Much Fear in Me*, *A Burning Rage*, *Driven by Vengeance*, etc.
3. Use stunts to build your force powers. There are some example stunts in *The Force*, at the end of this primer.
4. Act like a Force user in play. When you spend a Fate point to do something cool, talk about how the Force helps you. Talk like a Jedi, if you're playing a Jedi. Be concerned about the Dark Side. You know. Roleplay it.

That's it. Do that stuff, and you're a Force user.

...PLAY AN ALIEN?

If the alien is basically just a human with funky make-up, just describe your character as an alien. If being an alien is *important* to your character, include the fact that he or she is an alien in the high concept: *Twi'lek Spy*, *Wookiee Bounty Hunter*, *Bothan Jedi Consular*, etc.

You can choose phase aspects for your alien to show how he or she is a representative member of the species. For example, Zabrak are known to be fiercely independent, so you may choose a phase aspect like *Rules? Those are YOUR Rules, Not Mine!*

If your alien species has some special abilities, such as the Mon Calamari aquatic nature or Wookiee berserker rage, you can create those abilities with stunts.

...HAVE A STARSHIP?

If the group wants their own starship, you've got one. We'll build it during character creation. One or more of you may want to take an aspect to show that you own the ship, are its pilot or mechanic, or live aboard it. Why? Because that aspect lets you spend Fate points when the ship is involved in whatever you're trying to do.

If you want your own smaller personal spacecraft, like an X-Wing, you'll have to take an aspect that shows you own such a ship. We will build it during character creation.

...HAVE A LIGHTSABER, BOWCASTER, ARMOUR, OR OTHER AWESOME PIECE OF KIT?

Tell me you have it. There. You have it. If you want it to be important, take it as an aspect, like *My Father's Mandalorian Armour*⁵, or *Huge Wookiee Bowcaster*, or *Customized Blaster Pistol*. Weapons and armour are pretty simple in *Fate Core* – it's not a gear-game, like *D&D*. Your character aspects and stunts will trump straight gear any day of the week for character effectiveness.

So, how do weapons and armour work? Each one is given a rating, either as Weapon:X or Armour:X. That's how many shifts of damage the weapon adds to an attack, and how many shifts of damage armour subtracts from an attack. Here's how some common weapons and armour are rated:

- Weapon:1 – hold-out blaster, light blaster, vibro knife, big wrench, chair
- Weapon:2 – heavy blaster, lightsaber, vibro sword, laser welder, table
- Weapon:3 – blaster rifle, concussion grenade, speeding hoverbike
- Weapon:4 – heavy autoblaster, vehicle-mounted weapon, speeding speeder
- Armour:1 – security forces tactical armour
- Armour:2 – stormtrooper or clone trooper armour
- Armour:3 – heavy clone trooper armour, Mandalorian armour

Now, unless we wind up playing a military-centred game, wearing armour and hauling around heavy weapons⁶ is going to attract attention. And for special things, like a heavy autoblaster or Mandalorian armour, you're going to need to convince me that one of your aspects makes it reasonable that you would have such a thing.

A perfect example of this is the lightsaber. If you're playing a smuggler, and you tell me that you have a lightsaber, I'm gonna ask you where you got it. If you have a high concept aspect like *Fallen Jedi Smuggler*, you're golden. I'd even accept a phase aspect like *Collector of Rare Weapons*, or *Raised by Jedi*. And if you have an aspect tied to a story, like *Last Words of Master Gillias*, where you talk about how a dying Jedi charged you with a mission and gave you his lightsaber, that's awesome. But if you say something like, "I'm a smuggler, and I want it!" I'm gonna say no.

Now, that's weapons and armour. What about an astromech droid, or a really kick-ass medkit? Those can all be built with a combination of aspects and stunts. If there's a piece of kit you want, we can make it happen.

But – and this is important – if you try to make your character awesome just by giving him lots of awesome kit, you will fail. Gear in this game is less a mechanical thing and more a statement about your character, adding flavor and colour to him or her. **Focus on the character, not the gear.**

...PLAY A DROID?

Just like playing an alien, above.

...PLAY A SITH?

Find another GM, fucker.

⁵ I assume Boba Fett had this aspect. He still died like a punk.

⁶ That's everything rated at Weapon:3 or above.

THE FORCE

The Force is a big part of the Star Wars universe. In play, however, it's not all that different from any other funky thing in *Fate Core*: you build it with aspects, skills, stunts, and play.

ASPECTS

As mentioned above, to be a Force user, you need to have a high concept aspect that indicates you can use the Force. Simple. Now, this can also say that you're a Jedi, or a Witch of Dathomir, or an alien Force adept, or just that you're Force-sensitive. Any of those things can count towards this requirement.

This is basically an entry fee for using the Force, and it both helps to keep the game balanced and reflects the source material. You don't see any part-time Jedi in the movies, though you see some that aren't well-trained.

You also have to take a trouble aspect that indicates the way the Dark Side can tempt and seduce you. This is usually an aspect relating to anger, fear, hatred, cruelty, pride, envy, or another weakness or temptation of that sort. I require this because Force users in the source material always struggle with the Dark Side, and this lets you pick the kind of struggle you want, so that when I cause problems for you with it, they're problems you think are fun to play.

SKILLS

Empathy and Will are the two skills that power the Force. Empathy is used for knowing things, Will is used for doing things. If you want to focus on Force abilities, you probably want these two skills near the top of your pyramid.

For Jedi, other important skills are Athletics, Fight, and Rapport.

STUNTS

Stunts are how you gain some of the funky Force powers that you see in the movies. Here is a quick sampling:

- **Lightsaber Defense:** When armed with a lightsaber, you can use Fight to defend against Shooting attacks instead of athletics.
- **Blaster Bolt Deflection:** Requires Lightsaber Defense. If you block a blaster shot with your lightsaber, and succeed with style, you can turn the bolt back on the attacker, who has to defend against your Fight result or take damage.
- **Mind Trick:** Use Will to persuade a target.
- **Surge:** By default, you can cover an extra zone each round you move. If you sprint, gain a +2 to your Athletics check to determine how many zones you can cover.
- **Leap:** Gain a +2 to overcome attempts using your Athletics if being able to jump really high or really far would help.
- **Sense:** Use Empathy to detect the presence of living creatures nearby.
- **Past Sight:** Use Empathy instead of Investigate to create an advantage when knowing what happened in the general area in the recent past would help.
- **Telekinesis:** Use Will to create an advantage by moving objects with your mind.
- **Telekinetic Attack:** Use Will to make a ranged attack against a target by telekinetically throwing something.

PLAY

Once you've got all the mechanical stuff above lined up, *play like a Force user!*

- When you describe your actions, bring in the Force. Especially when you spend a Fate point! If you spend a Fate point to boost your defense, don't just dodge quickly – tell me that the Force lets you blur your image in the mind of your opponent for a second, making him miss you by a hair's breadth. When you hit the exhaust port on that moon-sized space station, it's because you turned off the targeting computer and trusted to the Force, right?
- Be concerned about the balance between the Light Side and the Dark Side. Your trouble aspect means that the pull of the Dark Side exists, and messes with you. It's going to mess with you when you're weak (i.e., low on Fate points), and you're going to give in from time to time. Be worried about that, try to atone, and vow to do better. Know that the balance matters.
- Have a code. Even the Sith have a code, though it's kind of fucked up. If you're a Jedi, follow the Jedi code. If you're an alien Force adept, you have a code that provides the discipline and structure that lets you use the Force. Make it up, and try to stick to it.
- Embrace mystical gobbledygook and dime-store philosophy. Star Wars uses the most fragrant and mouldy of cheesy mysticism clichés for its Force users. Dive into that with both feet.
- Never, ever, EVER mention midichlorians. Got that? Good.