

Diesel Empires

By Jefferson Lee | January 2023 | v24.2.0

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 will give your character a set of special traits.
- **Add one (1) to one of the character's Attributes.**
- **Pick one Background for your character.** Backgrounds describe the character's general experience and give them a set of *Traits* to select.
- **Pick one Trait from their Background**, which describes the character's *specific* experiences and abilities, and may include special equipment. **Traits start at one (1).**

You have an additional *three* points to spend. **One (1) point will upgrade a Trait or Attribute by one (1) or gain one new Trait** from the character's Background. **Attributes cannot have a score higher than two (2).** Traits have *no* score limit.

Playing the Game

What you'll need.

A standard Poker deck with **both Jokers**, and some writing tools and sheets of papers for everyone to track notes.

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.**

Pip cards are the cards numbered **2 through 10**, while **Queens, Kings, and Jacks** are *Royal cards*.

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.

At the start of the Check, the GM draws one to five Opposing cards, based on the *difficulty* of the task. These cards are **kept face down on the table**.

The GM then chooses which one of the character's Attributes will be Checked, based on the actions the character is taking. This also determines the *suit of the Check*.

Attribute	Suit	
Focus	♠ Spades	Readiness, precision, and concentration.
Resolve	♣ Clubs	Strength, endurance, and determination.
Insight	♦ Diamonds	Knowledge, memory, and awareness.
Influence	♥ Hearts	Presence, allure, and charisma.

Start with the character's Attribute score. If a Trait is relevant to the Check, add its score to the Attribute, though only *one* relevant Trait can be used for a Check. **Players can then play any number of additional cards from their hand, and the value of these cards are added to the Attribute.**

- **Pip cards that match the suit are worth one (1)**, otherwise they are worth **zero (0)**.
- **Royal cards that match the suit are worth two (2)**, otherwise they are worth **one (1)**.

- **The Ace that matches the suit is worth three (3)**, while the other Aces are worth **two (2)**.
- **Jokers are always worth three (3)**.

The player has the *option* to **Hedge the Check**, by introducing a **burden** or **risk** that the character gains from the Check. A character who is fixing an engine could skip *minor* repairs which might cause a *catastrophic* failure, use up extra *resources* that might be needed *later*, or *strain* themselves trying to *rush*. **Hedges add one (1) to the Attribute**, and *must* be made *before* the Opposing cards are revealed. **The GM decides if a Hedge is severe enough to make a difference**, but can offer suggestions.

Once all of the cards for the character are played, the GM looks at the Opposing cards and secretly totals the value of the Opposing cards.

The character *succeeds* if their final Attribute score is *greater than the Opposing total*, and *they fail* if it is *equal to or less than the Opposing total*. In either case the GM narrates the outcome. They are *not required to reveal the Opposing cards* during the outcome. *Some failures rely on doubt.*

Ties can also be considered a stalemate instead of an outright *failure*. The character may achieve a *minor* success, but not enough to change their situation: a broken engine actually *starts*, but it begins to *overheat* and *smoke*.

If an Ace or Joker is played or revealed anytime during a Check (by the player or as an *Opposing card*), the character either gains an **immediate advantage** if they *succeed*, or a **severe setback** if they *fail*. An *Opposing Ace* would count towards an *advantage*, *if* the character *succeeds*.

Once the outcome is resolved, **all of the cards used for the Check are immediately shuffled back into the deck.**

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 hammer to the face.

A player can play any number of cards of any suit to reduce trauma: Pip cards stop one (1) Hit, Royal cards stop two (2) Hits, and Aces and Jokers stop three (3) Hits. These cards are then **shuffled back into the deck**. Cards cannot be played *later* to retroactively *heal* Hits.

The character is *incapacitated* (*unconscious* or at least *non-functioning*) at their **Resolve plus three Hits**, and they are **dying** at their **Resolve plus five Hits**. The character is **dead** if they take any more Hits while they are *dying*.

Recovery

Characters that are not Incapacitated or Dying can recover one card if they are able to rest for an hour. It does not have to be *good* rest, but it has to be calm enough that a character could *sleep*.

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*. **Draw one Opposing card** if the character is *not* Incapacitated, otherwise **draw one, plus one for each Hit beyond Incapacitated, Opposing cards.**

Magic Foundations

Magic Checks

Magic Checks use the same rules as normal Checks, but their effects are usually more extreme and difficult to control, and that *usually* means that the Check will be more significantly *Opposed*.

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 Background**, 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

Weapons with a “+” **add one Hit only when determining if armor is degraded**, so a “2+” weapon will only inflict *two* Hits, but it will degrade *Strength 3* armor.

Weapon	Hits
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 in civilian markets.	3
5.56mm Combat Rifle. The kind of rifles favored by many modern militaries due to the weight and acceptable stopping power.	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, so *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 protection and degradation is calculated after any cards are played to stop Hits, so cards can save your character *and* slow down the wear on your armor.

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	3

cities.

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.