DIESEL EMPIRES
Core Rules v30.0.0 | 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. *One* (**1**) *Core Trait* starts at *rank one* (**1**).
- Pick *one Background* from their Path to *unlock. 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** <u>underlined</u> **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* Traits starting at *one* (**1**). The character also **gains the Background's** *extra assets*. **Players** *cannot* **gain** *new* **Paths**.
- *One* (**1**) **point will increase a Trait's rank by** *one* (**1**), but players can **only increase Core Traits** *or* **Traits 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**.

Each card has a *base value*, based on its *card type*:

Base Value	Card Type
+0	**Pip cards** (cards numbered *2* through *10*)
+1	**Royal cards** (Queens, Kings, Jacks)
+2	**Aces**
+3	**Jokers**

Whenever the deck runs out of cards, *immediately* **reshuffle the** *discard pile* **to 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.** Strength, power, determination.	**Burnout.** Exhaustion, harm, defeat.
♦ Diamond (D♦)	**Sharp.** Precise, attentive, smart.	**Fault.** Flaws, neglect, ignorance.
♥ Heart (H♥)	**Guts.** Intuition, daring, confidence.	**Doubt.** Distorted, reckless, confused.
♠ 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

Based on the character's *action*, **the player picks** *one* (**1**) *relevant Core Trait* and *one* (**1**) *relevant Background Trait*, though a character might have **only** *one* or **no** relevant Traits.

The *total rank* of the relevant Traits is the number of cards that player gets to *draw* and *play* from **the deck**, so a *rank one (1) Core Trait* and a *rank two (2) Background Trait* means that a player gets to draw and play *three* (3) cards from the deck.

The player can always play cards from their hand, **even if the character has** *no* **relevant Traits.**

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*.

Helping Hands

Other characters can *help* with a Check, but *all* of *their* Strain is *added* to the difficulty, and **any difficulties the** *helpers* **face are added to the difficulty of the Check**.

The Check Suit stays the *same*, but **helpers draw and can play cards like a** *normal* **Check**. When the outcome is revealed, *everyone* helping suffers the *same* consequences or rewards, so on a *Bad* outcome, *every* helper would suffer *one* Wound.

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**	*Failure is likely* and the character **gains** *one* (**1**) *Strain*.
-1	**Bad**	*Failure* **in** *most* **cases** and *one* (**1**) *Wound* is inflicted.
-2 *(or less)*	**Dismal**	*Failure* is *nearly* **guaranteed** and *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 Traits* (including *Core* Traits) **by one** (**1**) **rank, to a** *minimum of zero* (**0**), so a character with *two* (**2**) Serious Wounds would *reduce all* of their Traits by *two* (**2**) ranks, but any *rank one* (**1**) Traits remain at *rank zero* (**0**).

Any of the character's Traits that are reduced to *zero* (**0**) **can** *still* **be used for Checks if the** <u>keyword</u> **is important**, so a character could still *attempt* to use 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 *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 in a combat scene since *violence* makes actions significantly more *consequential*.

Combat Checks are *no different* **than** *regular* **Checks**, but the GM might sometimes **require a Trait with the** <u>combat</u> **keyword**, which usually only happens if a character is *fighting* a character that has a <u>combat</u> Trait.

The <u>combat</u> **keyword also usually includes a** *speciality* **in** *parenthesis*. If the character is taking an **action that is** *relevant* **to their specialty**, then they *draw one* (**1**) *extra card* for the Check.

Magic Keywords

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

- <u>*Ritual*</u> 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*.
- <u>*Evocation*</u> 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*)**. However, <u>evocation</u> rites can be cast as a <u>*ritual*</u> instead (which does *not* cause Strain).
- <u>*Psychic*</u> 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*.

Magic keywords *augment* Traits and are *optional*, so a *Surgeon* Trait with the <u>*ritual*</u> keyword means that a character can operate on a patient using *conventional* means, but they can *also* use <u>*ritual*</u> magic to help heal their patient.

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*.

If armor is *layered*, *add* the **Armor Ratings**, so wearing *two* (2) layers of *2 AR* armor gives a character a total of *4 AR*, but they might have difficulty *moving*.