

Diesel Empire, v8.0.0-alpha

Written by Jefferson Lee | September 2020 Alpha Release

Creating Characters

Step 1: Attributes

Attributes are the traits that have a strong influence over your character, like *agile*, *strong*, *precise*, *small*, *creative*, *technical*, *wise*, *impulsive*, *beautiful*, *confident*, *witty*, *stubborn*, *brave*, *determined*, and *cowardly* are all examples of Attributes.

- **Give your character two Attributes.** You can use our examples or create your own.
- **Your character can have duplicate Attributes**, which just means that it has a bigger impact on their lives, for better or worse.

Step 2: Species

Pick your character's species. Your choice will give your character additional Attributes.

Species: Human

Prolific. Over-confident. Stubborn. Except for the *Silohain*, humans have a significant presence in every kingdom and of all the sentient species, humans are probably the majority.

The main reason for this proliferation is that humans seem to have evolved from more than two dozen different regions across the known world, appearing about one hundred thousand years ago with the orcs.

Attributes:

- **Social Dominance** - All major cities in the world are willing to accept the human North Gilder as currency, and almost everyone in these cities can, at least crudely, communicate in the common human language of *Northword*. Also, since most of the industries are controlled by humans, most modern devices and equipment are designed for humans.

Species: Orc

Expansive. Powerful. Stubborn. Orcs evolved throughout the plains and steppes of the Eastern Expanse, where they continue to maintain total control. They appeared alongside humans, one hundred thousand years ago. Second only to humans, orcs are a major presence in every major kingdom outside the *Silohain*, but until recently, their populations were largely segregated.

Hardened tribalism keeps the orc nations divided and allows elven and human nations to maintain global dominance, but orc societies have been much faster in adapting to modern advances, which is beginning to become a significant economic advantage.

Attributes:

- **Resilient** - Orcs are famously difficult to kill.
- **Strong** - Orc are naturally as strong as a human athlete.
- **Family First - Who is your family?** This concept is a central tenet of all orc nations. Orcs are *driven* to advance the interests of their *own* family before the interests of anyone else, including themselves and other *individuals* of a family.

Species: Elves

Dogmatic. Magical. Ancient. Elves were the first species to “Know with the mind of the Gods” nearly two hundred millenia ago and founded the first schools of science, magic, and philosophy. The elven calendar is still the world standard. As elves developed, magic became a central tenet of their societies, and their lifespans began to extend as a result.

Attributes:

- **Magically Attuned** - Elves are naturally attuned to magic.
- **Magical Senses** - Elves are able to naturally sense magical energies, perceiving magic in a way similar to a sense of smell.
- **Long Lives** - Elves live a long time (800 years or more), which gives them a level of historical wisdom, but makes it much harder to imagine the *immediate* future.

Species: Dwarves

Productive. Generous. Loyal. Evolving from deep within the mountains of the Essian Range, dwarves were largely isolated but maintained a relative peace with their neighbors for twelve thousand years, even creating a kind of peace with the orcs for the last thousand years.

Dwarves have a special kinship with saurians. Saurian medicines and ingenuity help to stop the Firehand Plague, which nearly wiped out the dwarves two thousand years ago.

Attributes:

- **Resilient** - Dwarves almost as difficult to kill as an Orc.
- **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 strong and as heavy as an average human.
- **Clan Affiliation - What is your Clan?** Dwarves are strongly tied to their clans, and are fiercely loyal, and will do what they can to help fellow clan members.

Species: Halflings

Patient. Diplomatic. Friendly. Halflings are the demi-Fae who were born during the Ascendancy Wars, eight thousand 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.

The Fae nature of the halflings means that they care very little for worldly power or wealth, preferring to spend their lives in pursuit of joyful fulfillment as explorers, artists, and teachers.

Attributes:

- **Short** - Halflings are short, never growing much taller than four feet. This also makes them slightly 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.

Species: Goblins

Curious. Ancient. Underestimated. Goblin labor helped to build the First World and the Ancient World, and they were witnesses to every great fall for the last *thirty thousand* years. Their history is as long as the elves, but goblins have never held any significant power. Instead they have been subjugated by the elves, humans, and orcs several times throughout history.

Goblins have begun to see a renaissance in the last few centuries. While many nations still use goblin labor, modern manufacturing has replaced this need, and many goblins have begun to explore both the world and their history. Several key archaeological, geological, and biological discoveries in the past century have been made by goblins.

Attributes:

- **Small** - Goblins are famously small, never exceeding more than three 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 (60 years or more) actually *die* from these causes. Sadly this has made Goblins a favored subject for magical and scientific experimentation.

Species: Saurians

Strange. Respected. Isolated. This species is relatively young, only eighty thousand years old, but during that time saurians have been able to achieve the same level of scientific and philosophical achievements as the ancient elves.

The saurians also have a long-standing friendship with the dwarves. Though saurian doctors saved the dwarves from the Firehand Plague, dwarven experts and materials allowed saurians to build a thriving civilization in the swamps of the Southern Expanse.

Attributes:

- **Abstract Thinker** - Saurians have a unique brain structure and thought process.
- **Cold Blooded** - Saurians require less food to survive (preferring large, occasional meals), but they also are unable to *naturally* regulate their body temperature and sudden temperature changes can be *harmful*.
- **Amphibious** - Saurians are able to *safely* breath underwater for a little under fifteen minutes and roughly twenty minutes in an *emergency*.

Step 4: Trades and Proficiencies

Trades represent a general field of knowledge and expertise. Trade **Specialties** are your character's specific abilities.

You get **four points** to spend on your character's **Trades** and the Trade's **Specialties**.

- **Pick one starting Trade.** You can buy additional Trades for **one point**.
- **Pick a Background** for **each** of your **Trades**, which describes how your character learned their Trade and all of the Specialties linked to the Trade.
- **Specialties start at zero** and it costs **one point** to increase a **Skill** by **one rank**. Rank **one** makes a character an *expert*, while rank **three** makes them a *master*.

Trades

Assassin

- **SPECIAL COMBAT** training with a variety of **firearms, hand weapons, and martial arts**, specializing in **close combat** and **long-range marksmanship**.
- **ESPIONAGE** training with **security systems, evasion, stealth, and situational awareness**.
- **MANIPULATION** through **deception** and **emotional exploitation**.
- **RESISTANCE** training designed to **defeat interrogation and torture**.

Bounty Hunter

- **CLOSE COMBAT** training to fight in close quarters with **non-lethal martial** combat and **firearms**.
- **TRACKING** training to find target's location including being able to **search, investigate,** and **discover clues** through.
- **INTERROGATION** to find information through **personal interviews** and **intimidation**.
- **ENDURANCE** training to stay **physically fit** and **mentally focused**.

Trade: Engineer

The practical application of scientific properties to create complex systems.

Specialties:

- **APPLICATION** which encompasses the skills needed for **implementing solutions** and **repairing systems**.
- **TROUBLESHOOTING** skills that allow an engineer to **identify issues** and **design practical or radical solutions**.
- **JURY RIGGING** skills that allow an engineer to **improvise repairs** and **tools**.
- **ACADEMIC** skills that provide an engineer with the **scientific knowledge** to **understand** complex systems.

Trade: Fixer

The creative application of law and politics in the pursuit of power.

Specialties:

- **Back-Channel** - Collecting and understanding exploitable secrets.
- **Authority** - Exerting political power for gain.
- **Intelligence** - A through understanding of local politics, culture, and law.
- **Propaganda** - Guiding someone towards a truth, real or imagined.

Trade: Gunslinger

You are an expert at small arms and are practiced in unconventional gun fighting styles.

Specialties:

- **Gunfighter** - Using firearms to engage in improvisational, close-range combat.
- **Sharpshooter** - Being able to take precision shots, even under unusual circumstances.
- **Steel** - Being able to stay calm and clear regardless of the circumstances.
- **Gun Almanac** - The ability to identify, maintain and repair small arms.

Trade: Medical

Using modern medical techniques and medicines to heal others.

Specialties:

- **Pathology** - Finding the root cause of an ailment.
- **Aid** - Healing trauma in emergency situations.
- **Medicine** - The practical application of herbalism and pharmaceuticals.
- **Surgery** - The art of healing extreme trauma.

Trade: Ranger

The training needed to survive and live in a hostile environment for extended periods.

Specialties:

- **Endurance** - Physical and mental fortitude.
- **Hunting** - Seeking, stalking and killing a target.
- **Instinct** - A sense for finding things out of balance.
- **Survival** - Skills for living in harsh environments.

Trade: Soldier

The knowledge needed to maneuver a battlefield and the training needed to win a fight.

Specialties:

- **Combat Training** - The ability to fight with firearms and fists.
- **PT** - Physical training needed to navigate and endure combat.
- **Tactics** - Using strategy to subvert and defeat an enemy.
- **Alertness** - Being aware of all the dangers and advantages of a location.

Trade: Spy

Gathering information about a target through covert observation, or more aggressive means like bribery, and torture.

Specialties:

- **Clandestine** - The art of keeping secrets and staying undetected.
- **Coercion** - Convincing a target to perform a given action.
- **Observation** - The ability to detect important details.
- **Intelligence** - The ability to discern secrets from collected research and observation.

Trade: Thief

The art and craft of stealing through careful and patient observation.

Specialties:

- **Fast-Talk** - The ability to convince through confusion.
- **Underground** - Navigating the illegal trades and services market.
- **Stealing** - The art of taking something in secret.
- **Evasion** - Discipline required to be undetectable.

Magical Trade

School: Elemental

The ability to channel and embody the primal forces of nature. This art is older than Ritual magic and does not require any rites (though rites exist), but it requires an innate understanding of the energies at work and is *significantly* harder to *control*.

Attribute Prerequisites:

Magically Attuned

Arcana

- **Fire** - Controlling the transformational properties of fire.

- **Air** - Manipulating the air, which surrounds and witnesses all things.
- **Water** - Channeling the restorative and destructive elements of water.
- **Earth** - Harnessing the grounding and protective wisdom of the earth.

School: Alchemical

The transformation of base materials into exotic compounds through the use of magic. The more powerful effects require the use of extreme rites, but the lesser effects can happen through simple incantations. This is considered one of the *Classical Schools*.

Arcana

- **Transformation** - The founding rites of the School, which allows for the creation of new compounds from *base* elements.
- **Analysis** - The rites to divine the nature of a compound, like its composition and how it was created.
- **Dissolution** - The skill to break compounds down to base components.
- **Blending** - The rites need to combine *complex* compounds into *stable* materials. This does not always create *useful* combinations, but modern *plastics* were created through these rites.

School: Mecharcana

This School blends mechanics with alchemy to create incredibly complex systems. The more powerful effects require difficult rites, but lesser effects only need simple incantations. This Art is less than a century old, but it has had a *massive* impact on society.

Attribute Prerequisites:

Abstract Thinker

Trade Prerequisites:

Engineer

Arcana

- **Binding** - This art to create a permanent bond between two objects. This does not create any *new* compounds, and the bond is not always very strong.
- **Machine Nature** - This allows the engineer to fully visualize and understand the internal workings of a device.
- **Shaping** - The ability to shape *stable* materials into intricate shapes of any size. This Art is often used to shape the copper circuits of modern devices.
- **Infusion** - Allows the infusion of magical energies into a compound. Most often this is used to create batteries and Anatomancer surgical tools.

School: Divination

This Art allows the wielder to open their minds to visions from other realms. It can be used to peer into parts of our own reality, or even other *existences* and futures. This is an *embodied* school, and requires no rites, but rites do make the casting *safer*.

Attribute Prerequisites:

Magically Attuned, Intuitive

Arcana

- **Precognition** - The ability to see into *all* possible futures. Often a team of researchers are employed to help narrow the possibilities.
- **Outsider** - The training needed to see outside of our realm of existence. This does not grant *comprehension*, just the ability to see.

- **Prophecy** - The ability to try to *set* a destiny for a subject. This is most often paired with *Precognition*, since it is easier to set a subject on an *existing* course as opposed to creating an entire *destiny*.
- **Viewing** - This allows a wielder to see into *this* realm of reality, provided they are able to create some *connection* to their location.

Trade: Anatomancy

A modern School, derived from the art of *Necromancy*, allows for the manipulation of living tissue. This is a highly disciplined school requiring *many* rites, but many *commercial* tools have been developed for these purposes.

Trade Prerequisites: Medical.

Specialties:

- **Mend Flesh** - The ability to mend flesh and bone back together, but the caster still needs to understand how the tissue *should* be mended.
- **Sense Flesh**- This allows the wielder to sense the blood in the patient, and allows them to get a sense of the *state* of the blood, which helps for diagnoses.
- **Shape Flesh** - This Arcana allows the caster to *reshape* flesh and bone, which is used to heal scars or resolve complications from traditional surgeries.
- **Transfuse Flesh** - Allows the mage to transfer tissue and fluids from one body to another. Required to *restore* lost fluids or tissues. Many goblins make their living selling their tissues to rich patients, since goblin tissue is universally compatible.

Step 5: Starting Point

In addition to the starting resources from your *Trades*, describe your character's:

- **Income** from their *Trades*.
- **Essential possessions** that they have gained as a part of their *lifestyle* and *hobbies*.
- **Friends and family** that still have an impact on their life.

Playing the Game

The Deck

You'll need a regular 52-card **Poker deck**, *with both Jokers*.

The Hand

At the beginning of each game, the GM deals *five cards* to each player. **The GM does *not* get a hand.**

Running Out of Cards

When a player runs out of cards the player draws *five cards*, *minus* the character's current level of *Trauma*, as their new hand.

The player can *only* draw new cards when their hand is *empty*, but players **cannot discard cards**, unless the card is played during a *Check*.

The Check

The GM can call for a *Check* whenever a character takes an action where the *outcome* is *uncertain* and its *consequences* will have a *significant* impact on the story. Driving *fast* to meet a contact for a routine check-in does not require a Check, since success or failure will not have an impact on the story. A Check *would* be appropriate if they needed to reach the safehouse before the contact is *murdered*.

A player can call for a **Check** if they want to take an action to *change* or *interrupt* the outcome of an event that has *just occurred*. A character that is *ambushed* by an attack might ask for a **Check** to see if their character can react *before* the attack happens.

Whoever called for the **Check** needs to declare what *action* is being **Checked**. The **Check** determines the *outcome* of an action.

Step 1: Pick the Outcome

The *player* chooses the *outcome* they want for their **Check**, which will also determine the *suit* of the **Check**.

Outcome	Suit
Daring . An extreme outcome that is bold and dangerous .	Clubs
Focused . A calculated outcome based on care and experience .	Spades
Influential . An outcome that shapes the beliefs or behaviors of others.	Hearts
Insightful . An informative outcome used to gain knowledge or awareness .	Diamonds

The *player* can choose *any* outcome, but each has its own consequences. A character might want to use **Daring** to tell a lie so *outrageous* that everyone is too *shocked* to verify the truth, but it might also result in *rocks* being *hurled* at the character.

Step 2: Player Spread

The *player's* spread starts at *zero*. Draw *one* card for the spread if the GM thinks *one* of a character's **Trade** is relevant to the chosen *outcome*. If a **Skill** from the **Trade** *also* applies, **draw a number of cards equal to the Skill's rank** for the *player's* spread.

Add one to the spread for *each* **Attribute** that *helps* the character with their chosen outcome.

These cards are kept *face down*.

Step 3: Risk

The GM decides how much **Risk** a character is **taking** based on the action, the outcome, and their current situation.

Risk always starts at *one*, but *increases* depending on the challenges the character is facing.

Increase the Risk by one if the character is facing an opponent with a relevant **Trade**. If the character's opponent has an applicable **Trade Skill**, **increase the Risk by the Skill rank**.

Increase the Risk by one for *each* **Attribute** that might *hinder* a character.

The character might also carry **Risk** from *previous* encounters, which could affect *this* **Check**.

The GM draws *one* card from the deck, *face down*, for each level of **Risk**. These will be revealed once the *player* finishes playing cards for their **Check**.

Step 4: Play Cards

The *player* can either *play* a card from their hand, or use a card from their spread, but they cannot do *both*.

If the *player* plays a card from their hand, the spread is *discarded*.

If the *player* wants to use a card from their spread, the spread is revealed and the *player* can pick *one* card to play. The rest of the spread is *discarded*. **Once the spread is revealed, they cannot play a card from their hand.**

Once the player is done playing their cards, **reveal the Risk cards** and **keep the highest valued card**.

The player's card and the Risk card are compared and the player succeeds if they have the highest value card. The consequences of the Check depend on the chosen Outcome:

Outcome	Consequences
Daring	Failure: Crisis. The character loses control of the scene and is in danger. Something valuable is lost, and the character may suffer harm. Success: Glory. The risk pays off and the character achieves something <i>spectacular</i> .
Focused	Failure: Hesitation. The GM narrates how a moment of <i>hesitation</i> or <i>doubt</i> has resulted in a <i>catastrophic</i> failure. Gain <i>one</i> level of <i>Risk</i> and <i>one</i> level of <i>Strain</i> . Success: Resolve. Your character <i>succeeds</i> .
Insightful	Failure: Uncertainty. Your character succeeds, but you must narrate how a mistake makes the situation <i>worse</i> . Increase the Risk of anyone affected by this mistake, by <i>one</i> . Success: Discovery.
Influential	Failure: Insult. The relationship is damaged by your character's actions. The GM does not have to reveal <i>how</i> a character is offended, but whenever this relationship directly affects your character's Checks, increase the Risk by <i>one</i> . Success: Impact. Narrate how this relationship has dramatically changed.

The suit of the card determines if the GM narrates the outcome, or the player narrates the outcome. If the card *matches* the suit of the outcome, the player narrates, even if the outcome is a failure, otherwise the GM narrates.

The narration can not alter the outcome, and it must satisfy the consequences for the chosen outcome.

Once the outcome is resolved, all of the cards in play are shuffled *back* into the deck.

Special Checks

Background Checks

A player can ask to see if their character's *background* can help out in a scene. This might be calling in favors, getting better equipment, or even finding important contacts.

Equipment Checks

Sometimes the character is better qualified than the player to pick their equipment. If it is *unclear* if a character has an essential piece of equipment, the player can ask for an *Expertise* Check.

This is a normal Check, but any *consequences* from the outcome are narrated as a *flashback*.

Magic Checks

Concentration

Most spells require deep concentration and focus to maintain an effect, but if a character *succeeds* their Check, they can maintain a spell for as long as they are *physically* able.

Casting Methods

The GM is free to give a *bonus* to a spell Check depending on how they cast the spell:

- **Rituals** will always make a spell *much* easier to cast, but more potent effects require longer and more intricate rites.
- **Sacrifices**, either *material* or *living*, will reduce the difficulty of the spell based on the personal *value* of the sacrifice. A raw diamond is a good sacrifice, but a character's *heirloom wedding band* is a *significant* sacrifice.

- **Totems or foci** can also make a spell easier to cast, but they are far less effective than *sacrifices*. These are often used in conjunction with other methods: Anatomancer mages will use *foci* in triage to *stabilize* a patient long enough to reach a surgeon.

Rest Scene

The player must narrate a scene where the character takes a *genuine break*. The player can then recover *one Strain*.

It is up to the GM to decide if a Rest Scene is possible. The scene can be as short as a pull from a flask and a deep breath, but the character needs to be able to feel like they can *safely stop* and *take a break*.

Injuries

Whenever a character is hurt, the GM decides if the wound is severe enough to increase their *Injury* level. *Psychological* damage can also inflict Injuries.

Injury Level

Strained	The character is hurt, but their injuries are only annoying.
Wounded	The pain is hard to ignore, but the character can still focus.
Impaired	The trauma is now <i>debilitating</i> , but the character is still conscious.
Incapacitated	The character has succumbed to their trauma and is either barely functioning or unconscious .
Crossroads	The character is at a pivotal moment in their story. They may be dead , but they are certainly <i>unconscious</i> .

Crossroads

When a character reaches a *Crossroads*, the player must decide if their character's story is going to continue.

If the player wants to continue, they must narrate how the character is able to survive, and the GM creates a *new Attribute* based on the character's injuries.

If the player *does not* want to continue, they must narrate how their character exits the story. **This does not have to be a death scene**, but they are no longer part of the story.

The player *always* gets a choice when deciding a *Crossroads*, even if an injury is *grievous*. There is **no limit** to the number of *Crossroads* a character can endure.

Treating Trauma

When a character's injuries are treated, the GM decides how many levels of Trauma are recovered based on the character's *injuries* and the kind of *treatment* they receive.

- Characters who are *Wounded* can recover with some *rest* and *basic aid*.
- *Impaired* or *Incapacitated* characters will need *professional* medical assistance.
- Characters who survive a *Crossroads* will require *significant* medical care.

Weapons And Armor

Weapons

Weapons will list the *types of injuries* it can inflict, along with how many *Injury levels* each injury causes. The *Injury level* is just a baseline and the GM can change this value.

Attribute Modifiers

For hand weapons, a character's Attributes might increase the amount of *Injury* a weapon inflicts.

Weapon	Injury Levels
Fists. Still the most popular fallback, especially with orcs and dwarves.	1 Strain
Combat Knife. The classic.	1+Attributes Strain
Long Sword. The mainstay weapon of the Elven Nations.	1+Attributes
Spear. Also widely used by the Elven Nations.	2+Attributes
Longbow. Aside from magic, this is the main ranged weapon of the Elven Nations.	3
9mm Pistol. Most civilian pistols.	1
.45 ACP Pistol. Heavier firepower with less armor penetration, but popular in civilian markets.	1
5.56mm Combat Rifle. The kind of rifles favored by human armies.	3
7.62mm Combat Rifle. These heavier rifles are favored by the militaries of the Orc Nations, but also by Bonethorne Port.	3
30.06 Sniper/Hunting Rifle. Used in both civilian and military arenas.	4
14.7mm Sniper Rifle. An anti-vehicle class of weapon used in many militaries.	8
Hand Grenade. Now a common part of military equipment.	6

Armor

Protection Rating

An armor's **protection rating** is *subtracted* from any Injury that a character suffers. The GM might change this rating based on what is attacking the armor and the condition of the armor.

Armor	Protection
Leather. Basic stuff that a lot of survivalists still wear.	1
Half-Plate. Steel chest armor that some orcs still use.	2
Elven Half-Plate. Magically enhanced steel chest armor.	2
Class IIa Kevlar. The kind of protection commonly given to watch members in major cities.	2
Class IIa KevFlex. Magically strengthened Kevlar, which makes it light enough to be woven into plain clothes. Worn by special watch members.	3
Combat Armor. Laminate cloth with a light steel plate backing. This is what is used by most militaries due to its low cost and <i>acceptable</i> protection.	3
KevFlex Combat Armor. Heavy KevFlex with ceramic inserts, which is rarely fielded by any military beyond Bonethorne Port and the Huxlon Republic.	5

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@uptoolategames.com.