Playing Star Wars Epic Duels Online: A Tutorial

So, you want to play Star Wars Epic Duels online? Great! Getting everything setup is fairly easy and playing online can be even more fun than playing in real life. What follows is a step-by-step guide to get you from here to playing Epic Duels Online!

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Introduction:
To play SWED online you will need to download several different items from several different places. This tutorial will show you where to download the necessary files and how to start a game. It will also teach you how to use the VASSAL program (the engine that SWED is played on) and the SWED module (the game that VASSAL will load), including the installation of extensions.

NOTE FOR MAC USERS: If you do not have a two-button mouse, when this guide instructs you to right-click, hold the Control key down when you click instead.

1. Downloads
The first thing you will need to do is download the VASSAL engine. Go to www.vassalengine.org and click on the "downloads" link right on the main page. You can also click the Downloads link in the upper left hand corner of the main page. Click the install link for your operating system to install the engine.

NOTE: Vassal 3.1.19 requires Java Runtime Environment (JRE) 5 or later. See the OS-specific notes below for how to get an appropriate JRE for your system.

The second thing you will need to download is the SWED module, which is the game that VASSAL will load when you try to play. This module is also located on the VASSAL website. Click on the "modules" link in the upper left hand corner of the main page and then scroll down the list of modules until you find "Star Wars: Epic Duels." Click on the link, and then click to download the lated version of the module (v3.2 as of this writing). Download the module and save it to the same folder that you saved the VASSAL engine. Remember where you save the module, and do not try to open the file by itself.

2. Running VASSAL
The VASSAL website has specific documentation about how to run the Engine, so please refer to their documentation for running their program.

When you start VASSAL for the first time, click File->Open Module. A browsing window will appear, and you will need to locate the SWED3-2.mod module you saved and select it. Once you've selected it, click "Open." The module will now appear in the main VASSAL window program every time you start VASSAL.

3. Starting a Game
After you've located the module for VASSAL, from here on out, when you start VASSAL, just double-click the module from the main VASSAL window to start a game. Doing so will open the start-up wizard for Epic Duels. Just follow the instructions on screen to get things setup, and remember to "join side" as a player number (joining as an observer will limit what you can do).

Once the map is loaded it's time to select a character deck. Click the "DECKS" button. A window will appear with all 12 decks, including a random character deck (be sure to shuffle it by right-clicking before drawing a character). **NOTE:** The random character deck is all the way to the right of the twelve character decks. You may need to scroll the window to see it.

Once you've chosen your character, right click the appropriate deck and select the "Send to Game Table" function. Your deck will appear in the "Player 1" slot on the game table map. From there you will need to right click the deck again to "send to Player 2" (or farther around the table depending on how many players you have). You MUST send your deck out of the Player 1 deck slot before another deck from the ED decks window can be sent, otherwise the two decks will be combined together and both will be unusable. If you make a mistake simply click the "undo" button which is the farthest button to the left with the half circle arrow, under "File."

Now that you've got your deck, if you haven't clicked the Figures button yet, do so now. The figures window, with a list of figures, will appear to the left. Select the main character that matches the deck you picked and its picture will appear to the left. Simply click the picture and drag/drop it to the map in order to use the figure. The main characters are sorted alphabetically, and their corresponding minor character(s) will be directly underneath each main character, separated by dashes. The "extension" tab will be explained later. After you've dragged your figures to the board, you're ready to duel!

4. Playing a Game Online
Now that you know how to run VASSAL and start a game, it's time to learn how to connect to the VASSAL server and play a game online! Unfortunately there is no "artificial intelligence" (AI), so there isn't a "single player" mode. AI is beyond the scope of VASSAL, and you will have to connect online and play a game with other people.

If you didn't select "Find a game online" in the startup wizard, then beneath the Help menu you'll see a button with two arrows labeled CONNECT; pushing this will open the connection window. This window will appear to the right, and you will need to click the double arrow button in this window to connect to the server. Once you are connected you will see yourself in both the "Active games" and "Current games" windows, and you should be sitting in the "main room." If other people are online you will see them in

various rooms in the "Active Games" window. If no one else but you is in the Active Games window, then no one else is online. To play online you need to be in any room except for the "main room." So either join a room by doubling clicking it, or create a new one by entering a name into the "New Game" box.

You will now see yourself in your newly created room in both the Active Games and Current Games windows. In order to play with another person they need to be in the same room as you. Right-clicking the other person in the Current Games window will give you a menu of options. Once you or your opponent has loaded a map, it's time for you to synchronize to each other. Whoever didn't load the map needs to select synchronize and 'synch' to the other person. The person who synchs will be prompted to choose a side, and then the map will load for that person. Whatever actions you take will now be visible by every other person that is synchronized to the same game table, and all actions will be reported to the chat window.

Once you've synched and setup the board with characters and decks, you're ready to play! Playing Epic Duels in VASSAL is essentially the same as playing in real life. Click the die button to roll the die, then click and drag the figures around the board to move. The 1-6 buttons will open a "player hand" window that you may use to store cards. To draw a card simply click and drag a card from the deck to either the table or your player hand window (Note: there is very limited space on the table, so the use of hand windows is recommended). It is important to know that ALL CARDS YOU DRAW WILL ALWAYS APPEAR TO YOU FACE-UP, BUT WILL APPEAR TO YOUR OPPONENT FACE-DOWN. In order to make one of your cards visible to your opponent, you should right-click the card, and select "flip card." The card will appear the same to you, but it will be turned face-up to your opponent. Select "flip card" again to turn it back face-down to your opponent. To discard a card simply put it in the discard pile beneath your deck. It is helpful to right-click your discard pile and select the "face-up" option.

From here playing Epic Duels Online is the same as playing Epic Duels in real life. Roll the die, move your figures, and play and draw cards. You can chat with your opponents in the chat window or hold a private conversation by right-clicking their name in the Current Games window.

Right-clicking a figure brings up a contextual menu with several commands that are important to playing the game. To change a character's hit points as it takes damage, right-click the figure and choose Hit Points; enter the adjusted total. There is also a "Turn Sideways" command in the case of a character that is the target of Yoda's Force Lift card. Use the "Stand Back Up" command to return a character to normal status. If you wish to label your characters (such as calling your clone troopers "Trooper 1" and "Trooper 2" for simplicity in declaring attacks), right-click the character to label and choose Change Label. Then simply type whatever label you would like. Finally, when a character is destroyed, right-click it and choose "Delete Character" from the menu.

To start a new game, just select "New Game" from the File menu. You can use the MAPS button to randomly help you select a new map (but you'll have to manually select it yourself).

5. Extensions
The Epic Duels module only contains the decks, figures and maps that came with the original Hasbro game. However, there are several custom decks and maps in existence, and in order to use them you must load them as "extensions" to the original module.

There are two ways to load extensions in VASSAL. Once you've downloaded or created an extension to use, VASSAL needs to be able to find it. The first and most easy way, is to right-click the module from the main VASSAL start window, and select "add extensions". A browsing window will pop up, so find your extension, and click open. You'll see the extension now listed underneath the module in the main window. The second, and slightly more involved way, is to manually create a new folder that VASSAL will use to load the extensions. You will need to create this new folder in the same location that the module is located. The name of the folder must match the name of the module exactly, but with the suffix "_ext" at the end. For example, for the 3.2 version of the module (current as of this writing) you need to name this folder "SWED3-2_ext". It is important that the name of the extension folder matches the name of the module exactly with "_ext" added to the end; if this folder is not in the correct location and/or is not named correctly, the extensions will not load. Then, simply place extensions into this folder and VASSAL will load them when you restart the program.

If you've done this correctly, each extension will load when you restart the module. A message in the chat window should indicate which extensions loaded successfully when you start up the game.

The extensions you load will affect the module in individual ways depending on what the extension is. Some extensions add new buttons, and some extensions add more options to existing windows. For example, most deck extensions will appear in the "EXT" window, and their corresponding figures will appear in the "Extensions" tab of the Figures window. Most map extensions will simply be added to the map drop down menu.

6. Logfiles and Saving Games
It is possible to save a game and finish playing it later. It is also possible to record a logfile of any game and then watch it after you are finished.

To save a game, simply go to File->Save Game. Select a location for the "Save Game" file, name it, and then click save. When you want to come back to the saved game, after loading VASSAL, select "Load game" instead of "New game", and your saved game will load. Then after it loads, synch up with your partner pick up where you left off.

To create a logfile of a game, simply go to File and select "Begin Logfile" before you start a game. You will be prompted to select a location and a name for the logfile. Selecting Save will begin the logfile. When you are finished with the game and want to end the logfile, go to File and select "end logfile." A message will appear in the chat window "logfile written" if you've done this correctly. If you quit VASSAL before ending the logfile, the logfile will be corrupt and you will lose the record of your game.

NOTE TO EDOL MEMBERS: Any League game that has no logfile is null and void, so make SURE that both players are saving a log in case anything happens or you will be forced to replay the match.

To watch a logfile of a past game, when you startup VASSAL select "load game" instead of "new game." Locate the logfile you saved, select it and click Open, and this will load the logfile. Directly under Help will be a button marked with a right-pointing triangle. Clicking this button will advance the game one step at a time through the logfile. Each action that was logged, all the text that was typed into the chat window and the physical movements on the board will appear. Simply click this button repeatedly to view all the logged actions of the game in the order they happened.

7. Voice Chatting

While VASSAL doesn't have any voice chatting support built-in, there are a couple of options for voice chatting during games so players don't have to rely solely on the text-based chat window to communicate. Keep in mind that a microphone and speakers (preferably headphones) are required to use voice chatting software. Some webcams and laptops have microphones built-in, but you can also find dedicated headsets with microphones that work well. What follows are a few 3rd party options for voice chatting.

Option 1: Teamspeak
First, download TeamSpeak at: "http://www.teamspeak.com/?page=downloads". Then install and run TeamSpeak. Select Connections, then Connect from the drop-down menu. Enter "74.98.221.50:9988" into the Address box and type your name into the Nickname box. Leave the Password box empty. Click Connect. To play a casual game, you can create a temporary channel and invite friends to join you.

NOTE TO EDOL MEMBERS: Tournaments that require TeamSpeak will have a dedicated lobby setup. Users can join the Epic Duels Lobby by entering the appropriate password. The password for the tournament lobby will be given out as needed.

Option 2: Yahoo Voice Chat
Many users that play Epic Duels online, are also members in various yahoo groups, and therefore have a yahoo username already established for yahoo messenger. Built right into yahoo messenger is the voice chat option. After installing and running the latest yahoo messenger, the voice chat function is labeled as "calling" a contact. With the chat window open, click "call" and select "call computer".

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