

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), so a character with **combat (Fury)** has a *harder* time with taking *precision long-range shots*.

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 at least two (2) Successes, one (1) to build the body, and one (1) to channel the magic. Building the body is usually more difficult.**
- **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 and are Dire. 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 and are Dire, but since psychics rely entirely on intuition, they 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 can be used whenever they are relevant. The player can only apply one (1) effect per use, but the player can **spend as many uses** as they want.

- **Add n** to the *player's draw before the Check outcome*, so +2 means *draw two (2) extra cards* for the Check. **If a suit is listed, the bonus only applies if the suit of the Check matches**, so +2♣C means *draw two (2) cards if the Check suit is Clubs (♣)*. **Some resources have multiple bonuses**, but these are **not added together**, so +1/+2♠S means *draw one (1) extra card, but if the suit of the Check is Spades (♠), draw two (2) extra cards*.
- **Add n★ Successes after harm and Setbacks are applied**, so 2★ would *add two (2) Successes*. **This Resource can be used after a Check's outcome has been revealed.**
- **Draw n cards** (up to the *maximum hand size*), so draw 2 means the player can *draw two (2) cards*.

If a Resource has no **uses** listed, it has *unlimited uses*, but only *one (1) effect can be used per Check*. Resources with the **reload** keyword can have their **uses restored** if the character gets *any rest*.

Resources with the **rest** keyword can *only* be used during *Short or Long Rests*.

DIESEL EMPIRES

Core Rules v33.3.0 | By Jefferson Lee | UpTooLateGames.com

Creating Characters

- **Pick an ancestry** for the character, which provides *special abilities* or *Traits*.
- **Pick one Path** for the 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 unlocks 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, but 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 can pick **one (1) Trait** for their Check, which sets the *suit of the Check*: **Spades (♠S)**, **Hearts (♥H)**, **Diamonds (♦D)**, or **Clubs (♣C)**.

If the player picks a **Marked Trait**, the GM gains **one (1) Setback, plus one (1) for each Marked Strain on the character**, so a GM would get **two (2) Setbacks** if a character with **one (1) Marked Strain** uses a **Marked Trait**. **These Setbacks can be used immediately.**

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

The **Trait** also sets **how the character approaches the Check**, which affects the kinds of *risks* they might face, the *resources* they can use, and the *consequences* of a Check.

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 *Trait* they picked and the *actions* they are taking. **A character might have no usable Abilities for a Check.**

Opposing Cards

The GM draws **Opposing Cards**, *face-down*, based on the **risks of an action**, and they stay *face down* until the **outcome** is revealed. *Risk* in a Check represents the chance that an action will make things worse, or the character faces *genuine harm*.

If the character faces *physical* or *psychological harm*, then the Check is considered *Dire*.

Sometimes, the GM will draw **zero (0)** Opposing Cards.

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**.

Players can also use their *resources* at this time.

Helping Hands

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

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

If a helper has a **Marked Trait** that **matches the suit of this Check**, then the GM gains **Setbacks** from that helper.

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	<i>Successes equal to the total.</i>
0	Stalemate	<i>Zero (0) Successes</i> , and nothing <i>significant</i> changes.
-1 or less	Bad	<i>Zero (0) Successes</i> , and the GM gains one (1) Setback for each point below zero (0) . If the Check is <i>Dire</i> , the GM gains no Setbacks , but the character suffers one (1) Harm for each point below zero (0) . The GM decides how Harm is split with <i>helpers</i> .

The player, and any helpers, can use any **Threads** or "**★**" resources to **add Successes to the Check**, **after Setbacks or Harm is inflicted**. A character could use Successes from their "*Adrenaline Rush*" Pool to *run from a bear*, but the bear might *still* cause some harm *before* they escape.

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**.

Successes and Progress

Many challenges need **several 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 scores *three (3)* Successes in their *first* Check, they will only need *two (2)* Successes on their *next* Check.

Threads

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

A character can spend **one (1) rank in a Thread for one (1) Success in a Check**, **after Setbacks or Harm are inflicted**.

Sometimes, a GM might allow you to **spend ranks in Threads instead of making a Check**.

Setbacks

Setbacks are tracked and spent by the GM. **One (1) Setback removes one (1) Success**, and the GM can **spend any number of Setbacks at any time**. Setbacks might also **trigger story events**.

Harm

For **each point of Harm** the player marks either **one (1) Trait or one (1) Strain**, so if a character suffers *two (2) Harm*, the player could mark *two (2) Traits*, *two (2) Strain*, or *one (1) Trait and one (1) Strain*. **If all Traits and Strain are marked, the GM gains one (1) Setback for each remaining point of Harm**.

Characters **start with two (2) Strain**.

Rest and Healing

Rest is normally the only way to recover cards, heal harm, or restore items, but a character can do *other* tasks. There are only **two types of rest** the characters can take, and **the GM** decides what kind of rest the characters can take.

Short Rests give a character **just enough time and safety to use any number of rest resources and reload all equipment**.

Long Rests allow characters to **actively prepare and recover**. **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 reload all equipment**.

Healing

During a **Long rest**, a character can try to **heal themselves or another character**. The **base risk for healing is equal to the number of Marked Strain**, but **each Success** heals **one (1) Marked Trait or Strain**, but **Marked Strain must be healed first**.

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