

# KINGDOMS OF ASH

CORE RULES V29.4.1 | BY JEFFERSON LEE | UPTooLateGames.com

## CREATING CHARACTERS

Each player will need a *playbook* for the game (which can be found at [UpTooLateGames.com](http://UpTooLateGames.com)). From the playbook, each player will:

- Pick a *species* for their character.
- Pick *one Path* for their character. *Each Core Trait starts at rank one (1).*
- Pick *one Background* from their Path. *Each of Background Traits will begin with a rank of two (2), and the character also gains the extra assets of the Background.*
- Some Traits have underlined keywords which have *special* meaning.

Each player then has an additional *three (3)* points to spend on their character:

- *One (1) point will give a character a new Background, with the new Traits starting at one (1).* The character also gains the *extra assets* of the Background. **Players can only pick Backgrounds from their character's Path, and they cannot pick new Paths.**
- *One (1) point will increase a Trait's rank by one (1), but players can only increase Core Traits or Traits from your character's starting or purchased Backgrounds.*

## 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 draws 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 CARDS

*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 their next *Check* or when 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 THE SUIT

The GM picks the *suit* of the Check based on the character's *approach* to an action, which also has an effect on the *outcome*.

Suit	Approach
♣ Club	Grit (Gr). Forceful, daring, determined.
♦ Diamond	Sharp (Sh). Precise, logical, knowledgeable.
♥ Heart	Wits (Wt). Intuitive, careful, clever.
♠ Spade	Quick (Qk). Fast, agile, instinctive.

Add *one (+1)* to the base value of *all cards (except Jokers)* that match the suit of the Check, including *Strain and Opposing Cards*, so in a Grit Check all Club Pip cards would be worth *one (1)*.

The player can *always* ask for a *different suit*, but that might increase the *difficulty of the Check* or change its *outcome*. A *precise* Check can be *forced* instead, but that will change the outcome.

### OPPOSING CARDS

Before the character's cards are played, all of their *Strain cards* become *Opposing cards*. The GM then deals *one (1) additional Opposing card for each difficulty that has a meaningful impact on the Check*, so a *riding* Check in *poor weather* and on *bad roads* would add *two (2) Opposing cards*. It is possible for a Check to have *zero (0) Opposing cards*.

Opposing cards stay *face down* until the *outcome* is revealed.

### CHARACTER CARDS

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* means that a player draws *two (2) cards* for their character.

*Some Traits can only be used in Checks involving specific approaches*, listed in parenthesis, so a Trait with "(Gt, Wt)" can only be used in Checks involving *Grit* or *Wits*.

The player can play *any card from their hand for their character*, even if *no Traits* are being used.

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

Players can play or discard cards *one at a time until they stop or run out of cards*.

### THE OUTCOME

Once the player has *finished* playing their cards, *reveal all of the Opposing Cards* and *subtract the total value of the Opposing Cards from the total value of the character's cards*. Remember: the *suit bonus applies to all cards, including Opposing cards*. The *final total* determines the *outcome*:

Total	Outcome	
3+	Superb	<u>Success</u> with an <i>immediate advantage</i> .
2	Success	<u>Success</u> without any complications.
1	Messy	<u>Success</u> , but the character gains <i>one (1) Strain</i> .
0	Failure	<u>Failure</u> , and the character gains <i>one (1) Strain</i> .
-1	Bad	<u>Failure</u> and <i>one (1) Wound</i> is inflicted.
-2 (or less)	Dismal	<u>Failure</u> and <i>two (2) Wounds</i> are inflicted.

The GM narrates the *outcome*, and *all of the cards played for the Check* (including *Opposing cards*) are *discarded*.

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

On *any outcome*, the character gains *one (1) additional Strain* if they have *any Wounds* (new or old) at the end of the Check.

### WOUNDS

Wounds represent the *lasting physical* (injuries, poison, disease) or *mental* (panic, anxiety, psychosis) *trauma* inflicted on a character.

Once a character has *three (3) or more Wounds*, they are in *Shock*. *While in Shock*, characters can *still act*, but *all of their Traits are reduced to rank zero (0)*. The character's Traits can still be used for their keywords, so a character in Shock can still cast magic using their *rank zero (0) magic Traits*.

At **five (5) Wounds** the character sustains a **permanent injury**. If the character **suffers more than five (5) Wounds**, they **cannot be saved** and they **exit the story at the end of the game**.

## REST AND HEALING

*Rest restores cards and Strain* depending on the type of rest:

Rest		Hand Size	Strain Left
Half	Enough <b>safety to eat a quick meal</b> or take a <i>similar</i> level of rest.	<b>Three (3)</b>	<b>One (1)</b>
Full	<b>The minimum needed to rest</b> , but <b>enough of a delay to cause problems</b> (risks grow, enemies fortify, damage is being done).	<b>Five (5)</b>	<b>Zero (0)</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 to a set amount**, so if a character takes a *Half Rest*, their Strain would be reduced to *one (1)* card.

**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*.

### HEALING WOUNDS

If a character is *not in Shock*, a *Full Rest* will **heal one (1) Wound**.

If a character is *in Shock*, healing *one (1) Wound* requires a **successful Check to apply medical aid**, or a **successful *Grit* Check to heal naturally**. **Either Check must be made after a Full Rest**.

A character is **no longer in Shock** once they are down to **only two (2) Wounds**.

## COMBAT CHECKS

Combat Checks are resolved *normally*, but the **approaches** are slightly different:

Suit	Approach
♣ Club	<b>Grit (Gr)</b> . Dirty, messy, and desperate.
♦ Diamond	<b>Sharp (Sh)</b> . Strategic, cunning, and precise.
♥ Heart	<b>Wits (Wt)</b> . Defensive, alert, and cautious.
♠ Spade	<b>Quick (Qk)</b> . Aggressive, direct, and lethal.

The GM will let you know if a **combat Check is required**, and **only Traits with the combat keyword can be used in a combat Check**.

## MAGIC CHECKS

Magic Checks are resolved *normally*, but the **approaches** have a different meanings in magic:

Suit	Approach
♣ Club	<b>Grit (Gr)</b> . Sacrifice, endurance, and willpower.
♦ Diamond	<b>Sharp (Sh)</b> . Preparation, practice, and precision.
♥ Heart	<b>Wits (Wt)</b> . Focus, clarity, and calm.
♠ Spade	<b>Quick (Qk)</b> . Fast, messy, and instinctive.

Characters can **only use magic if their Trait has one of these magic keywords**, which indicate the specific method a Trait can be used to channel magic:

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

## WEAPON STRENGTH (ST)

If a character is *hit* by a weapon, the **Strength (ST)** of a weapon is *subtracted* from the Check's **outcome**, so if a character's Check is *zero* (0) and they are *hit* with a 3 ST weapon, the character's final outcome is a *minus three* (-3).

If a character *hits* something with a weapon, the **ST** is *added* to the Check's **outcome**, so if a character's Check is *one* (1) and they *hit* with an 3 ST weapon, the character's final outcome is *four* (4).

## ARMOR RATING (AR)

**Armor Rating (AR)** reduces the ST of a weapon to a **minimum of zero** (0), so 3 AR will reduce a 2 ST weapon to 0 ST.

The number of "+" after the ST of some weapons is the amount to *reduce* AR, to a **minimum of zero** (0), *before it affects ST*, so a 2+ ST weapon versus 2 AR, would result in a 1 ST hit, and a 1++ ST weapon versus 2 AR would *also* result in a 1 ST hit.