

DIESEL EMPIRES

Core Rules v35.1.0 | 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 Backgrounds and Traits*.
- From the chosen Path pick *one (1) Background* to start at *one (1)*. You get all of the *extra resources* from this Background.
- Pick *two (2) Abilities* to start at *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 the score of *any Ability or Background* by *one (1)*.
- A character *unlocks* a Background if it has a score of *one (1) or more*.
- 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.

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 *Background score* is the *minimum starting rank* for the *Thread*, so if the *Thread* is *below* the minimum, *increase* its rank. *Some Backgrounds* have *additional starting Threads*.

The character's *Scars* are also restored at the beginning of *each game*.

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 *must* pick *one* Suit for the Check, which describes *how* the character acts, and 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 (♣) Check a Pip Club (♣) card would be worth one (1). This applies to *all* cards, including *Threat* cards.

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

2. Ability

The player then chooses *one* (1) *relevant* *Ability* for the Check, which describes *what* the character is doing, and sets the *difficulty* of a Check.

3. Threats

The GM draws *Threat* cards, *face-down*, based on how much *Harm* the Check might inflict, *usually* between *zero* (0) and *five* (5) 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 *one* (1) and *five* (5).

4. Ante

Draw a number of cards *equal* to your *Ability* score. The *total* value of the cards is the *Check* score.

If a *Background* is relevant, draw cards from the deck equal to the *Background* score and *add* their value to the *Check* score. Only *one* (1) *Background* can be used per Check.

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

Any relevant *Threads* can be used and *each* rank spent from the *Thread* lets the player draw *one* (1) card from the deck and *add* its value to the *Check* score, so spending two (2) ranks gives the player two (2) draws. *Threads* can be spent *one* (1) rank at a time.

Players can *play* any number of cards from their hand, *adding* the value of any card played to the *Check* score.

Players can also *discard* cards and for *each* discard they draw *one* (1) card from the deck and *add* its value to the *Check* score, so *three* (3) discards gives the player *three* (3) draws. Cards can be discarded *one* (1) at a time.

HELPING HANDS

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

Helpers must use the same *suit* and *Ability*. Helpers can play or discard cards, and use *Threads* and resources *normally*.

5. Call

Once the player (and their *helpers*) have committed to their cards, reveal the *Threat Cards*. Players cannot play cards after the Threat cards are revealed.

The total value of the Threat cards is the *Harm* inflicted on the character and their helpers.

The players can spend any amount from their Check score to reduce Harm. Each point spent from their Check score reduces Harm by one (1).

The final Check score determines the outcome of the Check:

Outcome	
Zero (0)	Bad. Things actively get worse - the GM gains one (1) <i>Setback</i> .
At least one (1) but less than the Target	Stalemate. The challenge remains, but the players (including helpers) gain one (1) <i>Thread</i> based on the actions they took.
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, the character gains ranks in the *strained* Trait, which increases the chance the character will burn out at the conclusion of the story.

If a character reaches four (4) ranks in *strained*, the GM gains one (1) *Setback* and the excess Harm has no further effect.

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 Threat 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.

Healing

Target for the Check is equal to the total Harm. Success heals one (1) marked Trait or one (1) rank of *strained*. If a character's *strained* Trait reaches zero (0), the *strained* Trait is removed.

The *heal* (∞) Trait means the character can make a healing check at any time, even outside of Rest.

Burn Out

If a character is *strained* at the end of the game, draw cards from a full deck, equal to the *strained* rank plus the number of Scars the character carries. The total base value of the cards decides the character's fate.

Total	Outcome
0-1	Lucky. No permanent effects.
2	Scarred. The character gains one (1) Scar.
3+	Gone. The player narrates how their character exits the story. This does not always mean death or even tragedy. They just burn out of the story.

Fight Traits

Fight Traits have a *focus* (in parenthesis), which helps the GM decide the *Target* for a Check. A character with fight (furious) will have more difficulty taking a long-range *precision* shot.

Magic Traits

Magic Traits indicate 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:

- Draw **▲n** card from the deck and *add* their value to the Ability score, so **▲2** means *draw two (2) cards from the deck and add them to the Ability score. If a suit is listed, the bonus only applies if the suit of the Check matches*, so **♣C▲2** means *only draw two (2) cards if the suit of the Check is Clubs (♣)*. Some resources have *multiple bonuses*, so **▲1/♠S▲2** means *draw one (1) card normally, but if the suit of the Check is Spades (♠), draw two (2) cards.*
- **Draw n** number of cards to your hand *per use*.
- **Heal n** number of marked Suits, or Wounds, or recover one (1) Scar, *per use*.
- **Reload** resources can have their uses restored if the character gets to *Rest*.

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.