

# DIESEL EMPIRES

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## Creating Characters

Before the game starts, the GM will pass around a set of sheets that contain all of the *species*, *Paths*, and *Traits* for the game (which can be found at [UpTooLateGames.com](#)).

- **Pick your character's species**, which gives your character a set of *attributes*.
- **Pick one Path for your character**. Paths describe the character's course through their life and gives them a set of *Backgrounds* and *Traits* to select.
- **Pick one Background from their Path**, which has a set of *Traits*. These Traits begin with a rank of *one* (1). You also gain the *extra assets* of the Background.
- **Both Backgrounds and Traits have keywords**. Underlined keywords have *special* rules.

You have an additional *three* (3) points to spend:

- *One* (1) point will give a character a *new Background*, but the new Traits start at *zero* (0). You *do* gain the extra assets of the Background.
- *One* (1) point will increase a Trait's rank by *one* (1), but you can **only increase Traits from your character's starting or purchased Backgrounds**.
- You can **only pick Backgrounds from your character's Path**, and you **cannot gain new Paths**.

## Playing the Game

### 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* carries a hand and players can *never* have *more than five* (5) cards in their hand.

The *base value* of the cards is *zero* (0) for *Pip cards* (the cards numbered 2 through 10), *one* (1) for *Royal cards* (Queens, Kings, Jacks), *two* (2) for *Aces*, and *three* (3) for *Jokers*.

Whenever the deck runs out of cards, immediately *reshuffle* the discard pile and create a *new deck*.

### Strain

*Strain cards* represent the *physical or mental* stress of a character and are **dealt to the player face down** and **stay with the character until a Check is resolved or the character rests**.

### Checks

The GM can call for a *Check* anytime the *outcome* of a character's action will have a *meaningful* impact on the story. The GM also chooses the *type* of Check, which determines the *suit* of Check.

Check	Suit	
Control	♠ Spade	Focus, precision, finesse.
Insight	♦ Diamond	Awareness, intuition, knowledge.
Presence	♥ Heart	Influence, authority, allure.
Resolve	♣ Club	Stamina, willpower, determination.

Add *one* (+1) to the base value of *all* cards that *match the suit of the Check*, so *all matching Pip* cards would be worth *one* (1). **Jokers do not get this bonus**, but are still worth *three* (3).

### Character Advantage

If a character has a *significant advantage* in a Check, the GM can ask *the player* to choose the *suit* of the Check, and the player is allowed to choose *any* suit.

### Complications

If the Check has *extra* complications that have a *meaningful* impact on the Check, then the GM can add *one* (1) *extra Strain* for *each complication*, so a *driving* Check in *poor* weather, and on *bad* roads might add *two* (2) extra Strain.

### Character Draw

If the character has a *Background* that is relevant to the Check the player **draws and reveals one** (1) *card* from the deck.

If the character's Background has a *Trait* that is relevant to the Check, the player **draws and reveals one** (1) *additional card for each rank in the Trait*, so a rank *two* (2) Trait would mean the player draws *three* (3) cards: *one* (1) for their Background and *two* (2) for their Trait.

The player can then **play any card from their hand to add to their character's draw**.

The player can also *discard* cards from their hand. *Each* discard allows the player to **draw and reveal one** (1) *additional card*, so *three* (3) discards would give the player *three* (3) additional draws.

A player can *play or discard* as long as they still have cards in their hand, so a player *can* discard and reveal *one card* at a time, and still get the chance to play from their hand.

### The Outcome

Once the player has *finished* playing their cards, **reveal all of the Strain cards and subtract the total value of the Strain cards from the total value of the character's cards** to determine the *outcome*.

Total	Outcome	
3+	Superb	They <u>succeed</u> and they gain an <i>immediate</i> advantage.
2	Ideal	They <u>succeed</u> .
1	Messy	They <u>succeed</u> , but they gain <i>one</i> (1) <i>Strain</i> .
0	Failure	They <u>fail</u> and gain <i>one</i> (1) <i>Strain</i> .
-1	Bad	They <u>fail</u> and either suffer <i>one</i> (1) <i>Hit</i> or a <i>setback</i> to their progress.
-2	Dismal	They <u>fail</u> and either suffer <i>two</i> (2) <i>Hits</i> or a <i>permanent setback</i> (an ally dies, something important is destroyed, etc.)

The GM narrates the *outcome*, and *all of the cards revealed for the Check are discarded*. Any *new Strain* gained from the outcome is *dealt*.

The character also gains *one* (1) *additional Strain for each Hit they carry (including Hits they just received)*, *regardless of the outcome*, so a character with *two* (2) Hits always gains *two* (2) Strain even if they achieve a *Superb* outcome.

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

### Rest

*Rest* restores both *cards* and *Strain*, depending on the *quality* of rest.

Rest		Hand Size	Strain Left
Quick	Pausing long enough to <i>stop</i> and <i>focus</i> .	<i>One</i> (1) card	<i>2+Hits</i>
Half	<b>Having the safety to <i>eat a quick meal</i></b> or something similar.	<i>Three</i> (3) cards	<i>1+Hits</i>
Full	Getting <b>two hours of <i>sleep</i></b> , or the <i>equivalent</i> .	<i>Five</i> (5) cards	<i>0+Hits</i>

**Rest recovers cards back to a set *hand* size**, so if a player has two (2) cards in their hand, a *Quick* rest *would not* be helpful since their hand is *greater* than *one* (1), but a *Half* or *Full* rest would help.

**Rest *also* recovers Strain back to a set level**, so if a character has two (2) Strain, a *Quick* rest *would not* help, but a *Half* or *Full* rest would help. **Recovered Strain is *discarded*.**

**Characters *cannot* have *less* Strain than Hits**, so a character with two (2) Hits always keeps two (2) Strain, even with a *Full* rest.

**Cards and Strain can be recovered in other ways**, like *stimulants*, *magic*, or *achieving milestones*, but it is **up to the GM to decide *what* is recovered** and if there are any *side-effects*.

## Hits and Trauma

Hits can be gained both *physically and mentally*, but **can only be gained through *failed* Checks**.

The character is *incapacitated* at *three* (3) Hits, and *dying* at *four* (4) Hits. **If the character suffers any Hits while they are *dying*, they *die*.**

### Healing

A Hit can be *removed* if the character makes a *successful* **Resolve Check** (the *tough* keyword applies), or a *successful* medical Check, but **both require a *Full Rest before the Check is made*.**

## Non-Player Characters (NPCs)

The GM **never draws cards for their NPCs**. Instead, every NPC has a **Difficulty rating (DR)**, which is the amount of *Strain* the NPC causes as a *complication*. In most cases this is *zero* (0), but *professional* NPCs start at *one* (1), and *veteran* NPCs start at *two* (2).

NPCs also have a set amount of *Strain* they can endure, usually *three* (3) for *humanoids*, but **instead of drawing cards, the GM tracks NPC Strain as individual *scores*.**

When an NPC runs out of Strain, **reduce their Difficulty rating**, and when an NPC’s Difficulty rating falls *below zero* (0), the GM decides if they are *incapacitated* or *dead*.

## Combat Checks

**Whenever a character attempts to *attack* or *defend* during *combat*, use a normal *Check*** (the combat keyword applies), and **they can still suffer Hits while attacking or defending**.

**If a character lands a *successful* attack, their Check *total* is the *attack strength*. Attack strength is also the amount of *Strain* inflicted on a target**, so a character that has a result of *two* (2) on an attack Check has an attack strength of *two* (2) *and* inflicts two (2) Strain on their target.

The number *after* the combat keyword is the amount *added to the attack strength of any successful attack*, so *combat 1* adds *plus one* (+1) to the attack strength.

## Magic Checks

**Resolve Checks are used to determine if a character can *channel* the magic**, and **Checks are also used to *resist* magical effects. Magical Traits *help* with *resisting* magic.**

### Magic Keywords

- Ritual magic uses a *prepared* body, like a *ritual circle* or *consecrated sacrifice*. It is the *oldest* form of spell casting, and it is *safer* since the body can be purposefully built to *endure* channeling, though *run-away effects* can still be dangerous.
- Evocation channels magic through the *caster’s body*. This poses *extreme* risks for the spell caster because they have to split their focus between an intricate channeling rite, and the **physical labor**

of *containing* magic. This allows a caster to shape effects by **simply *speaking* a rite**, but **it always causes *one* (1) *extra Strain after the Check*** (even if they *succeed*). The *recited* component does allow evocation rites to be cast as a ritual instead (which **does not cause *extra Strain***).

- Psychic evocation is the same as regular evocation, but ***without a spoken component*, and it still causes *one* (1) *extra Strain after the Check***. However, since psychics rely **entirely** on *instinct* and *intuition*, psychics *cannot* inscribe their rites as a *ritual*.

**In practice, mages rely on a *combination* of magics**, pairing *evocation* with *lesser ritual bodies* to *mitigate* side-effects. **Commercial mages** tend to rely exclusively on ***permanent ritual bodies***, like *resonance granite* in hospitals or a mechanic’s *Tilly Box*.

## Weapons And Armor

### Weapons

The **Strength (ST)** of a weapon is *added to the attack strength if a character succeeds*, so a 2 ST weapon simply increases the attack strength of an attack by two (2).

The number of “+” *after ST* is the amount to **reduce armor rating**, to a minimum of *zero* (0), *before armor affects attack strength*, so a weapon with 2+ ST would add two (2) to the attack strength, and *subtract one* (1) from the armor rating of the target.

	Strength (ST)
Bare Hands and Feets. The classic.	0
Combat Knife. The first upgrade.	1
Long Sword. The mainstay weapon of the Silohain.	2
Spear. Also widely used by the Silohain.	2+
Longbow. Aside from magic, this is the main ranged weapon of the Silohain.	2
.38 Pistol. Most civilian pistols.	2+
.454 Pistol. Heavier firepower, but harder to manage.	3
.223 Combat Rifle. The kind of rifle favored by many modern militaries.	3+
.308 Combat Rifle. A heavier rifle, usually reserved for support fire.	4
.338 Arden Sniper/Hunting Rifle. Used in both civilian and military arenas.	5+

### Armor

The **armor rating (AR)** *reduces the attack strength* of an attack to a minimum of *zero* (0), so 3 AR armor will reduce an *attack strength* two (2) to attack strength *zero* (0).

**Armor only affects *attack strength***, so a character wearing 3 AR armor who *fails* a defense Check against an *attack strength* two (2) attack, will still suffer at least *one* (1) Strain from the *failed* Check.

	Rating (AR)
Ballistic Leather. Synthetically strengthened leather that a lot of survivalists wear.	1
Elven Plate. Magically enhanced steel armor which is as light as aluminum.	3
Class IIa Kevlar. Commonly given to watch members in major cities.	2
Class E IIa KevFlex. Magically enhanced to be woven into plain clothes.	2
Combat Armor. Stiff laminate cloth with a steel plate backing.	2
Class E III KevFlex, with ceramic inserts. Used in advanced militaries.	3
Class E IV KevFlex, with ceramic inserts. Rarely fielded due to its weight and cost.	4