

Power Beyond Belief

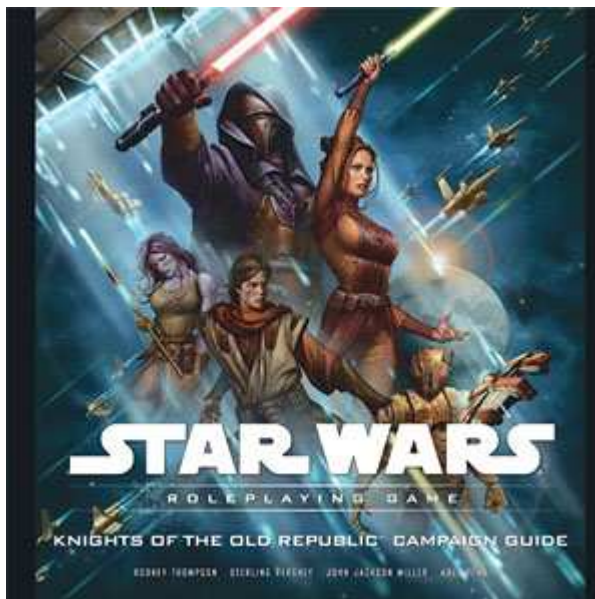
Using Ultra-Powerful Sith Lords in Saga Edition

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Amazingly dark and devastating powers are the purview of some of the greatest Sith Lords of the Knights of the Old Republic era. They cheat death repeatedly. They devastate and consume entire worlds with a thought. They bend and twist the Force to their needs and desires as the dark side warps them into tools of its own. Average beings stand no chance of stopping these ultra-powerful monsters of the dark side. Only the greatest heroes may ultimately defeat them.

In the **Star Wars Roleplaying Game** Saga Edition, using such powerful characters presents many challenges to the Gamemaster and game system itself. This is especially true when balancing story issues with game mechanics. As a GM, how do you handle characters with powers that are far beyond those that the heroes possess?

In the *Knights of the Old Republic Campaign Guide*, the approach taken to adjudicating these powers uses a combination of story devices, Destiny Points, and existing talents, feats, and powers. In this article, we discuss this method. We also provide alternative ideas for GM who wish to apply similar abilities to their own villains by creating specialized mechanics.



Using Powers as Story Devices

The true function of some ultra-powerful abilities is as a story device. Each Sith Lord's power is specific to that character, created through his or her unique circumstances and developed to suit specific plot points. They are unique powers, with no expectation of duplication by other Sith Lords. They are also not powers likely (or able) to be shared or taught to an apprentice.

Using a power as a story device gives GMs maximum flexibility in creating and using their own powerful Sith Lords. The power simply operates as required to fit the plot. However, it is important to realize that while these dark abilities are devastatingly powerful, they are also limited in scope. They generally do not provide a great variety of powers; instead, they dramatically boost a single power or a limited number of related abilities.

Powers used as story devices should be more cinematic in nature and rarely used directly against the heroes. They are best used to shock, frighten, or horrify the heroes and drive the plot forward. If this type of power is used directly against the heroes, be prepared to allow them to make skill checks, make attacks, or use other abilities to escape or mitigate its effects. It should not be easy, requiring high skill DCs or even the use of a Force Point or Destiny Point.

Using Destiny Points

A second way to emulate an ultra-powerful ability is through the creative use of Destiny Points. This encourages creative descriptions that relate to the ability's main use. Since there are a limited number of Destiny Points, this automatically restricts the number of uses a given power has. This implementation works best with characters that fight against or otherwise interact with the heroes, where tighter integration with familiar mechanics may appeal to a player's sense of fair play.

Using Destiny Points is a great way to account for powerful abilities in combat. Scoring an automatic critical hit could be described as channeling a unique power instead of making a simple blaster shot or lightsaber strike. An automatic miss could be described as the absorption of a vast amount of power or deflecting an attack miraculously through the Force, rather than the simple avoidance of an attack. The ability to act out of turn could emulate a character's amazing quickness on the battlefield or his ability to strike the heroes at an unexpected moment. Even using a Destiny Point to immediately gain 3 Force Points could be described in a manner that

makes a character seem like he is rejuvenating himself in a mystical fashion, even though he may not use the actual Force Points until later in the encounter. The GM is under no obligation to specify the mechanics behind the effects during the game. However, she should consider doing so after the fact so that the players understand what is happening -- even if their characters do not.

Gamemasters may find it useful to combine this option with the story device method. The Sith Lord might gain the regular Destiny Point benefits or alternative benefits as dictated by the GM. While the story device provides the overall special ability and justifications for the existence of a power, using Destiny Points allows for limitations on that power. This can be especially useful for new GM characters that the heroes must ultimately defeat. After all, just because an ability is extremely powerful, that doesn't mean its use is unlimited. Over a long adventure or campaign, the heroes might battle an enemy many times, whittling away at his supply of Destiny Points until it is exhausted -- and the enemy is finally defeated.

Examples in Play

Here are a few examples using these techniques, as applied in the [Knights of the Old Republic Campaign Guide](#). Spoiler warning: If you have not completed the video game **Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords**, you might wish to skip these examples, since they contain some spoilers.

Darth Nihilus is literally a destroyer of worlds, powered by an insatiable hunger that drives him to consume greater and greater populations. While one may reasonably expect someone fallen to the dark side to employ Force lightning against a foe, no one expects a fleet of starships commanded by Sith Lords consuming entire planets. Nor would Nihilus tolerate such a rival and competitor for his sustenance. Given the Sith Lord's unique background, it is not the type of ability that would be taught to an apprentice.

From a game mechanics point of view, there is little need to spend time developing rules and restrictions for such a unique power. It is a story device. From the GM's perspective, Darth Nihilus consumes a world when the plot requires it. However, lesser aspects of his terrible hunger might be used directly against the heroes. These abilities are better emulated by the use of Force talents, powers, secrets, and techniques. In this case, the GM should describe the use of such a talent, like Drain Force, in a manner that suggests that it is powered by his unnatural hunger.

As another example, Darth Sion embodies the unbeatable enemy. He's a Sith so vile that he channels his own anger through the Force to keep himself alive even though he should be dead. Thanks to his intense anger and pain, he literally holds his decaying body together through the dark side of the Force.

Darth Sion's continued existence is best described as a story device, rather than as a specialized Force power that requires constant rolls to keep Sion whole. However, even though the character may believe that his ability to escape death is nearly infinite, it is actually limited by his Destiny Points in an unusual way. When taking a final hit that would normally kill him, he spends a Destiny Point to cause the attack to miss, and his story device background returns him to full hit points and the top of the condition track. Darth Sion cannot be defeated until his Destiny Points are exhausted. Once they are gone, he feels the loss of power, loses the will to fight, and begins to question his existence. From this point, he is susceptible to the Exile's attempts to persuade him to give up his life as a much-desired



escape from his painful existence.

Alternative Mechanics



In their home games, some GMs might wish to use mechanics that emulate a story device or unusual power beyond what regular Force powers, feats, talents, and class abilities already provide. A GM could create a new Force power, but that implies that the ability could be learned by other Force users, including the heroes. If that works for your campaign, and the limitations of using it in the Force power suite works for your character concept, it is an acceptable option.

However, these ideas usually involve abilities that are beyond the scope of a single Force power. In this case, the Special Quality comes into play. Special Qualities are normally reserved for special class features from prestige classes or for unusual abilities used by certain beasts that are not connected to a feat.

In this case, the GM could define the new powerful ability as a Special Quality and write a specific rule that dictates how the power operates every time. This is best used for a power that does not evolve or change over time. It is also expected that this is a narrowly defined mechanic. A power with multiple aspects might require several Special Quality descriptions.

For an example of a Special Quality that covers part of Darth Sion's abilities, here is one based on his similar ability in the **Star Wars Miniatures Game**:

Eternal Hatred: Whenever this character would be killed, make a DC 10 Wisdom check; if successful, this character is restored to full hit points and returned to the top of the condition track instead of being defeated.

Heroes and Powerful Abilities

Inevitably, some Knights of the Old Republic fans and players will want to turn their PCs into ultra-powerful Force-using characters. While the official products assume that the heroes act heroically, some GMs and players may wish to try a campaign or adventure based on the dark side or to create a character that requires redemption.

Allowing a player character to gain such powerful abilities poses all of the same difficulties as that of a GM character -- without the GM's direct adjudication of the power's use. Therefore, it is best to clearly define the extent of the power's use before play begins. Powers that function as story devices are probably the most difficult to craft and use. In that case, both the GM and the player must agree when the power could come into play. Powers based on Destiny Points would be the most limiting in terms of the amount of use. They are most easily used to enhance Force powers, talents, or similar abilities that already exist in the game. Special Qualities are easily the most adaptable option, allowing the GM and player to craft a specific power suited to the campaign.

However, there should be a cost to developing dark side abilities. It should be significant and impose a considerable penalty on the character's ability to accomplish other tasks. The severity of the cost and penalty should be proportional to the usefulness and extent of the creative power.

Disfigurement is the most obvious type of cost. Most powerful Sith Lords suffer some kind of major physical deformity or disfigurement. A character who takes on a strong power should suffer a similar fate. It should penalize one or more ability scores, including Charisma. For more on generating the look of a Sith character (whether a player character or a GM character), see the article [Behind the Threat: The Sith, Part 2](#).

Fortunately, handling ultra-powerful characters is a rare occurrence in Saga Edition. Though they are beyond the scope of the average game, they make excellent villains and plot devices. Defeating ultra-powerful characters is also a worthy goal for any long-term campaign. They make effective antagonists for heroes of virtually any level, though only the greatest heroes may ultimately overcome them.

About the Author

Sterling Hershey is an architect and freelance game designer. He regularly creates **Star Wars Miniatures** and

Starship Battles scenarios and previews for the Wizards of the Coast web site. He is one of the authors of the *Knights of the Old Republic Campaign Guide* and *The Force Unleashed Campaign Guide*, plus other products and online articles for the **Star Wars Roleplaying Game** Saga Edition. You can read more about gaming in a galaxy far, far away in his [starwars.com](#) blog, [Delusions of Grandeur](#). Sterling lives in the Midwest with his wife, Mary.

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