

Diesel Empires, v0.0.1 Alpha

Based on Turn of the Card | Written by Jefferson Lee | May 2022

Creating Characters

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

- **Pick your character's species**, which will give your character a set of special traits.
- **Pick one Background for your character**, which describes the character's general experience and gives them a set of *Fair Abilities*.
- **Pick one Specialty from their Background**. Specialties describe the character's *specific* expertise and give them their *Good Abilities*.

Your character gets **two points** to upgrade their **Background or Speciality Abilities** (which are underlined) by **one level**. Only **one point** can be spent on an Ability, so an Ability cannot be upgraded **twice**. Mark any upgrades with a "+".

Playing the Game

What you'll need.

A standard Tarot deck with **four 14-card suits** (known as the *Minor Arcana*) and **22 Major Arcana**. In this game the suits of the Minor Arcana are named *Swords*, *Pentacles*, *Cups*, and *Wands*, but it's not a problem if your deck uses different names.

The Cards

Everyone *except* for the GM gets **five cards** at the start of the game. **The GM never carries a hand** and **players can never have more than five cards in their hand**.

Anytime the deck runs out, reshuffle the discards and create a new deck.

Checks

The GM can call for a *Check* anytime 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.

The GM picks the kind of Check the player is facing, which also **determines the suit of the Check**.

Type	Suit	
Focus	Swords	Calm, precision, and attention.
Influence	Cups	Presence, allure, and manipulation.
Resolve	Wands	Drive, strength, and determination.

The GM normally narrates the outcome of a Check and the *default* outcome is **Mediocre**. The outcome is **Fair** if the character's *Background* is relevant, or **Good** if their *Specialty* is relevant. If a specific *Ability* applies, use the *Ability's score* instead.

Outcome

Incredible	They succeed and gain an advantage .
Great	They succeed by a wide margin .
Good	Everything goes exactly to plan.
Fair	Routine actions succeed , but critical actions require extra effort or compromises .
Mediocre	They either fail or simply make no progress .
Dismal	Their actions make things worse .

Playing Cards

Players can play *any number* of cards from their hand to *Push* the outcome. Players can also *Stand* on their character's abilities and **not play any cards**.

Playing cards from the suit of the Check or *Pentacles* improve the outcome: **Pip cards** (*ace to ten*) add *one* to the score, while **Royal cards** (*Knave, Knight, King, Queen*) add *two*.

Playing a Major Arcana means that **the player immediately narrates the outcome**, regardless of the current score, but **the player must narrate the outcome based on the card**.

Cards can also be *Burned*. Burned cards are *discarded*, and an **equal number of cards are drawn from the deck**. If the drawn card *matches the suit of the Check*, or is a Major Arcana, it is **put into play**, but **everything else is discarded**.

Opposed Checks

If a Check is **extra challenging**, the GM can draw *one to four* cards at the *start* of a Check as **Opposing cards**. The GM reveals **Opposing cards after the player finishes playing their cards**.

Opposing Cards from the suit of the Check or Pentacles worsens the outcome.

If **any of the Opposing cards is a Major Arcana**, the GM picks *one* and **narrates an outcome based on the card**, *regardless* of the current score.

If the player plays a Major Arcana, **the player immediately narrates the outcome** and the Opposing cards are *discarded*, even if one of the Opposing cards is a Major Arcana.

Wrapping Up

Once the Check is resolved, anyone who played cards for the Check can draw *one* card for their hand. All cards played for the Check are then discarded.

Major Arcana Prompts

Here are some extra keywords based on the general meaning of each Major Arcana:

0. The Fool. Reckless, daring, spontaneous.	I. The Magician. Resourceful, inspired, impulsive.
II. The High Priestess. Intuition, secret, sacred.	III. The Empress. Nurture, nature, allure.
IV. The Emperor. Presence, control, resolute.	V. The Hierophant. Wisdom, tradition, faith.
VI. The Lovers. Choice, unity, imbalance.	VII. The Chariot. Will, discipline, momentum.
VIII. Strength. Courage, compassion, falter.	IX. The Hermit. Isolation, guidance, peace.
X. Wheel of Fortune. Luck, karma, cycles.	XI. Justice. Fairness, truth, law.
XII. Hanged Man. Surrender, outlook, setbacks.	XIII. Death. Change, endings, purging.
XIV. Temperance. Balance, patience, excess.	XV. The Devil. Shadow, desire, constraint.
XVI. The Tower. Chaos, disaster, awakening.	XVII. The Star. Hope, despair, renewal.
XVIII. The Moon. Illusion, fear, confusion.	XIX. The Sun. Joy, innocence, vitality.
XX. Judgment. Mercy, doubt, destiny.	XXI. The World. Apex, knowledge, journey.

Trauma

When a character suffers trauma, the GM decides how many *Hits* they receive based on the severity of the trauma (usually between *one to five*). **Trauma can be both physical and mental**: a drug-induced psychotic break can be as traumatic as a punch to the face.

A player can play *any number* of cards from *any* suit to reduce trauma: **numbered cards subtract one Hit**, while **Royal cards subtract two Hits**. A Major Arcana will stop *all* trauma, as long as **the player narrates how the trauma is averted based on the card**. These cards are discarded, but **the player does not get to draw a replacement card**.

The character is **Incapacitated** (unconscious or *barely* conscious) at **three Hits**, and they are **Dying** at **five Hits**. The character **dies** if they take **more than five hits**.

Glancing Wound

If a character is making a Check to *inflict* or *evade* trauma, a **Fair outcome results in half (round down) the number of Hits inflicted or received**.

Recovery

Characters that are not Incapacitated or Dying can recover **one card** if they are able to **fully rest** for at least an hour.

Each **Hit** requires a *separate* Check to recover: either a **Resolve** Check for the character to heal *naturally*, or a **Focus** Check to apply *medical aid*. **Fair outcomes mean that recovery is delayed**.

Magic Foundations

Magic Checks

Magic Checks use the same rules as *normal* Checks, but their effects are usually more extreme. In general **Fair outcomes usually result in side-effects**.

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 a magical Specialty**, 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*. Casters can *mitigate* these risks through *sacrifices* or *totems*, which is why there is a market for spell components.
- **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.

Weapons And Armor

Weapons

A weapon's **Strength** is the number of **Hits** it inflicts. Weapons a "+" add **one Strength** only when determining if armor is *degraded*.

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.	3+
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	3

in civilian markets.

5.56mm Combat Rifle. The kind of rifles favored by many modern militaries due to the weight and acceptable stopping. 4

7.62mm Combat Rifle. These heavier rifles are favored by a shrinking number of militaries due to their weight. 4+

30.06 Sniper/Hunting Rifle. Used in both civilian and military arenas. 5+

Armor

Subtract the **Strength** of any armor protection from any **Hits** the character receives. Strength *two* armor stops *two* Hits. **Armor is not perfect** and the **GM** can change the effectiveness of Armor depending on the attack. Steel armor is great for stopping blades, but it is *useless* against *fire*.

If the number of Hits dealt equals or exceeds the Strength of the armor, the armor is **degraded** and its **Strength is reduced by one**.

Armor	Strength
Ballistic Leather. Synthetically strengthened leather that a lot of survivalists wear.	2
Plate Armor. Steel chest armor that some kingdoms still field.	3
Elven Plate. Magically enhanced steel armor which is as light as aluminum.	4
Class IIa Kevlar. The kind of protection commonly given to watch members in major cities.	3
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. Stiff laminate cloth with a steel plate backing. This is what is used by most militaries due to its low cost.	3
KevFlex Infantry Armor. Light and flexible KevFlex with ceramic inserts, which is rarely fielded by any military beyond Bonethorne Port and the Huxlon Republic.	4
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.	5

Feedback

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