Jedi Counseling 109
Free Actions Aren't Free
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Welcome to the 109th installment of "Jedi Counseling," our regular column in which we answer your rules questions about the *Star Wars* **Miniatures Game** and the *Star Wars* **Roleplaying Game**. If you have a question, send it in through the link at the end of this column, and check back here for the official answer.

Star Wars Roleplaying Game Saga Edition

Q: I have a question about the Force technique Improved Sense Surroundings. Its description says that you can "use the sense surroundings ability of the Use the Force skill (see page 77) as a free action rather than a swift action." Since there is no specific limit on how many free actions you can take (or when you can take them), it seems that you could make this Use the Force check over and over again, as many times as you wanted. Because you could theoretically reroll until you rolled a natural 20, this would let you automatically maximize your roll every time *and* recover all your spent Force powers on top of that!

Would this trick actually work, and if so, shouldn't this be errata?

A: No, it wouldn't work.

First, there's the "unlimited free actions" part. While the rules don't *explicitly* spell out a specific number you can take in a round, they do make it clear that free actions aren't without limits: "The GM puts reasonable limits on what counts as a free action." It's not that free actions don't require *any* time or effort; rather, they require so little that it's generally not worth counting. If you do enough of them, they can add up to a significant amount of time such that it is no longer reasonable to continue calling them free actions.

For example, saying a single word or a short phrase (such as calling out to your friends for help) is a free action, but saying a long sentence or more (such as reciting the epic history of the Rodian hunter clans) is not. Could someone then claim to perform 10,000 one-word-long free actions that, in succession, tell the epic history of the Rodian hunter clans? Of course not -- this sequence of "free actions" just simulates a bunch of full-round actions, so the GM is allowed (and expected) to disallow it.

Variant Rule: Free Actions Aren't Free
Each round, a character can perform a number of free actions equal to 1 plus his Charisma modifier or Intelligence modifier (whichever is more), with a minimum of one free action allowed each round. This encourages characters with a higher Charisma or Intelligence -- the leaders and planners -- to coordinate the group even when they don't have any talents that can come into play. Conversely, it encourages the heavy-hitters to "shut up and shoot" instead of trying to overplan their actions, thereby keeping the tempo of the fight moving along.

Second, all of the above is actually moot because sense surroundings only comes into play "when making Perception checks to detect or observe targets." In other words, these two actions are directly linked such that you make the Use the Force check immediately before making the Perception check. You don't get to make multiple Use the Force checks, just as you wouldn't get to make multiple Perception checks to detect a hidden sniper.

Clearly, Perception checks aren't unlimited. Unless the GM calls for a Perception check as a reaction (such as when a new enemy comes into your line of sight or to oppose a Stealth check), you have to spend a higher-value action to initiate a Perception check (such as a standard action to actively search for enemies not in your line of sight or a full-round action to search a square).

Q: If a Jedi had the Quick Draw feat and wanted to draw his lightsaber, would he still have to use another swift

action to activate the lightsaber?

A: No. The "draw a weapon" action normally includes everything necessary to render that weapon immediately usable, including deactivating the safety on a blaster pistol and activating a lightsaber or vibroblade. Weapons are designed to be drawn and armed very quickly, so the GM generally shouldn't require a separate action unless there's some unusual difficulty in play (such as when the wielder isn't proficient with the weapon). Similarly, you don't have to spend a separate action to deactivate or disarm a weapon when you holster it.
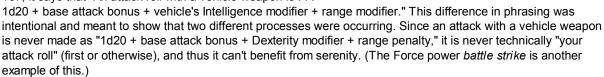
However, it is important to note that this applies only to the actual "draw or holster a weapon" action (that is, moving the weapon either to or from a holster, hanger, sling, and so on). It does not apply when picking up or dropping a weapon, nor does it apply when using the Stealth action to use sleight of hand to get the weapon in your hand without attracting attention. In these cases, you're not getting the weapon in your hand as efficiently as you would when drawing or holstering it.

Q: Can you use serenity to get an automatic natural 20 when using a vehicle weapon? If so, doesn't this make it devastatingly good?

A: This isn't clear in the text, but the answer is no.

Serenity says that "your first attack roll . . . made in the following round is considered to be a natural 20." This use of "your" was intentional, an artifact left over from earlier phrasing that made this point more clear: Any reference to "*your* attack roll" means that it applies only to a personal, hand-held weapon, but a reference to "*an* attack" (or attack roll) is not limited this way.

As described on page 144 of the Saga Edition rulebook, "Your attack roll with a ranged weapon is 1d20 + base attack bonus + Dexterity modifier + range penalty (if any)." However, on page 167, it says that "An attack roll with a vehicle weapon is . . .
1d20 + base attack bonus + vehicle's Intelligence modifier + range modifier." This difference in phrasing was intentional and meant to show that two different processes were occurring. Since an attack with a vehicle weapon is never made as "1d20 + base attack bonus + Dexterity modifier + range penalty," it is never technically "your attack roll" (first or otherwise), and thus it can't benefit from serenity. (The Force power *battle strike* is another example of this.)

Originally, this was part of the justification for why Luke had to turn off his targeting computer to use the Force and blow up the Death Star. With the targeting computer off, the proton torpedoes basically became improvised ranged weapons, and he was limited to a very short-range shot (within the same starship-scale square) due to the lack of computer assistance. However, Luke could use his personal ranged attack bonus and thus qualify for using a Destiny Point (or even *battle strike*, which we originally considered making his first Force power).

Obviously, this explicit distinction was lost while condensing everything to fit in the available page count, but the remnants of it ("your attack roll") are still there.

Star Wars **Miniatures Questions**

Q: Let's say that Nym (from the *Bounty Hunters* set) is near a Trandoshan Mercenary (from *Alliance and Empire*). The Trandoshan now has Double Claw Attack and Double Attack. Against an adjacent enemy, would both abilities apply and allow him to make a total of three attacks?

A: No, the Trandoshan Mercenary could make only two attacks. As in any situation where a character somehow gains noncumulative additional attacks from multiple sources (as in this case, with Double Attack and Triple Attack, and so on), they do not stack.

Extra Attack, of course, is cumulative, unlike the abilities described above.

Q: What happens if Han Solo in Stormtrooper Armor (from *Alliance and Empire*) grants Charging Fire from his commander effect to an ally with Mobile Attack? Would the two abilities interact at all?

A: The ally would have access to both abilities, but it could never use both at the same time. Charging Fire allows a character to move up to double its speed and then make an attack. Mobile Attack allows a character to move both before and after its attack, provided that the total distance moved is no more than its speed. Given this, the two abilities are incompatible. The only benefit that Charging Fire gives (extra movement before an attack) automatically disqualifies the character from using Mobile Attack, so the abilities would never interact in any way.

Q: Okay, but what happens if Han grants Charging Fire to an ally that has Lightsaber Assault, Grenades, or some other ability that replaces attacks?

A: As before, the ally would have access to both abilities, but it could never use both at the same time. Charging Fire is a "replaces turn" ability. As noted on page 49 of the 2007 Starter Set rulebook, a replaces turn ability cannot be used in conjunction with a replaces attacks ability. Because of this, that ally could use one but not both of these abilities on its turn.

Q: Hypothetically, if a character has two mutually exclusive abilities, do you have to declare which one you're using before you begin? For example, would I have to say I'm using Charging Fire before I start to move, thus preventing me from changing my mind and using Mobile Attack instead?

A: You don't have to declare an action until it actually alters the normal sequence of play or otherwise changes the limitations for that character, so you don't have to say you're using it until that point is reached. This will rarely come up (you don't often change your mind mid-turn), but some abilities or outcomes might prompt you to reconsider your options.

However, Charging Fire and other "replaces turn" abilities alter the normal sequence of play immediately (that is, your normal turn ceases to exist and is replaced by something else), so this is one case where you would have to declare its use at the beginning of the turn without the option of changing your mind.

Nevertheless, the specific details of a "replaces turn" ability are still determined as they're used, just as with any other action. For example, let's say that you're planning on using Charging Fire to move 10 squares to reach an ideal firing position and then attack a significant enemy commander. Before anything else, you declare that you're using Charging Fire. During your third square of movement, you trigger an attack of opportunity from a Stormtrooper, and your opponent scores a lucky critical hit. You'd hoped to avoid being hit at all, so taking 20 damage is a substantial change! Because of this, you decide to adjust your plans: Instead of moving a lot farther and making an attack (but leaving yourself exposed), you decide to go around a corner and stop after 2 more squares before attacking that Stormtrooper. You don't get to hit quite so valuable a target, and you end up not taking advantage of the benefits of Charging Fire (that is, you moved only 5 squares), but you leave yourself less exposed and still eliminate an enemy that would have been an obstacle for the rest of your squad.

About the Author

Gary M. Sarli is a freelance designer, developer, and editor whose credits include the Saga Edition rulebook, *Starships of the Galaxy*, and the **Dawn of Defiance** adventure path. When not making games, he moderates on the Gleemax forums as WizO the Hutt (cheerfully feeding Code of Conduct violators to the Sarlacc) and operates his store, GMSarli Games (an online shop specializing in nonrandom miniatures packs designed for the *Star Wars* **Roleplaying Game** and **Dungeons & Dragons**).

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