

DIESEL EMPIRES

Core Rules v32.0 | By Jefferson Lee | UpTooLateGames.com

Creating Characters

Each player will need a *playbook* for the game (which can be found at UpTooLateGames.com). From the *playbook*, each player will:

- Pick an *ancestry* for their character, which provides *special abilities* or *Traits*.
- Pick *one Path* for their character, which gives them a set of *Traits* and *basic resources*.
- Pick *one Background* from their Path to *unlock*. Each *Ability* from this Background begins with a rank of *two* (2). The character also gains the *extra resources* of the Background.

Each player then has an additional *three* (3) points to spend on their character:

- *One* (1) point will *unlock* a new Background from their Path, with the *new Abilities* starting at *one* (1). The character also gains the Background's *extra Resources*. *New Paths cannot be unlocked*.
- *One* (1) point will increase an *Ability rank* by *one* (1), but players can *only increase Abilities from unlocked Backgrounds*.

The Deck

The game requires a *standard Poker deck* with *both Jokers*.

Everyone *except* for the GM gets *five* (5) cards at the start of the game. The GM *never* draws a hand and players can *never* have *more than five* (5) cards in their hand.

Each card has a *Base Value*, based on its *card type*:

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*.

Checks

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

One Trait and One Ability

The player picks *one* (1) *Trait* for their Check, which sets the *suit* of the Check: Spades (S♠), Hearts (H♥), Diamonds (D♦), or Clubs (C♣).

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 every *Pip Club* card is worth *one* (1), every *Royal Club* card is worth *two* (2), and the *Ace of Clubs* is worth *three* (3).

The *Trait* also sets the *intent* of a Check, which can affect the *outcome* and determines what *Abilities* or *resources* a character can use for a Check – a character using the *Calm* Trait cannot also use their *Berserk* Ability.

The player then chooses *one* (1) *Ability* for the Check, but the GM decides if the *Ability* can be used for the Check, based on the chosen *Trait* and the *actions* the character is taking. A character might have *no usable Abilities* for a Check.

If an *Ability* *partially* applies, the GM can allow the player to use the *Ability* at *half its rank* (rounded down), but an *Ability* is *unusable* if its rank is *less than one* (1).

Opposing Cards

The GM draws *Opposing Cards* (*face-down*) based on the *risk of harm* that the character is facing. If a character is *chasing* a target on *bad roads*, the GM might draw *one* (1) *Opposing Cards* for the risk of *crashing*, and *two* (2) *more* for the *bad roads*.

If there is *no risk of harm*, *zero* (0) *Opposing Cards* are drawn. This might be the case if a Check is for *research*, *planning*, or *prepping*.

Opposing Cards stay *face down* until the *outcome* is revealed.

Risk (Rsk) is sometimes used to *say* or *modify* the number of *Opposing Cards* in a Check, so *2 Risk* means that there are *two* (2) *Opposing Cards* in the Check, while *+2 Risk* means *add two* (2) *Opposing Cards* to the Check.

Draw, Play, Discard

The *rank* of the player's chosen *Ability* is the number of cards that player gets to *draw* and *play* from the deck, so a *rank two* (2) *Trait* means that a player gets to draw and play *two* (2) cards from the deck. If the character has *no usable Abilities*, the player *draws zero* (0) cards.

The player can *always* play cards from their hand, even if they draw *zero* cards from the deck.

The player can also *discard* cards from their hand, and *each* discard allows the player to *draw and play one* (1) card from the deck, so *three* (3) discards gives the player *three* (3) draws.

Players can play or discard their cards *one* at a time until they *choose to stop* or *run out of cards*.

Helping Hands

Other characters can *help* with a Check, if it makes sense in the story, but the GM can *add* *Opposing Cards* if the helpers are bringing their *own* dangers.

The Check's *suit* does *not* change but the helpers can use any *relevant Abilities* or *resources*, and they can *play and discard* from their hands *normally*.

Helpers all suffer the *same* consequences, so on a *Dire* outcome, every helper suffers *two* (2) *Strain*.

Check Outcome

Once the player has finished playing their cards, *reveal then subtract* the total value of the *Opposing Cards* from the total value of the character's cards. The *final total* determines the *outcome*:

Total	Outcome	
1+	Good	Successes equal to the total, no drawbacks.
0	Stalemate	0 Successes, but no drawbacks.
-1	Bad	0 Successes, and the character suffers one (1) Strain.
-2 or less	Dire	0 Successes, and the character suffers two (2) Strain.

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

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

Successes

Every challenge requires a certain number of *Successes* to complete, but any *Successes* applied to a challenge *carry on between Checks*. A *safe* might need *five* (5) *Successes* to open, but if a character manages to score *three* (3) *Successes* in their *first* Check, they will only need *two* (2) more *Successes* in their *next* Checks.

If you have *extra Successes* after completing a challenge, they can be used for *related* challenges or they can be *added* to new or existing *Success Pools*.

Success Pools

Success Pools represent loose story threads that the character can still use. A character can have any number of *Success Pools*, and new ones can be created *as needed*. If a character has extra *Successes* from *smashing a door*, an “*Adrenaline Rush*” *Pool* might be created for these extra *Successes*.

If a *Success Pool* is *relevant*, any amount of its *Successes* can be used towards a challenge, so while a character could *not* use *Successes* from their “*Adrenaline Rush*” *Pool* for *careful research*, they *could* use it to *escape a bear*.

Successes from a *Success Pool* are added *after* a *Check* outcome is revealed, *regardless of the outcome*, so if a character gets a *Dire* outcome while trying to *outrun a bear*, they would still suffer *two* (2) *Strain*, but they could use *Successes* from their “*Adrenaline Rush*” *Pool* to *escape*.

Strain, Hits, Scars

Strain (SRN) represents *fatigue* which can be restored through *rest*. Characters can only carry *two* (2) *Strain* - *additional* *Strain* become *Hits*.

Hits (HIT) represent *lasting trauma* that needs *active care* to heal. +1 *Risk* to *all* *Checks* if a character has *any* *Hits*. Characters can only carry *two* (2) *Hits* - *additional* *Hits* become *Scars*.

Scars (SCR) represent *severe trauma* that can lead to *death* or *permanent injuries*. +1 *Risk* to *all* *Checks* if a character has *any* *Scars*. Characters can carry any amount of *Scars*.

Burnout for Cards

Characters can *voluntarily* suffer *one* (1) *Strain* or *one* (1) *Hit* to draw *two* (2) cards for their hand, as long as *no* *Scars* are gained.

Death and Consequences

At the *end* of the game, draw cards, from a *full* deck, *equal* to the number of *Scars* *plus* any *permanent injuries*. The *total Base Value* of the cards decides the character’s fate:

Scar Total	Outcome
0	Lucky. No permanent effects.
1+	Scarred. The character gains a <i>permanent injury</i> , and the player describes what this looks like for their character.
3+	Gone. The player narrates how their character <i>exits the story</i> .

Rest and Healing

Rest restores cards and *Strain* depending on the type of rest:

Rest	Hand Size	Strain
Half	Enough <i>safety</i> to eat a <i>meal</i> or take a <i>similar</i> level of rest.	Three (3) -1 <i>Strain</i>
Full	A <i>Full</i> rest might only last a <i>few minutes</i> or be <i>hours</i> long, but it’s <i>always</i> enough of a delay to <i>increase the risks</i> .	Maximum All Removed

Only *one* (1) rest is allowed between scenes, so players cannot take *two* (2) *Half* rests in a row.

Rest recovers cards back to a set *hand size*, so if a player has *one* (1) card in their hand, a *Half* Rest would bring them back to *three* (3) cards.

Rest also recovers *Strain*, so a *Half* Rest would remove *one* (1) *Strain*.

Healing Hits

After a *Full* rest, each character gets *one* (1) *Check* to heal *Hits*, which might come from *themselves* or *another character*. Each *Success* heals *one* (1) *Hit* or *Scar*, but *Scars* must be healed *first*.

Abilities with the *healing* keyword can be used *more often*, so a *healing (Half)* means this character can try to heal *Hits* after a *Half* rest. *Healing (∞)* can be done at any time.

Combat Keywords

The GM might only allow Abilities with the *combat* keyword for a *Check*, but usually only when a character is *fighting* someone with *combat* Abilities.

Combat Abilities also include a *focus* (in parenthesis) and the Ability may only *partially apply* based on its *focus*. A character with *Combat (Fury)* is going to have difficulty with a *precision long-range shot*.

Magic Keywords

Characters can *only* use magic if their Ability has one of these *magic keywords*, which indicate the specific *method* the Ability can be used to 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 *two* (2) *Checks*, *one* to *build the body*, and *one* to *channel the magic*, and *each* requires at least *one* (1) *Success*. Only the *extra* *Successes* from *channeling* go towards the challenge, *if the body is completed*.
- 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 *Risk*. However, *evocation* rites can be cast as a *ritual* instead.
- 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 *Risk*, but since psychics rely entirely on *intuition*, psychics *cannot* inscribe their rites as a *ritual*.

Magic keywords *augment* Abilities and are *optional*, so a *Surgeon* Ability with the *ritual* keyword can be used to operate on a patient using *conventional* means, but can also use *ritual* magic.

Resources

Resources *modify* a *Check*, and *if relevant* they can be used *before* or *after* an outcome is revealed.

- Resources with a *Modifier* add to the *Check total*, so +2 means *add two* (+2) to the *Check total*. If a *suit* is listed, only add the modifier if the *suit* of the *Check* matches, so +2C♣ means *add two* (+2) if the *Check* suit is *Clubs* (♣). *Modifiers* are *added together*, so if a modifier is +1/+1S♠/+1C♣, it means *add one* (+1) to the *Check*, but *add two* (+2) if the suit of the *Check* is *Spades* (♠) or *Clubs* (♣).
- Resources with a *Success modifier* (S) add *Successes* to a *Check* *regardless of outcome*, so +2S means *add two* (+2) *Successes* to a *Check*, even if the outcome is *Dire*.
- Resources with the *reload* keyword can have their uses *restored* if the character gets a chance to *reload* the item, but it is up to the GM to decide what this means in the story.