

# DIESEL EMPIRES

v29.3.1 | By Jefferson Lee | UpTooLateGames.com

## 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 gives your character a set of *attributes*.
- **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**, which has a set of *Traits*. **These Traits begin with a rank of two (2)**. You also gain the *extra assets* of the Background.
- **Some Traits have underlined keywords** which have *special* meaning.

You have an additional *five (5)* points to spend:

- **One (1) point** will give a character a *new Background*, but **the new Traits start at zero (0)**. You also gain the *extra assets* of the Background.
- **One (1) point will increase a Trait's rank by one (1)**, but you can **only increase Traits from your character's starting or purchased Backgrounds**. **Traits cannot have a rank greater than four (4)**.
- **You can only pick Backgrounds from your character's Path**, and you cannot gain *new Paths*.

## Playing the Game

### The Deck

The game requires a *standard Poker deck* with *both Jokers*.

Everyone *except for the GM* gets *five (5) cards* at the start of the game. **The GM never carries a hand and players can never have more than five (5) cards in their hand.**

The *base value of the cards* is *zero (0)* for *Pip cards* (the cards numbered 2 through 10), *one (1)* for *Royal cards* (Queens, Kings, Jacks), *two (2)* for *Aces*, and *three (3)* for *Jokers*.

Whenever the deck runs out of cards, **immediately reshuffle the discard pile and create a new deck.**

### Strain

*Strain cards* represent the *physical or mental fatigue* of a character and are **dealt to the player face down and stay with the character until a Check is resolved or the character rests.**

### Checks

The GM can call for a *Check* anytime the *outcome* of a character's action will have a *meaningful* impact on the story.

#### Pick an Approach

The player decides the *suit* of the Check based on their character's *approach* to a Check, but the player might need to **explain how their character uses the approach.**

Suit	Approach
♣ Club	Grit (Gr). Daring, determination, strength.
♦ Diamond	Sharp (Sh). Clever, inventive, experienced.
♥ Heart	Wits (Wt). Awareness, intuition, wisdom.
♠ Spade	Reflex (Rf). Precision, finesse, instinct.

Add **one (+1)** to the base value of **all cards that match the suit of the Check, including Strain cards**, so *Pip Club* cards are worth **one (1)** during a *Grit* Check. **Jokers do not get this bonus**, but are still worth **three (3)**.

## Complications

Before the player plays cards for their character, the GM can deal **one (1) Strain for any complications that could have a meaningful impact on the Check**, so a *driving* Check in *poor* weather, and on *bad* roads might add **two (2) Strain**.

The **approach can also create complications**. Using *Grit* to approach a *reserved* and *delicate* situation might generate extra complications.

Each **Wound a character carries counts as one (1) complication**, so a character with **two (2) Wounds** would gain **two (2)** extra Strain from the trauma of their injuries.

## The Character Play

If the character has a **Trait that is relevant to the Check**, the player **draws and plays one (1) card from the deck for each rank in the Trait**, so a rank **two (2)** Trait gives a player **two (2)** draws. The character can use Traits with a rank of **zero (0)**, if they have the appropriate **Background**.

The player can play any card from their hand for their character.

The player can also **discard cards from their hand**, and **each discard** allows the player to **draw and play one (1) card from the deck**, so **three (3)** discards gives the player **three (3)** draws.

A player can **play or discard as long as they still have cards in their hand**, so a player is *allowed* to discard or play cards **one card** at a time until they run out of cards.

## The Outcome

Once the player has *finished* playing their cards, **reveal all of the Strain cards and subtract the total value of the Strain cards from the total value of the character's cards** to determine the outcome:

Total	Outcome	
3	Superb	They <u>succeed</u> and they gain an <b>immediate advantage</b> .
2	Ideal	They <u>succeed</u> .
1	Messy	They <u>succeed</u> , but they <b>gain one (1) Strain</b> .
0	Failure	They <u>fail</u> and <b>gain one (1) Strain</b> .
-1	Bad	They <u>fail</u> and <b>gain one (1) Wound or two (2) Strain</b> (GM's choice). Badly failing an all-nighter won't <i>Wound</i> a character, but it's a lot of <i>Strain</i> .
-2	Dismal	They <u>fail</u> and <b>gain two (2) Wound or three (3) Strain</b> (GM's choice).

The GM narrates the outcome, and **all of the cards revealed for the Check are discarded**. Any new Strain gained from the outcome is *dealt*.

If the player has **zero (0) cards in their hand**, they may **draw one (1) card for their hand**.

## Rest

*Rest* restores both cards and Strain, depending on the *quality* of rest.

Rest		Hand Size	Strain
Half	Having the safety to <b>eat a quick meal</b> or similar.	<b>Three (3) cards</b>	<b>Remove one (1)</b>
Full	Getting <b>two hours of sleep</b> , or the equivalent.	<b>Five (5) cards</b>	<b>Remove all</b>

*Rest* recovers cards back to a set **hand size**, so if a player has **one (1)** card in their hand, a *Half* Rest would bring them back to **three (3)** cards.

Rest *also* removes Strain, which is simply *discarded*.

Cards and Strain can be recovered in other ways, like *stimulants*, *magic*, or *achieving milestones*, but it is up to the GM to decide *what* is recovered and if there are any *side-effects*.

## Wounds

Wounds can only be gained through *failed Checks*, and represent *lasting physical or mental trauma*.

The character is *incapacitated* at *three (3) Wounds*, and *dying* at *four (4) Wounds*. *Dying characters* that take *any more Wounds die*.

### Recovery

Wounds can be removed if a character can make a *successful Check* to apply *medical aid*, or a *successful Check* to heal *naturally*. Either attempt requires a *Full Rest*, and *failing Badly or Dismally* always results in *gaining Wounds*.

## Combat Checks

Combat Checks work as normal, but the *approaches* have slightly different meanings in a fight:

Suit	Approach
♣ Club	<b>Grit.</b> Dirty, desperate, and bloody.
♦ Diamond	<b>Sharp.</b> Strategic and calculated.
♥ Heart	<b>Wits.</b> Cautious and defensive.
♠ Spade	<b>Reflex.</b> Clean, fast, and lethal.

*Combat Traits* have *avored approaches*, which allow the player to *draw one (1) extra card* if the favored approach is used for a Check.

### Attack Strength

The *attack strength* is the amount of *Strain* inflicted on a target if an attack succeeds, and is *added* to any *Wounds* or *Strain* from a Check. A *Bad* Check against an attack with a strength of *two (2)* would inflict *one (1) Wound* and *two (2) Strain* from the attack.

The character's *base attack strength* is equal to their *Check total*, so if the Check total is *two (2)*, the attack strength is *two (2)*.

## Magic Checks

Magic Checks work as normal, but the *approaches* have a different meanings in magic:

Suit	Approach
♣ Club	<b>Grit.</b> Channeled via strength and will.
♦ Diamond	<b>Sharp.</b> Carefully crafted.
♥ Heart	<b>Wits.</b> Guided by intuition.
♠ Spade	<b>Reflex.</b> Cast as an instinct.

Characters can only use magic if their Trait has one of the *magic keywords*.

### Magic Keywords

These keywords indicate the specific method a Trait can be used to channel magic:

- **Ritual** magic uses a *prepared body*, like a *ritual circle* or *consecrated sacrifice*. It is the *oldest* form of spell casting, and it is *safer* since the body can be purposefully built to *endure* channeling, though *run-away effects* can still be dangerous.
- **Evocation** channels magic through the *caster's body*. This poses *extreme* risks for the spell caster because they have to split their focus between an intricate channeling rite, and the **physical labor**

of *containing magic*. This allows a caster to shape effects by *simply speaking a rite*, but it **always causes one (1) extra Strain after the Check (even if they succeed)**. The *recited* component allows *evocation* rites to be cast as a **ritual instead** (which does *not* cause extra Strain).

- **Psychic evocation is the same as regular evocation, but *without a spoken component*, and it **still causes one (1) extra Strain after the Check**. However, since psychics rely **entirely** on *instinct* and *intuition*, psychics *cannot* inscribe their rites as a *ritual*.**

## Non-Player Characters (NPCs)

The GM **never** draws cards for their NPCs. Instead, every NPC has a **Difficulty rating (DR)**, which is the amount of *Strain* the NPC causes as a *complication*.

When an NPC is hit by an attack, **subtract the attack strength from their DR**. When an NPC's DR falls **below zero (0)**, the GM decides if they are *incapacitated* or *dead*.

Every NPC also has their own **base attack strength** score, which is used when the NPC lands an attack on a character.

## Weapons And Armor

### Weapons

The **Strength (ST)** of a weapon is **added to the attack strength**, so a 2 ST weapon increases the attack strength by *two (2)*.

The number of “+” **after ST is the amount to reduce armor rating, to a minimum of zero (0), before armor affects attack strength**, so a weapon with 2+ ST would add *two (2)* to the attack strength, and *subtract one (1)* from the armor rating of the target.

	Strength (ST)
<b>Bare Hands and Feets.</b> The classic.	0
<b>Combat Knife.</b> The first upgrade.	1
<b>Long Sword.</b> The mainstay weapon of the Silohain.	2
<b>Longbow.</b> Aside from magic, this is the main ranged weapon of the Silohain.	2
<b>.38 Pistol.</b> Most civilian pistols.	2+
<b>.454 Pistol.</b> Heavier firepower, but harder to manage.	3
<b>.223 Combat Rifle.</b> The kind of rifle favored by many modern militaries.	3+
<b>.308 Combat Rifle.</b> A heavier rifle, usually reserved for support fire.	4

### Armor

The **armor rating (AR)** **reduces the attack strength** to a minimum of zero (0), so 3 AR armor will reduce an attack strength of *two (2)* to zero (0).

**Armor only affects attack strength**, so a character will **still suffer Wounds or Strain from a failure even if the attack strength is reduced to zero (0)**.

	Rating (AR)
<b>Ballistic Leather.</b> Synthetically strengthened leather that a lot of survivalists wear.	1
<b>Elven Plate.</b> Magically enhanced steel armor which is as light as aluminum.	3
<b>Class IIa Kevlar.</b> Commonly given to watch members in major cities.	2
<b>Class E IIa KevFlex.</b> Magically enhanced to be woven into plain clothes.	2
<b>Combat Armor.</b> Stiff laminate cloth with a steel plate backing.	2
<b>Class E III KevFlex,</b> with steel inserts. Used in advanced militaries.	3
<b>Class E IV KevFlex,</b> with ceramic inserts. <i>Rarely</i> fielded due to its cost.	4