

DIESEL EMPIRES

Core Rules v33.2.2 | 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 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 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 *immediately* gains *one* (1) *Setback*.

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 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 *Calm* Trait might have *less* risks, but it will take you *longer*.

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* and 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 there is *zero* (0) *risk*, the GM draws *zero* (0) *Opposing Cards*, which might happen if the character is able to work *safely*.

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

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*.

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.
0	Stalemate	0 Successes.
-1 or less	Bad	0 Successes, and each point below zero (0) causes one (1) <i>Setback</i> . Additionally, if the Check is <i>Dire</i> , then the character is <i>harmed</i> , and they <i>Mark one</i> (1) <i>Trait</i> or take <i>one</i> (1) <i>Scar</i> . If there are <i>helpers</i> , the GM decides how to split the harm between the helpers.

The player, and any helpers, can *add any number* of *Successes* from *relevant Success Pools* to the Check, *after Setbacks* or *harm* is inflicted. A character could use *Successes* from their "Adrenaline Rush" Pool to *escape a bear*, but the bear might *still* cause some damage.

Post-Check

If the character was forced to *Mark* their *last Trait*, they are now *Spent*.

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, even if their character is *Spent*.

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

Successes

Every challenge requires a certain number of Successes to complete, usually between *one* (1) and *five* (5), 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, the GM might apply them to *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.

Setbacks

Setbacks are tracked and spent by the GM and *one* (1) Setback can increase the risk of a Check by *one* (1) or *cancel one* (1) Success. The GM can spend any number of Setbacks for a Check.

Spent Characters

Characters that are *Spent* are either *physically* or *psychologically exhausted*. They can still make and help with Checks, but they *cannot have more than one* (1) card in their hand and they *cannot draw cards for their Abilities*.

Marked Traits and Scars

Marked Traits represent *severe trauma* that *hinders* a character and requires *active care*.

Scars represent *deep trauma* that can lead to *death or permanent damage*. Characters, usually, can only carry *two* (2) Scars.

Rest and Healing

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

Short Rests give a character *just enough time and safety to use resources to recover cards and reload or reset all equipment*.

Long Rests allow characters to *actively prepare and recover*, but in the background *dangers to the characters might also be getting worse*. 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 resources to recover cards and reload or reset 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 Scars the character has suffered, but *each Success heals one* (1) Marked Trait or Scar.

Spent characters *recover if at least one* (1) Marked Trait is healed.

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.

Death and Consequences

If a character has Scars 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> .

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 *modify* a Check if they are *relevant*.

- Resources *add 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 +2C♣ means to *draw two* (2) cards if the Check suit is *Clubs* (♣). Some resources have *multiple bonuses*, but these are *not added together*, so +1/+2S♠ means *draw one* (1) extra card, but if the suit of the Check is *Spades* (♠), *draw two* (2) extra cards.
- Resources with “+n★” adds *n Successes after the Check outcome*, like a *Success Pool*, so a Resource with 2★ adds *two* (2) Successes to any outcome, even if the Outcome is *Bad*.
- 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.
- Resources with the *n card* keyword means that *during a rest, each use allows the player to draw n cards for their hand*, so *2 cards* means the player can draw *two* (2) cards during a *rest*.