

DIESEL EMPIRES

Core Rules v34.0.0 | By Jefferson Lee | UpTooLateGames.com

Creating Characters

- Pick an *ancestry* for the character, which might provide *special attributes*.
- Pick *one (1) Path* for the character, which gives them a *unique set of Suits, Backgrounds and Abilities*. From the chosen Path pick *one (1) Background* to start at rank *two (2)*, *one (1) Ability* to start at rank *two (2)*, and *two (2) Abilities* at rank *one (1)*.
- The character starts with *one (1) Scar*. This can be decided *now* or through *gameplay*.

Each player gets *three (3) additional* points to spend on their character.

- For *one (1) point*, the player can raise *any Ability or Background* by *one (1) rank*.
- A character *unlocks a Background* by having at least *one (1) rank in the Background*.
- The character gets the Path's *Base Resources plus the Extra Resources from unlocked Backgrounds*.
- The character also gains any *traits (underlined)* from *unlocked Backgrounds*, which gives the character *extra* benefits.
- For *one (1) point*, the player can buy *extra traits* (listed with "+□") from *unlocked Backgrounds*.

Starting the Game

Each *player (not the GM)* gets *five (5) cards* at the start of the game.

Each player starts *every game* with their *unlocked Backgrounds* as a *Thread*. The *rank of the Background* is the *minimum starting rank for the Thread*, so if the *Thread* is *below* the minimum, *increase* its rank.

The Cards

The game requires a *standard Poker deck* with *both Jokers*. Each card type has a *Base Value*:

Base Value	Card Type
+0	Pip cards (cards numbered 2 through 10)
+1	Royal cards (Queens, Kings, Jacks)
+2	Aces
+3	Jokers

When the deck runs out of cards, the GM shuffles the *discard pile* to create a *new deck*, but the GM is allowed to shuffle the deck *at any time*.

The Player's Hand

The players can *never* have *more than five (5) cards* in their hand, and they can *never* discard cards *unless* they are in a *Check*. The player's hand can only be restored by *rest*, or *using resources*.

Threads

Threads represent narrative advantages that the character has gained from *Backgrounds* or through the course of the story. A character can have *any number* of *Threads*.

Setbacks

Setbacks are accumulated by the *GM* and make the story more *dangerous* or make the *conclusion* more *tragic*.

Scars

Scars represent the *hard lessons* a character has endured. **Scars can be marked to allow the player to immediately draw two (2) cards for their hand, or prevent all Harm from one (1) Check.**

Checks

Anytime the player takes an action to overcome a *significant* challenge in the story, a *Check* is used to determine the *outcome* of the action.

1. Suit

The player picks the *Suit* for the Check, which describes *how the character approaches* a Check, which affects the *threats* a character will face, and the *resources* they can use.

The Base Value of *all cards (except Jokers) matching the Suit of the Check* are increased by *one (+1)*, so in a *Clubs (♣C)* Check a *Pip Club (♣C)* card would be worth *one (1)*. **This applies to all cards, including Threat Cards.**

If the player picks a *marked Suit*, automatically add *one (+1) Threat* card. If the character is *exhausted*, add an *additional (+1) Threat* card.

2. Ability

The player then chooses *one (1) Ability* for the Check, which affects the *difficulty* of a Check. The player can pick *any Ability*, but **the player may need to justify their choice**, and **it's up to the GM to decide if a character can use the Ability**.

Backgrounds have an effect on *Abilities*, altering a character's . A *Soldier's Influence* Ability is different from a *Spy's Influence* Ability, and while they can both get information at a *party*, they will have different advantages and disadvantages.

3. Threat and Target

The GM draws *Threat cards, face-down*, based on how much *harm* the Check might inflict, *usually* between *zero (0)* and *six (6)* cards. **Threat cards stay face down until the outcome is revealed.**

The GM also decides the *minimum total card value* the character needs to *succeed*, which is the *Target of the Check*, *usually* between *zero (0)* and *six (6)*.

4. Ante

The *rank of the player's chosen Ability* is the *number of cards that player draws and plays for their character*, so a *rank two (2) Ability* means that a player gets to draw and play *two (2) cards* from the deck for their character. **If the character has zero (0) ranks in an Ability, the player draws zero (0) cards.**

Players can play *any number of cards* from their hand.

Players can also *discard* cards from their hand, and *each discard* allows them to *draw and play one (1) card from the deck*, so *three (3) discards* gives the player *three (3) draws*. **Cards can be discarded one (1) at a time**, so a player can see their draw *before* committing to more cards.

Any relevant character resource can be used, and *any number of uses* can be spent.

A character can also use *any relevant Threads*. Each *rank spent from the Thread* adds *one (+1)* to their *total*, so spending *two (2) ranks* adds *two (+2)* towards the character's total.

Players must *play their cards, use resources, and spend Threads before* the Outcome is revealed.

HELPING HANDS

Other characters can *help* with this Check, if it makes sense, but **the GM can add Threat Cards or increase the difficulty** if the helpers are bringing their own dangers.

The Check's Suit does not change and helpers add their Ability rank to the Check, but cannot play or discard cards from their hands. They can use their character's resources or Threads.

5. Call

Once the player (and their Helpers) have finished playing their cards, reveal the Threat Cards. The total value of the Threat Cards is the amount of Harm the character and any Helpers might suffer.

The player can spend any amount from their outcome to reduce Harm and each point spent reduces harm by one (1).

The final total determines the outcome of the Check:

Outcome	
Zero (0)	Bad. Usually this means you fail to complete the task, but sometimes you still succeed, but the GM always gains one (1) Setback.
At least one (1), but less than the Target	Progress. The challenge remains, but the player (not their Helpers) gains one (1) Thread matching the most relevant Background.
Equal to or greater than the Target	Success. The challenge is either overcome or significant progress is made. Some challenges may require multiple successes to overcome.

6. Harm

The player can mark one (1) Scar to prevent all Harm for this Check, narrating how that happens.

For each point of Harm that remains, the player marks one (1) Suit. Once all Suits are marked for the Check, any remaining Harm for this Check has no effect, so if the character suffers three (4) Harm, and they only have one (1) unmarked Suit, they mark their last Suit and the remaining two (2) Harm have no effect.

If the character is Harmed while all Suits are marked, the character gains the exhausted trait, but any remaining Harm for this Check has no effect.

If the character is Exhausted and they suffer Harm, the character is now Done, and any remaining Harm for this Check has no effect. Any future Harm gives the GM one (1) Setback, and at the end of the game, the player narrates the end of their character's story. This does not always mean death, and it does not always mean tragic.

7. Post-Check

If the player has zero (0) cards left in their hand at the end of the Check, they draw one (1) card for their hand.

Finally, all of the cards in play, including Opposing Cards, are discarded.

Rest

Rest allows the characters to recover cards, heal Harm, restore items, or actively prepare.

Each character gets one (1) Check to prepare (healing, repairing, research), but if a character only rests, the player gets to draw two (2) cards for their hand. The characters can also freely use rest resources and restore all uses for resources with the reload trait.

Healing

During a Rest, a character can try to heal themselves or another character. The base difficulty for healing is equal to the amount of Harm, but Success heals one (1) marked Trait.

The exhausted trait and Scars can only be healed if the character has the heal trait, and heal (∞) means they can make a healing check at any time, even outside of Rest.

Fight Traits

Sometimes the GM might *require* the fight trait for a Check and if a character **does not** have a fight trait they *cannot* draw cards for any Ability and they can **only** play cards from their hand. This usually only happens when a character is *opposing* someone with a fight Ability.

Each fight trait also has a *focus* (in parenthesis), which helps the GM decide the *Target* for Checks. A character with fight (furious) will have a harder time taking a long-range precision shot.

Magic Traits

Characters can **only** use magic if they have a magic trait, which indicates the specific *method* the character can *channel* magic, and its *costs* to the caster.

- Ritual magic requires a *prepared body*, like a *ritual circle* or *consecrated sacrifice*. It is the *oldest* form of spell casting, but it is the *safest* since the body is purposefully built to *endure* channeling magic. Rituals always require **at least two (2) Checks, one (1) to build the body, and one (1) to channel the magic.**
- Evocation channels magic through the *caster's body*. This is a risk for the caster since they have to split their focus between channeling a rite, and the physical labor of *containing* magic. This allows a caster to shape effects by just *speaking a rite*, but **evocation Checks always have +1 Threat.** However, evocation rites can be cast as a ritual.
- Psychic rites also channel magic through the *caster's body*, but the evocation is *intuitive*, so the effects are **usually instant**, and sometimes *reflexive*. Psychic rites Checks **always have +1 Threat**, and since psychics rely entirely on *intuition*, they **cannot** inscribe their rites as a ritual.

Resources Traits

Here is what the resource traits mean:

- +n to the Check outcome, so +2 means *add two* (+2) to the final outcome. **If a suit is listed, the bonus only applies if the suit of the Check matches**, so +2♣C means the bonus *only* applies if the suit of the Check is Clubs (♣). **Some resources have multiple bonuses**, but these **are not added together**, so +1/+2♠S means +1 normally, but it's +2 if the suit of the Check is Spades (♠).
- Draw n number of cards to your hand *per use*.
- Heal n number of marked Suits, or heal the exhausted trait *once* (1), or recover one (1) Scar, *per use*.
- Reload resources can have their uses restored if the character gets to *Rest*.
- Rest resources can only be used during *Rests*.

If a Resource has no uses listed, it has *unlimited* uses, but only **one** (1) effect can be used *per Check*.

Some resources will also list *other* traits, which help the GM decide the *Target* of a Check.