

DIESEL EMPIRES

Core Rules v29.4.4 | By Jefferson Lee | UpTooLateGames.com

Creating Characters

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

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

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

- *One* (1) point will *unlock* a *new Background* from their *Path*, with the *new Abilities* starting at *one* (1). The character also *gains the Background's extra assets*. *Players cannot gain new Paths*.
- *One* (1) point will *increase* an *Ability's rank* by *one* (1), but players can *only increase Core Abilities or Abilities from their character's unlocked Backgrounds*.

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 are:

- *Zero* (0) for *Pip cards* (the cards numbered 2 through 10)
- *One* (1) for *Royal cards* (Queens, Kings, Jacks)
- *Two* (2) for *Aces*
- *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 have an *effect on the character's future Checks*.

Checks

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

Check Suit

The GM picks the *suit* of the *Check* based on the *approach* or *risks* of an action.

Suit	Approach	Risks
♣ Club (C♣)	Grit. Daring, power, determination.	Burnout. Exhaustion, harm, defeat.
♦ Diamond (D♦)	Sharp. Precise, attentive, smart.	Fault. Flaws, neglect, ignorance.
♥ Heart (H♥)	Cool. Intuition, cunning, control.	Doubt. Distorted, misled, panicked.
♠ Spade (S♠)	Quick. Speed, agility, instinct.	Reckless. Falter, trapped, exposed.

Add one (+1) to the base value of all cards (except Jokers) that match the suit of the Check, including difficulty cards, so in a Clubs 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, but that will change the outcome.

Difficulty Cards

Difficulty cards count against the character's final outcome, and the GM deals one (1) card (face-down) for each difficulty that has a meaningful impact on the Check, so a driving Check in poor weather and on bad roads would add two (2) difficulty cards. It is possible for a Check to have zero (0) difficulty cards.

All of the character's Strain are added to the difficulty cards.

Difficulty cards stay face down until the outcome is revealed, but the player should always know how many difficulty cards are being played against their character.

Character Cards

If the character has an Ability that is relevant to the Check, the player gets to draw and play one (1) card from the deck for each rank in the Ability, so a rank two (2) Ability means that a player gets to draw and play two (2) cards from the deck.

The player can always play cards from their hand, even if no Abilities are being used.

The player can also discard cards from their hand, and 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 choose to stop or run out of cards.

Ability Key Suits

Some Abilities have key suits listed in parenthesis and if any of an Ability's key suits matches the suit of the Check, the player draws and plays one (1) extra card from the deck, so a player using an Ability with the key suits of "(C♣, H♥)" in a Clubs (C♣) Check gets one (1) extra draw from the deck.

Check Outcome

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

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

The GM narrates the outcome, and all of the cards played for the Check (including difficulty cards) are discarded. On an outcome of zero (0) or less, the GM decides if the character succeeds or fails.

If the player has zero (0) cards left in their hand at the end of the Check, 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.

Any Wounds the character suffers after two (2) Wounds become Serious Wounds. Each Serious Wound reduces all of a character's Abilities by one (1) rank, to a minimum of zero (0), so a character with two (2) Serious Wounds would *reduce all of their Abilities by two (2) ranks*, but any *rank one (1) Abilities remain at rank zero (0)*.

Any of the character's Abilities that are reduced to zero (0) can still be used for Checks if the keyword is important (i.e. *magic*), but they *do not get to draw cards for that Ability*.

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 safety to eat a quick meal or take a similar level of rest.	Three (3)	One (1)
Full	The minimum needed to rest, but enough of a delay to cause problems (risks grow, enemies fortify, damage is being done).	Five (5)	Zero (0)

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 does not have Serious Wounds, a Full Rest will heal one (1) Wound.

Healing one (1) Serious Wound requires a Full Rest and either Check to apply medical aid, or a Clubs (C♣) Check to heal naturally.

Combat

Combat is treated like any other scene in the game, but there are usually *more Checks and more Wounds*. **Almost every action taken during combat should require a Check**, since almost *every action* will have a *meaningful impact*.

Characters can attempt multiple actions for a Check, like *dodging and shooting*, but this should **always increase the difficulty of the Check**.

Interrupting actions is also allowed, like trying to *tackle someone before they shoot*, but that **might also increase the difficulty of the Check**.

Combat Checks are no different than regular Checks, but the GM might sometimes **require an Ability with the combat keyword**.

This usually happens if a character is *fighting* a character with a combat Ability, or if a character is attempting to use a *weapon to attack* another character.

Magic Checks

Characters can *only* use magic if their Ability has one of these *magic keywords*, which indicate the specific *method* an Ability can be used to channel magic, and its *costs* to the caster.

- **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. **Preparing a body takes time**, but it can be *rushed*.
- **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 concentrating 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 also channels magic through the caster's body**, but *without a spoken component*, and the effects are usually *instant*, and sometimes *reflexive*. **Psychic rites still cause one (1) extra Strain after the Check (even if they succeed)**, and since psychics rely **entirely on instinct and intuition**, psychics *cannot* inscribe their rites as a *ritual*.

Weapons and Armor

If a target is *hit* by a weapon, they suffer *one (1) extra Wound in addition to any Strain or Wounds from a Check*, so if a character's Check is *zero (0)* and they are *hit* with a weapon, the character takes *one (1) Strain* from their Check, and *one (1) Wound* from the weapon.

The Strength (ST) of a weapon does not affect the number of Wounds a weapon inflicts, so a 3 ST weapon still only inflicts *one (1) extra wound*.

Each *"+"* after a weapon's Strength (ST) score *increases the number of additional Wounds inflicted by one (1)*, so a 3+ ST weapon will inflict *two (2) extra Wounds* on a hit.

Armor

If the **Armor Rating (AR)** of a target is *equal or greater than the Strength (ST) of a weapon* it stops the weapon from inflicting any *extra Wounds*, but any **Strain or Wounds from the Check will still be inflicted**, so if a character's Check is *minus one (-1)* and they are hit with a 3+ ST weapon, *3 AR will stop the two (2) extra Wounds*, but the character will still suffer *one (1) Wound from the Check*.