

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.