

Chapter Three

Writing in the Star Wars Universe

Star Wars writers must write with the same tone, spirit and atmosphere as the *Star Wars* movies. They must be consistent with what has been done in the universe in the past, including game products, novels and comics. Here are some hints and rules to make sure you're writing best fits the *Star Wars* feel.

All these areas are general guidelines. Talk to us. We do offer some flexibility for exceptional ideas. But these are clichés and poorly executed concepts we see repeatedly.

No Juvenile Writing

A lot of authors write for an audience composed exclusively of 12-year-olds. We expect writing that is serious, exciting, original, and interesting. Don't be redundant, condescending or simplistic. Your audience is a group of highly intelligent high school, college and older age individuals.

If you're looking for suggestions on appropriate tone and style, look at the writing styles used in *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game, Second Edition* and *The Star Wars Sourcebook*.

PG & PG-13

The *Star Wars* universe is a PG and PG-13 universe. Profanity should be limited to hell and damn (or *Star Wars* slang equivalents such as stang). And we should see very little blood (and only in *very* dramatic situations) and no extreme violence. We should see no nudity. Sexuality is a topic best left undiscussed — romance in a traditional, non-graphic nature is acceptable.

Potentially disturbing situations, such as torture, should be "faded out" — just as when Darth Vader interrogates Princess Leia in *Star Wars*. We know what's going to happen and the camera doesn't have to show us to get across the dramatic impact.

Like the movies, do not glamorize negative traits, such as people who look down on aliens or members of the opposite sex: these characters

can have these traits, but they should be presented as *negative* traits. These traits should also be limited exclusively to the characters — these traits shouldn't be part of the narrator's point of view. Likewise, players and their characters shouldn't be encouraged to use abusive slang or dehumanize characters. Remember, what comes around goes around.

Likewise, do not glamorize the abuse of alcohol. Drugs are off limits — we often use the term "spice" as a substitute. You may also name something, "ryll" for example, but don't describe its drug-like qualities.

If you have any questions, ask yourself, "Does this fit in the *Star Wars* movies?" If you even hesitate to say yes, then your material is questionable and you should send this material in advance to West End for commentary.

Don't Be Redundant

Too many authors pad out their word counts by saying the same thing three times, or using "As we said before ..." We trim mercilessly, and more importantly, this means that you'll have to come up with completely new sections to fulfill your word count obligations outlined in your contracts.

Don't Make Fun of Star Wars

Material may not make fun of the *Star Wars* universe. You may certainly present humor from the point of view of a character, or humor inherent in a certain situation, but you may not make fun of or be degrading to the *Star Wars* universe. Have fun with *Star Wars* instead.

Use the Star Wars Setting

The *Star Wars* universe is a lot more than the Rebels versus the Empire. There are independent companies, hostile bounty hunters, intelligent aliens, and so forth. When creating plots, villains and settings, use this setting to the utmost. Remember, it's a big galaxy out there, and you can help fill it — if what you create fits

existing material and has that *Star Wars* feel to it.

Be exciting! *Star Wars* should be chaotic, fast-moving action adventure. The worlds and characters should be interesting. If you want guidelines on pacing for adventures and how to make believable worlds, see the adventure *The Abduction of Crying Dawn Singer*.

However, the largeness of scale must have context. You may not create something that's *too* big, powerful, destructive, or valuable, or else the Empire would have taken control of it. Before the death of the Emperor, if it was really important to the Empire, it would crack down and assert control. On the other hand, if it would be cheaper and easier to intimidate others into doing their bidding, the Empire would use that tactic.

For example, most large businesses stayed independent by swearing allegiance to the Empire and keeping any illegal activities very quiet.

Writing in the New Republic

The era of the New Republic is an era of decay. The Empire has steadily lost ground and it has fragmented into many, many factions. However, the Republic isn't all that much better off. Constant infighting prevents the Republic from making any real gains, and the economy has stagnated. Credits, weapons and ships are scarce. By the events of *Heir to the Empire*, the New Republic is barely maintaining power. A year later, in *Dark Empire*, the Empire has reunified just long enough to take power again, but after the Alliance was defeated and forced to flee Coruscant, the Empire factionalized again, triggering a major civil war. Lots of new, experimental weapons are being developed, but beyond that, the economy is still in a shambles.

Minimize Real World References

Since we are trying to maintain the *Star Wars* universe as an independent fictional universe, don't use real world references unless absolutely necessary.

Limit references to objects that could conceivably exist in the universe — as in the Tim Zahn novels: cigarra, hot chocolate and tea. When you want to refer to a specific type of technology, you can refer to it with a synonym — for instance, walkie talkies are comlinks, video phones are vidcomms, cars are ground transports.

Never use references to real world locations, events, or people — don't draw comparisons to fictional characters, celebrities and so forth.

Never use the names of other people's trademarks — for example, no characters named Bilbo or Gandalf or Judge Dredd.

Create Real and Logical Characters

Star Wars is a *real* universe. *Star Wars* is more than good guys versus bad guys. People in the *Star Wars* universe are *real* people, with real motivations, goals, faults and weaknesses. Create three dimensional, interesting, complex characters with depth. People have real motivations, just like people in our world: to get a good job, to get rich, to find a date. They don't do things without reason. People are good and evil, and many have high and lofty ideals, but many also have realistic motives.

Granted the Empire is evil, but let's see some realistic evil: the Empire is trying to control people and maintain power. They're not going to execute people unless they think it will get them something — obedience from those who are around, for instance. The citizens of the Empire are, more often than not, just folks who don't realize how evil the Empire can be because it never affects them personally.

The Empire has a great deal of control of information, so most of the time people don't hear about atrocities on backwater worlds. In the Empire proper no one is going to think about revolting against what they perceive as a "not perfect but could be worse" government. Besides, if someone does hear about an atrocity, they figure the victims were criminals and rabble-rousers who deserved what they got. It's not that people don't care, but they, like lots of Americans, choose not to get involved.

Be Logical, Be Consistent, and Do Your Research

Be internally consistent. Authors often contradict themselves in their own writing. If a character is a "really good bounty hunter," then he should act like one, and not make juvenile mistakes (this comes back to researching your subject).

Think the universe through: if you are putting a military base on a world, ask yourself, why was it put here in the first place? What was the objective?

Likewise, it's not very believable to have a "hidden" pirate base in the heart of a highly populated system. Now, on the other hand, you could have a crime lord's enclave in the depths of Nar Shaddaa, but that's because it is a lawless world where the police don't really care. Think things through logically!

Do your homework! If you are inventing a new world that's really unusual, call up an astrophysics professor at a local university to see if it's plausible. If you're inventing a gang, do research on Earth gangs to see how they operate, and then

modify that information to fit the *Star Wars* universe. Remember, any costs incurred while doing research are tax deductible if you keep your receipts.

People make the most mistakes when covering military tactics and procedures. Research the deployment of warships, or troop movement, or army organization, or whatever else is relevant. The bottom line is people who really *know* how these things are done in the real world will be reading your material, so make sure you know what you're talking about.

Think new planets through: we've had too many worlds that are too much like Earth or "there is one settlement and the rest is wilderness." This is fine once in a while, but it seems that every planet in the galaxy is like that. Develop worlds with unique cultures, industries, attitudes, and so forth.

If a planet has been settled for thousands of years, it could have some amazing architecture, huge monuments and other things that make anything on Earth look downright piddly.

When building a planet, figure out its economy. What do residents do for a living? What is the economy based on — manufacturing goods or exporting natural resources? Is it just getting by?

What are the various climates like? Don't do one planet/one climate worlds — Tatooine and Hoth were extreme examples. Make this a believable universe. Why do people come here? Why do they leave? What happens here?

Think Big

Don't underestimate the size and scope of the galaxy. There's a galaxy of billions of stars, with a hyperspace-linked culture that has been around for over 20,000 years. There is room for an astounding amount of diversity. Likewise, not everything or everyone should be from Tatooine or Bespin (just like not everything interesting happens in Boise, Idaho).

It is a universe of neat gadgets, cool aliens, mystery and a hint of magic. Espionage, military scenarios, *Indiana Jones* in space, westerns, old *Star Trek*, simple combat, lost cultures, lightweight cyberpunk, smuggling, "pirates in the Caribbean" and even horror themes all fit into the *Star Wars* universe if done properly.

Trouble Spots

Feel free to introduce new elements to the universe, like aliens, ships and planets, but be careful to maintain the balance of the universe. Don't advance the technology, change the power structure of the galaxy, or anything like that. We aren't interested in teleportation gadgets, super-duper hyperdrives, or "aliens invade the galaxy"

plots. Likewise, we are not interested in time travel, alternate dimension or alternate universe stories.

We are not interested in tired clichés ... no planets obviously stolen from other science fiction stories, no cat, lizard or bug aliens. When creating something new, make it original. For example, Wookiees have canine and simian aspects, but are a wholly unique invention.

Do Not Talk About the Past

You may not discuss anything of galactic significance which occurs prior to *Star Wars: A New Hope*. This includes subjects such as the Clone Wars, specifics about the Old Republic, how the Emperor rose to power, how the Rebellion stole the X-wing prototype, the fall of the Republic, the extermination of the Jedi Knights, the history of Emperor Palpatine or Darth Vader, the Mandalorians or anything about the history of the Jedi Knights.

No Superlatives or Absolutes

Don't make stuff the "biggest" or "best" or "worst" or "most" anything. You can make something big and impressive and nasty by sheer description. You may not use these absolute descriptors because somehow, somewhere, somebody will come up with something bigger and badder (and they probably were inspired by your idea in the first place).

Similarly, don't make sweeping statements about the nature of the *Star Wars* galaxy. Instead of saying, "All customs inspectors in the galaxy will do this," limit your perspective to something more local — "Customs inspectors on this planet ..." People will do things differently in different parts of the galaxy, so you will have worlds that are wildly different.

Stormtroopers Are Loyal!

Real stormtroopers are fanatically loyal to the Emperor. After the death of the Emperor, some Imperials might dress up normal soldiers in stormtrooper uniforms, but "real" stormtroopers still loyal to the remnants of the Empire are unswayable.

Use the Major Players Sparingly

Don't submit plots in which the major movie characters play a significant part. Maybe they guest star or have a short cameo for a scene or two. Think of Sean Connery's role in *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*. Don't use Darth Vader, the Emperor, or other heavy adversaries.

Be Fluent in Star Wars

Know your *Star Wars* history and the universe. You are expected to know the history in the *Star Wars* universe chapter in *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game, Second Edition*. There is also a lot of information out there in our various products that you probably don't know, as well as information from the novels and comics you should be familiar with.

As a bare minimum, you are expected to have and be familiar with *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game, Second Edition*, *The Star Wars Sourcebook*, *The Imperial Sourcebook*, and *The Rebel Alliance Sourcebook*.

A handy reference for anyone writing *Star Wars* is Bill Slavicsek's *A Guide to the Star Wars Universe* published by Del Rey. It's a fairly comprehensive encyclopedia of much of the material which has appeared in the films, the radio plays, the comics, the novels, and even the roleplaying game.

If your product is set after the Battle of Endor, you must also be familiar with the sourcebooks for Timothy Zahn's trilogy of novels. If you are using locations or places from the movies, you

must have *The Star Wars Movie Trilogy Sourcebook*. You are likely to find other supplements, like *The Death Star Technical Companion*, *Galaxy Guide 6: Tramp Freighters*, and *Galaxy Guide 7: Mos Eisley* handy as well.

Do not hesitate to call the Star Wars editors at West End Games with history or continuity questions.

Other points about the *Star Wars* galaxy you might find useful include:

- Hyperspace has been around for thousands of years.
- The Republic lasted for 1,000 generations, or 25,000 years. It is so old that a lot of the past isn't too well known.
- There are millions of worlds in the Known Galaxy (the Empire, New Republic, settled space); there are lots of worlds beyond the Known Galaxy that are unexplored or rumored to exist. These outer worlds may have ancient technology, such as really old hyperdrives.
- There are billions of suns in a galaxy.
- The Empire had at least 25,000 Star Destroyers.

Star Wars Timeline

- **25,000+ years before *Star Wars* ***
Hyperspace has been around for thousands of years.
- **25,000-20,000 years before *Star Wars* ***
The Old Republic founded. This was so long ago that a lot of the past isn't that well known.
- **4,000 years before *Star Wars* ***
Tales of the Jedi and *Dark Lords of the Sith* from Dark Horse Comics. At this time, West End hasn't produced any material for this time period.
- **Before *Star Wars* ***
The Clone Wars
- **5-10 years before *Star Wars* ***
Droids comics series from Dark Horse Comics
- **Before *Star Wars* ***
Lando Calrissian books by L. Neil Smith
- **Just before *Star Wars* ***
Han Solo books by Brian Daley
- **Star Wars**
- **Between *Star Wars* and *Empire***
Classic Star Wars, the Al Williamson/Archie Goodwin comic strips
- **Between *Star Wars* and *Empire***
All West End materials bearing the simple *Star Wars* logo.
- **3 years after *Star Wars***
The Empire Strikes Back (we believe the movie takes place over about six months).
- **4 years after *Star Wars***
Return of the Jedi
- **Immediately after *Return of the Jedi***
The Truce at Bakura by Kathy Tyers

*** Note: You may not discuss this era since it occurs before the films.**

- **After Return of the Jedi**

New Republic established. All West End material bearing the *The New Republic* banner is set after the Battle of Endor. At this time the Republic is plowing across the galaxy. At the two year mark, we think they've got about 50% of the galaxy. The Empire has fragmented into many factions, all paying allegiance to the "Empire" in name, but none supporting each other.

- **3-4 years after Return of the Jedi**

The Courtship of Princess Leia by Dave Wolverton. Han and Leia married.

- **5 years after Return of the Jedi**

Heir to the Empire. By now, the Republic has 3/4ths of the galaxy and the Empire has been forced back to the galactic backwaters. The New Republic has moved its seat of government to Coruscant, the former Imperial capital. The time encompassed by *Heir to the Empire*, *Dark Force Rising* and *The Last Command* is six months. At the end, Thrawn is defeated, but has retaken about half the galaxy in the name of the Empire. Leia gives birth to Jacen and Jaina, her twins.

- **6 years after Return of the Jedi**

Dark Empire. Occurs soon after the conclusion of Zahn's novels. The Empire, inspired by Thrawn, has reunited, retaking 3/4ths of the galaxy and forcing the New Republic on the defensive. The Empire retook Coruscant, but once again fragmented, triggering an all-out civil war. Coruscant is leveled in the fighting. The New Republic establishes a new base on the Pinnacle Moon. The Emperor returns with his World Devastators, destroying most of Calamari. Luke embraces the dark side in an attempt to defeat the Emperor.

- **6 years after Return of the Jedi**

Dark Empire II.

- **7 years after Return of the Jedi**

Kevin Anderson trilogy of novels — *Jedi Search*, *Dark Apprentice*, *Champions of the Force*. Focuses on Luke's efforts to reestablish the Jedi Knights.

- **11 years after Return of the Jedi**

Vonda McIntyre's novel, *The Crystal Star*.

