

# DIESEL EMPIRES

By Jefferson Lee | March 2023 | v28.0.0

## 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](http://UpTooLateGames.com)).

- **Pick your character's species**, which will give your character a set of special abilities.
- **Pick one Path for your character.** Paths describe the character's course through their life and gives them a set of *Backgrounds* and *Traits* to select.
- **Pick one Background from their Path starting at one (1).** Backgrounds describe the *broad* abilities and experiences of a character.
- **The character gains all the Traits of their starting Background at one (1).** Traits have an associated *suit* and describe the *specific capabilities* of a character.

You have an additional *three* points to spend. *One (1) point will upgrade a Background or Trait score by one (1).* The maximum score for a Trait is its **Background score plus one (1)**, so if a Background has a score of *one (1)*, the maximum score for all of its Traits is *two (2)*.

You can also spend *one (1) point* to add *one new Background from the character's Path* with a score of *one (1)*. Characters **do not gain any Traits from the new Background**, but these Traits can be purchased for *one (1) point* and start with a score of *one (1)*.

## Playing the Game

### What you'll need.

A standard Poker deck with both **Jokers**, and some pens. You'll also need copies of all of the play sheets for a game that the GM should have.

### 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 *Royal cards* are **Queens, Kings, and Jacks**.
- **The base value for cards is zero (0) for Pip cards, one (1) for Royal cards, and two (2) for Aces.**
- *Jokers* are worth **three (3)**, and can represent *any suit*.

### Draws

**The GM can call for a Draw** 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.

#### 1. Opposing Cards

**The player picks a Trait or Background** based on the outcome they want for the Draw. Traits give the character a better chance to succeed, but they are only useful in specific cases. Backgrounds are much more *broadly* useful, but success is more difficult to achieve.

**The GM then draws one (1) to five (5) Opposing cards**, which are kept *hidden*. **They draw one card for each major obstacle the character faces:** *lack of resources, rushing a task, poor information, fatigue*, or just being totally *untrained* or *unprepared*. The GM **draws at least one (1) extra card for an Injured**

**character**, but they can draw *more* depending on the *kind* of injuries: the pain of a shattered leg has a bigger effect on *climbing* than on *driving*.

If there are no major obstacles, **the GM does not have to draw *Opposing* cards.**

## 2. Player Cards

The Player draws a number of cards equal to the score of the *Trait* or *Background* in use, and reveals them *face-up*. The total value of these cards is the character's score.

If a *Trait* is in use, any card that has the same *suit* as the *Trait* gets *plus one* (1) to its base value, so a *Pip* card that has the same suit as a *Trait* would be worth *one* (1). This bonus does *not* apply to *Opposing* cards.

The player can then play *any number* of cards from their hand to *increase* their score, but these cards can only be restored if the character *rests*.

## 3. Final Outcome

Once *all* the cards for the character are played, the GM looks at the *Opposing* cards and *secretly subtracts* the base values of the *Opposing* cards from the player's score, and the *final score* determines the *success level* of the outcome. The GM is *not* required to reveal the final score, since some outcomes rely on *doubt*.

Score	Outcome	
3	Superb	The character <i>succeeds</i> , and they gain an <i>immediate advantage</i> .
2	Ideal	The character accomplishes <i>exactly</i> what they wanted.
1	Messy	The character <i>barely succeeds</i> , so they may have been <i>harmed</i> , the results might be <i>limited</i> , or <i>new complications</i> might appear.
0	Failure	The character <i>fails</i> , which might expose them to <i>new threats</i> or <i>harm</i> .
-1	Dismal	The character <i>fails</i> , and the situation <i>immediately becomes more dangerous</i> .

The GM then narrates the outcome based on the final score and the chosen *Trait* or *Background*.

## 4. Clear the Table

Once the outcome is resolved, *all* of the cards used for the *Draw* 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 to *reduce* trauma. Each card stops *one Hit* and is shuffled back into the deck. Cards cannot be played *later* to *retroactively* stop *Hits*.

The character is *Injured* at *three Hits*, and they are *Down* (*unconscious* or at least totally *incapacitated*) at *five Hits*. The character is *Dying* if they take any more *Hits* while they are *Down*.

## Recovery

Characters that are *not* *Down* 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 *sit down* and *eat a meal*.

If a character is *Down*, each *Hit* requires a *separate* *Draw* to recover: either a *Draw* for the character to heal *naturally*, or a *Draw* to apply *medical aid*. Draw *one* *Opposing* card for each remaining *Hit*, and heal a number of *Hits* equal to the final *Draw* score.

If the character is *Dying*, each **Hit after Down** requires *medical aid* and *separate Draws* to recover. Draw one **Opposing card for each Hit after Downed** and **heal a number of Hits equal to the final Draw score**. If the result is a *Failure* the character gains a *Scar* (permanent injury), and if the result is *Dismal*, the character *dies*.

## **Magic Foundations**

### **Magic Draws**

**Magic Draws use the same rules as normal Draws**, but their effects are usually more extreme and difficult to control, and that *usually* means that the Draw 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
<b>Fists.</b> Still the most popular fallback, especially with orcs and dwarves.	1
<b>Combat Knife.</b> The classic.	2
<b>Long Sword.</b> The mainstay weapon of the Silohain.	3
<b>Spear.</b> Also widely used by the Silohain.	3+
<b>Longbow.</b> Aside from magic, this is the main ranged weapon of the Silohain.	3+
<b>9mm Pistol.</b> Most civilian pistols.	3+
<b>.45 ACP Pistol.</b> Heavier firepower, but sometimes harder to manage. Very popular in civilian markets.	3
<b>5.56mm Combat Rifle.</b> The kind of rifles favored by many modern militaries due to the weight and acceptable stopping power.	4
<b>7.62mm Combat Rifle.</b> These heavier rifles are favored by a shrinking number of militaries due to their weight.	4+
<b>30.06 Sniper/Hunting Rifle.</b> 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
<b>Ballistic Leather.</b> Synthetically strengthened leather that a lot of survivalists wear.	2
<b>Plate Armor.</b> Steel chest armor that some kingdoms still field.	3
<b>Elven Plate.</b> Magically enhanced steel armor which is as light as aluminum.	4
<b>Class IIa Kevlar.</b> The kind of protection commonly given to watch members in major cities.	3
<b>Class IIa KevFlex.</b> Magically strengthened Kevlar, which makes it light enough to be woven into plain clothes. Worn by special watch members.	3
<b>Combat Armor.</b> Stiff laminate cloth with a steel plate backing. This is what is used by most militaries due to its low cost.	3
<b>KevFlex Infantry Armor.</b> Light and flexible KevFlex with ceramic inserts, which is rarely fielded by any military beyond Bonethorne Port and the Huxlon Republic.	4
<b>KevFlex Combat Armor.</b> 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](mailto:jlee@uptoolategames.com).