

Diesel Empire, v18.0.0-alpha

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Creating Characters

They are born.

Pick your character's species. Your choice will give your character a set of starting *Traits*.

Human

Except for the elven *Silohain*, humans have a significant presence in *every* kingdom. Of all the Gods-touched species, humans are probably the majority, and they are easily the species with the most political and economic influence.

Traits:

- **Social Dominance** - Almost every major market in the world bases their services and products around human needs, and the human language of *Northword* is spoken, though not always perfectly, in nearly every corner of the world.

Elves

Elves were the first species to be Gods-touched more than 200,000 years ago. They founded the first schools of science, magic, and philosophy, and these founding texts still form the fundamentals of modern academia.

Magic became a central tenet of elven societies nearly a 100,000 years ago, and their mastery of magic allowed the elves to rule virtually unopposed for 90,000 years, unifying and maintaining order among the rest of the younger Gods-touched species, until the *Fae* nearly wiped all civilized societies in the *Ascendancy Wars*.

The *exclusively* elven controlled kingdom of the *Silohain* still maintains a huge amount of influence as a founder of the Grand Ascendant Kingdoms, but they are no longer the sole world power.

Traits:

- **Magical Senses** - Elves are naturally attuned to magic and are able to naturally sense magical energies, perceiving magic in a way similar to a sense of *smell*.
- **Slow Aging** - Elves live a long time (500-800 years or *longer*), because their aging is *slowed*. An elven pregnancy can last for up to five years, and it takes at least a *century* for an elf to reach adulthood, which are reasons why elves generally prefer living in established elven communities.

Orc

Orcs evolved throughout the plains and steppes of the Eastern Expanse, where they continue to maintain *total* control. They were Gods-touched alongside humans, around 120,000 years ago, and are almost as numerous as humans. They are a major presence in every kingdom outside the *Silohain*.

Hardened tribalism and long-standing rivalries have kept orc societies from attaining the same level of power as humans and elves, but orcs as a whole rival humans in terms of influence and presence in the world.

Traits:

- **Ordhauden Grit** - Orcs are famous for their physical endurance and their ability to survive in the harsh extremes of the Eastern Expanse. They can endure extreme cold and heat without protection, and can operate at full strength even with very little water and food.

Halflings

Halflings are the demi-Fae who were born during the Ascendancy Wars, nearly 8,000 years ago.

Though there are no major halfling nations, halflings have kept their Fae ancestors from obliterating the world for thousands of years by maintaining a peace with The Veil and the Fae. By all accounts, the Fae only tolerate the existence of this world because of their half-cousins.

Traits:

- **Short** - Halflings never get taller than five feet and are lighter and weaker than the average human.
- **Demi-Fae** - Halflings *usually* look like smaller humans or elves but halflings have a wide range of vestigial physical traits that come from their Fae ancestry. They are also able to sense the presence of other Fae and demi-Fae as a natural intuition. **Describe your vestigial trait.**
- **Otherworldly** - The Fae nature of the halflings keeps them slightly detached from *this* reality, which makes them aloof and sometimes very stubborn.

Dwarves

Evolving to Gods-touched from deep within the mountains of the *Essian Range*, the dwarves have formed largely isolated, but peaceful societies in the last 12,000 years, even integrating the *Lorrash* and *Koto Harrain* orcs into dwarven societies.

Though dwarves defended themselves from the Fae, their isolated societies kept them from being too deeply involved in the Ascendancy Wars.

Dwarves have a special kinship with saurians, whose medicines and ingenuity helped to stop the Firehand Plague, which nearly wiped out the dwarves 2,000 years ago.

Traits:

- **Short** - Dwarves are usually only about four feet tall, and never taller than five feet.
- **Muscular** - Though shorter, dwarves have a very *dense* musculature which makes them as heavy as an average human, but *stronger*.

Saurians

Though saurians are a relatively young species, Gods-touched only 80,000 years ago, they have been able to achieve the same level of scientific and philosophical achievements as the ancient elves, and have begun to surpass elven academics in the past century.

Saurians, like the dwarves, were not badly affected by the Ascendancy Wars, which allowed them to create a stable and thriving civilization in the swamps of the Southern Expanse.

The saurians also have a long-standing relationship with the dwarves. After saurian doctors saved the dwarves from the Firehand Plague, dwarven experts and materials helped the saurians raise their empire from the swamps and muddy coasts.

Traits:

- **Cold Blooded** - Saurians require less food to survive (preferring large, infrequent meals), but they have difficulty *naturally* regulating their body temperature and sudden temperature changes can be *harmful*. Saurians buy a *lot* of sweaters.

- **Amphibious** - Saurians are able to *safely* breath underwater for a little under fifteen minutes and roughly twenty minutes in an *emergency*.

Goblins

Goblin labor helped to build the *First World* and the *Ancient World*, and they have been witness to every great fall for the last 200,000 years. Their history is as long as the elves, but goblins have never held any significant power. Instead, they have quietly co-existed in the margins with humans, elves, and orcs, living in peaceful, isolated, communities.

Goblins have begun to see a renaissance in the last few centuries. Several *key* archaeological and scientific discoveries in the past century have been made by goblins, whose infamous *stubbornness* has driven them further than any other explorer or researcher.

Traits:

- **Small** - Goblins are small, never exceeding more than four feet. This makes them much lighter, but also weaker than the average human.
- **Stubborn Survivors** - Goblins can survive on miniscule amounts of food and water in very extreme conditions.
- **Extreme Immunities** - Goblins *can* get sick and are weakened by infectious diseases, poisons, and *radiation*, but only *very old* Goblins (80 years or more) actually *die* from these causes. Sadly this has made Goblins a favored subject for magical and scientific experimentation, both *voluntary* and *involuntary*.

They grow up.

Your character gets *one additional Trait* that they cultivate as they grow into adults. Traits are natural features of a character, which might be good or bad.

They adopt a society.

Pick your character's **home nation**, which makes them a legal citizen of that nation. It'll also influence what they

The North Kingdom

The Southern Kingdoms

Silohain

The Huxlon Republic

Bonethorne Port

The Dwarven Compact

Greater Ordhauen

Southern Ordhauen

Ordhauen Union

They learn.

Your character picks *one Trade*, which represents their general experience and knowledge.

Your character also gets *three* points to spend on the Trade's *Disciplines*, which define the way a character is trained to use the Trade.

Trades always have the same **four** Disciplines:

- **Focus.** Using a Trade to handle challenges that require concentration, precision, and finesse. Repair, surgery, and combat rely on Focus.
- **Influence.** Using a Trade to alter the motives and beliefs of others. Negotiation, seduction, and leadership rely on Influence.
- **Insight.** Using a Trade is to discover, understand, and apply knowledge. Investigation, tracking, and invention use Insight.
- **Resolve.** Using a Trade to overcome challenges requiring drive and perseverance. Physical endurance, controlling fear, and patience all use Resolve.

Disciplines start at zero and it costs **one point** to raise a Discipline by **one**. A character can have points in *multiple* Disciplines.

The Trades

These are some of the more prominent Trades, but this is only a small fraction of what is available in the world. Feel free to

- **Criminal.** There are eleven *trillion* North Guilders in the global economy, and four *billion* beings with *vices* and *needs*. The character can **steal**, **evade**, **fight dirty**, **observe targets**, and knows their way around the **blackmarket** and **criminal families**.
- **Engineer.** The world is rapidly modernizing and industrializing and Engineers are at the frontline. Engineers can **build**, **design**, and **maintain** very complex technical systems, but can also **improvise** systems if necessary.
- **Fixer.** Kings and Princes are no longer the sole arbiters of power, and individuals who can creatively wield political capital are rapidly building their influence in the shadows. Fixers **manipulate**, **observe**, **charm**, **intimidate**, and **analyze** their targets. Fixers also, by necessity, are grounded in **politics**, **history**, and **etiquette**.
- **Investigator.** Investigators seek to unravel the secrets of individuals in the name of public safety, or profit. They **observe**, **analyze**, and **interrogate** in order to find clues, and know how to navigate **local politics**, and **laws**.
- **Medical Professional.** Modern technology and pharmaceuticals have vastly increased the life expectancy of all beings. Medical Professions can **treat injuries**, **diagnose ailments** (**physical** and **mental**), and **prescribe medicines**.
- **Ranger.** While the world is rapidly modernizing, vast parts of the world are still completely untamed. Old World Rangers know how to **survive** extreme environments, **hunt**, and **forge**. They are also trained **herbalists**, and can **identify** a wide range of **plants** and **animals**.
- **Scholar.** Knowledge, both old and new, has been key to unlocking the modern world. Scholars specialize in **research** and **analysis**, and draw from a wide **knowledge base**, of **science**, **history**, **philosophy**, **lore**, and **modern studies**.
- **Spy.** The most terrifying conflicts today are fought and won through stolen secrets. Spies are trained to **manipulate**, **steal**, **evade**, **observe**, and **analyze**. They also have a grounding in **modern politics**.
- **Soldier.** Professional soldiers have become much more prominent in the few decades since the *Grand War*. Soldiers are the few individuals that are **combat trained**, but also understand **command**, **tactics**, and **military logistics**.
- **Watch.** Law enforcement has become increasingly more complex as the absolute rule of Kings and Princes has begun to dissolve. Active and former members of the Watch

understand **local laws** and **enforce** those laws through **lethal** and **non-lethal force**, but they also attempt to maintain order through **community outreach**.

Magical Trades

Magic Trades work the same way as normal Trades, but the Disciplines have slightly different meanings:

- **Focus.** Using the School to return an object, body, or environment back to a natural state, or to make very subtle changes to the environment. Mending and healing rely on Focus, as well as fine telekinetic movement, or controlled temperature changes.
- **Influence.** Using the School to alter or control the nature, perception, and cognition of others. This aspect represents some of the most frightening rites, like mind control, memory manipulation, and illusions.
- **Insight.** Using the School to uncover and understand information, like psychometry, remote sight, or memory recall. These rites can also be used to look into alternate realities, or timelines, but for most practitioners that simply leads to *madness*.
- **Resolve.** Using the School to make massive or rapid changes to reality or the environment, or to summon, or create, beings and objects. These are the rites that have the most extreme effects, but also create the most collateral damage.

The Magic Trades

These are the major magical schools, but there are hundreds of other schools in the world that range from the utterly alien and exotic, to the mundane.

- **Anatomancy.** An offshoot of the ancient *Necromancy* school, these rituals allow a mage to **read the anatomy of living beings** and **treat trauma** or **disease**. These rites can also be used to **alter the anatomy** of a being.
- **Astral.** One of the most dangerous schools, Astral rituals allow the **mage's consciousness to leave the physical confines of their bodies**. In astral spaces, a mage is able to **instantaneously travel** and **perceive any physical location**, but this also affects a mage's perception of time. Some mages spend years in the astral, while their bodies have only experienced seconds, but in other cases comatose mages have withered and died without ever regaining consciousness.
- **Conjuration.** The ability to **summon spirits, golems, and elemental creatures** from *this* plane of existence. This is a highly regulated Art since it is possible to **summon otherworldly creatures**, but those rituals are **forbidden**, and these mages are usually *captured* and *executed* by the *Tolsci* of the Silohain.
- **Destruction.** A side-effect of Alchemical schools, Destruction rituals allow for a caster to **break the atomic bonds of a substance** and **reduce it into component elements**. Complex and stable substances require a lot of effort to break down.
- **Elemental.** The ancient ability to **manipulate natural forces**, like the weather, and **manipulate natural elements**, like bodies of water, rock formations, fire and even *plants*. Elementarists **cannot create elements out of nothing**, but they can manipulate existing sources.
- **Illusion.** Built on the nearly extinct school of *Domination*, the Illusion school **manipulates the perception of a target**. A skilled practitioner can create illusions that are indistinguishable from reality, even influencing other Illusionists.
- **Mecharcana.** Derived from the principles of *Necromancy*, Mecharcana **allows a mage to completely understand mechanical or electronic systems**. This gives a mage the ability to **manipulate** or **repair** a system, but these rituals **do not allow a mage to conjure new parts**, so some repairs may be *impossible*. Mecharcanist **can also attempt to improve a system**, but they are limited by the quality of the existing materials.

- **Mentalist.** An art that has its roots in Oracle magic, these rituals allow a caster to **see the thoughts and memories of others**. Skilled Mentalists can perceive thoughts in *real-time*, experiencing the moment through the senses of their subject.
- **Portal** magics are *known* but there are no *public* practitioners and teaching this knowledge is *forbidden*. **Portal rituals allow a mage to cut through reality and bypass physical distances**, but it is also possible to simply cut through reality into *other worlds*, which is what triggered the *Ascendancy Wars* with the *fae*.

The Tolci of the Silohain have *publicly* attempted to wipe out all traces of this school over the centuries, and while no major Portal school exists, practitioners of these rites do appear.

- **Probability.** A refined version of the Divination school, **a mage is able to predict the outcome of an action or series of actions**. The *accuracy* of a ritual is **greatly diminished if the mage intends to influence the future**, and while some Probability mages have claimed to have been able to change their fates, it is impossible to know if that is the truth, or if there was a fault in their ritual.
- **Transmutation.** The modernised version of Alchemy, **Transmutation rituals allow for basic elements to be rendered into more complex substances** and even allows those compounds to be **precisely shaped**. This always requires raw materials, which is why these rituals are sometimes paired with Destruction rituals.

This school has resulted in the greatest changes to society, creating the first diesel fuels, plastics, and electronic circuits.

They collect *real* experiences.

Your character gets *two* points to spend on Traits, Trades, or a Trade's Disciplines. Each extra Trait or Trade costs *one* point, and it costs *one* point to raise a Discipline by *one*.

Disciplines can not have a score greater than *three*. With a score of three, you are considered a *master* of that Trade's Discipline.

A character *can* have a Trade without any points in its Disciplines, which means that the character has basic training, but no *real* experience.

Playing the Game

What you'll need.

You'll need at least *one six-sided die*, but *three or more die* is ideal. Everyone will also need some pens and paper to keep track of their characters and other game notes.

The Check

The GM can call for a *Check* whenever the *outcome* of a character's action could have a *significant* impact on the story, or if *failing* an action would result in *meaningful* consequences. A *Check* is not needed if a character is driving home, but it is needed if they need to get home *before* the killer arrives.

A *Check* starts with *one die*. Add *one extra die* if the character has a *Trade* that is relevant to the Check. Add *one more die* if the character has a relevant *Trait*.

Roll the dice and take the *highest* result. If the character is using a *Trade*, they can *add its relevant Discipline* score to the result.

Finally, if the GM thinks the character has an *advantage*, like being well prepared or having a lot of relevant Trades and Traits, **add one to the result**. If the GM thinks the character is at a *disadvantage*, due to circumstance, Injuries or Traits, **subtract one from the result**.

If the total is **seven or better**, the character *succeeds without any consequences*. They achieve exactly what they intended.

A total of **five or six** means that the character *succeeds*, but the GM picks a *consequence* as a side-effect.

A total of **four or less** means that the character *fails*, and the GM picks a *consequence for their failure*.

Consequences

- **Compromised.** The player decides what risks they took, like taking extra time, using poor materials, or rushing to finish. If the character *succeeds*, these issues *might* affect them *later*. If they *fail*, the GM explains how it affects them *immediately*.
- **Harm.** If the character *succeeds*, they take **one point of Strain** from stress or physical exertion. If the character is out of *Strain*, the character suffers a **Setback** instead. If they *fail*, the GM describes an *Injury* they suffer.

Injuries can be both physical and mental: a *panic attack* can be just as debilitating as a broken arm.

Characters can endure **four points of Strain** and **two Injuries**. If the character suffers a **third** Injury, they are at a **Crossroads**.

- **Setback.** If the character *succeeds*, the player decides what their character *loses*, which might be something abstract like *trust* or *control*, or something more concrete like *documents* or *suffering an Injury*. If the character *fails*, the GM decides what the character *loses*.
- **Uncertainty.** Whether the character *succeeds* or *fails*, the GM lets the player know that there *might* be *hidden* consequences, even if it's just an empty threat.

Recovery

A character recovers **all of their Strain** if they can take a **break**. This can be *quick*, like a slug from a flask, or a few bites of food, but it needs to be long enough to *stop* and *breathe*. **Injuries do not stop a character from recovering Strain**.

A character's *Injuries* are treated **individually**, and recovery depends on the nature of each Injury, but *almost all* injuries need **medical treatment**. Broken bones need to be treated differently than gunshot wounds.

Crossroads

Once a character takes their **third** Injury, **the player decides if their character's story continues**.

If the character's story ends, the player narrates the character's final scene and the character exits the story.

If the character's story continues, the GM assigns a **Trait** based on the character's injuries, like a *bad leg*, *scars*, or *night terrors*.

If the character takes any further **Injuries**, the character's story ends immediately and the GM describes the character's final scene and exit.

Magic Foundations

Magic Checks

Magic Checks use the same rules as normal Checks, but their effects are usually more extreme.

Practitioners shape their magical effects by using well-practiced rites to pull energy from local space-time, and alternate realities. The risks associated with casting a spell come from *regulating* and *controlling* this energy over a *fixed* amount of time. *Any* effect is possible with *unlimited* casting time, but most mages have to work on a *deadline*.

The greater the effects, the more dangerous the Consequences. Most often this either results in a **corruption of the spell effect**, or **losing control of the magical energies**, or **both**, which can have a *catastrophic* effect on the *caster* and their *environment*.

Evocation and Rituals

There are two ways to shape magical energies:

- **Evocation** can produce powerful effects in just a few minutes, or even *seconds*. **Evocation requires training in an associated Magical Trade**, but allows a caster to pull magical energy *directly* from the universe, and requires *no* preparation (just *skill*). This puts the caster at significant *personal* risk, but the ability to cast rites via *evocation* is highly *coveted*.
- **Rituals** are the *oldest* form of spell casting, and can be **performed by anyone**. Rituals are the most stable ways to cast a spell, but can take *hours*, *days*, or even *years* to complete and require significant preparation. The *longer* a ritual is performed, the *lower* the risk, and the more *powerful* the effect.

Sacrifices and Foci

Spell casters can employ **Sacrifices** or **Foci** to aid in evocations or rituals:

- **Sacrifices**, *material* or *living*, provide an *instant* source of energy that can be consumed, which makes spells *easier* to cast and *safer*. The effectiveness of a sacrifice depends on the value of the sacrifice. A raw diamond is a good sacrifice since it is dense, *ancient* matter, but a character's *heirloom wedding band* is a more *substantial* sacrifice since it is *unique* and contains *living memories*.
- **Foci** or **totems** make a spell *safer* to cast by providing familiar *channels* for the caster. They are always tied to a single spell, or a set of spells that have extremely *similar* effects, and while this limits their use, foci and totems are *reusable*. Foci and totems are often used in conjunction with *simple* rites to ensure consistent and sustainable effects: ER Anatomancers will use *foci* in triage to simply *stabilize* patients.

Special Checks

Combat Checks

Violent conflict is handled through Checks, just like any other action, though *Harm* and *Setbacks* are *more* common in combat Checks.

If the order of combatants needs to be established, the GM decides the order based on the *scene*, each character's *Trades*, and Trade's *Focus* score. **Trades should have a bigger effect than Traits when determining order.** A trained *Soldier* will react faster than someone with the *quick* Trait. **A player can ask to act earlier**, but that will probably require a *Check*.

Weapons And Armor

Weapons

Pluses (“+”) indicate how much *extra* Strain or Injuries are gained if this weapon causes a character *Harm*, so “++” means your character gains *three* Strain or Injuries.

Weapon

Strength

Fists. Still the most popular fallback, especially with orcs and dwarves.	1
Combat Knife. The classic.	2
Long Sword. The mainstay weapon of the Silohain.	3
Spear. Also widely used by the Silohain.	4+
Longbow. Aside from magic, this is the main ranged weapon of the Silohain.	3
9mm Pistol. Most civilian pistols.	3
.45 ACP Pistol. Heavier firepower, but sometimes harder to manage. Very popular in civilian markets.	2+
5.56mm Combat Rifle. The kind of rifles favored by armies of the Ascendancy.	4
7.62mm Combat Rifle. These heavier rifles are favored by the militaries of the orc nations, but also by Bonethorne Port and the Dwarven Compact.	5
30.06 Sniper/Hunting Rifle. Used in both civilian and military arenas.	6+
14.7mm Sniper Rifle. An anti-vehicle class of weapon used in many militaries.	10++
Hand Grenade. Now a common part of military equipment.	10++

Armor

Armor	Strength
Ballistic Leather. Synthetically strengthened leather that a lot of survivalists wear.	3
Plate Armor. Steel chest armor that some kingdoms still field.	5
Elven Plate. Magically enhanced steel armor which is as light as aluminum.	5
Class IIa Kevlar. The kind of protection commonly given to watch members in major cities.	4
Class IIa KevFlex. Magically strengthened Kevlar, which makes it light enough to be woven into plain clothes. Worn by special watch members.	4
Combat Armor. Stiff laminate cloth with a steel plate backing. This is what is used by most militaries due to its low cost.	5
KevFlex Infantry Armor. Light and flexible KevFlex with ceramic inserts, which is rarely fielded by any military beyond Bonethorne Port and the Huxlon Republic.	6
KevFlex Combat Armor. Heavy KevFlex with ceramic inserts, which is rarely fielded even by Bonethorne Port and the Huxlon Republic due to its weight and cost.	7

Feedback

Thanks for picking up this game and taking a look! If you played in one of my playtests then *very extra* special thank you! *Diesel Empire* is in very early development, and I would absolutely love your feedback if you have any, especially if you decide to take this home and play it with your friends as the GM! Please send any feedback to jlee@uptoolegames.com.