

# DIESEL EMPIRES

Core Rules v30.1.1 | 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 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 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* that is **most relevant for the Check**, based on the *action* or its *consequences*.

♠ Spade (S♠)	Reflex, speed, instinct; rushed, delayed, misled.
♥ Heart (H♥)	Intuition, daring, presence; panicked, ruined, ignored.
♦ Diamond (D♦)	Precision, focus, knowledge; uncontrolled, surprised, uncertain.
♣ Club (C♣)	Grit, power, determination; crushed, exhausted, defeated.

Add one (+1) to the base value of all cards (except Jokers) that match the suit of the Check, including Opposing 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. Understanding motives using Diamonds is different from using Hearts.

## Opposing Cards

Opposing Cards are subtracted from the character’s final outcome. The GM deals one (1) or more Opposing Cards (face-down) for every major challenge in the Check, so a driving Check at night and on bad roads might be worth three (3) Opposing Cards: one (1) for the darkness, and two (2) for the bad roads. If there are no major challenges, zero (0) Opposing Cards are drawn.

All of the character’s Strain are added to the Opposing Cards.

Opposing Cards stay face down until the outcome is revealed, but the player should always know how many Opposing Cards their character faces before they commit to their cards.

## Character Cards

Based on the character’s action, the player picks one relevant Core Trait and one 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 Opposing Cards, and any challenges the helpers face are added to the Opposing Cards.

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 (1) Hit.

## Check Outcome

Once the player has finished playing their cards, reveal then 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	Success with an immediate advantage.
2	Success	Success without any complications.
1	Messy	Success, but the character gains one (1) Strain.
0	Poor	Success is possible but the character gains one (1) Strain.
-1	Bad	Success is unlikely and one (1) Hit is inflicted.
-2 (or less)	Dismal	Success is next to impossible and two (2) Hits are inflicted.

The GM narrates the outcome, and all of the cards played for the Check (including Opposing Cards) are discarded. On an outcome of zero (0) or less, the GM decides if the character succeeds or fails, usually based on what would make a scene more interesting.

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 are *Wounded*, or *two (2)* if they are *Severely Wounded*.

## Hits

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

The character is *Wounded* if they take *one (1) Hit*, and they are *Severely Wounded* at *three (3) Hits*. At *five (5) Hits* the character gains a *Scar*, which is a *permanent injury*.

If the character suffers *more than five (5) Hits*, the character is on the *Brink*. At the end of the game, the players of any characters on the *Brink* **pick one (1) suit for each Scar** and **pull one (1) card from the full deck**. If the card matches any of the player’s suits, the player **narrates how their character’s story ends**.

## 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	A Full rest might only be a handful of minutes or a full night of sleep, but it’s always 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*. **Recovered Strain is discarded**.

Other effects, like *stimulants*, *magic*, or *achieving milestones*, can grant rest benefits immediately, but they sometimes have other drawbacks.

## Healing Hits

If a character is *Wounded*, a *Full Rest* will *heal one (1) Hit*. If the character is *Severely Wounded*, healing *one (1) Hit* requires both a *Full Rest* and a *Check to apply medical aid*, with **Opposing Cards equal to the number of Hits**.

## 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 may **only allow Traits with the combat keyword**, usually when a character is *fighting* someone with a combat Trait.

The combat keyword also includes a *focus* (in parenthesis), and the GM may **increase the difficulty of a Check if an action does not fit the focus**, so a character with Combat (Fury) will have a harder time taking *precise shots*.

# 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.

- **Ritual** magic requires a *prepared* body, like a *ritual circle* or *consecrated sacrifice*. It is the *oldest* form of spell casting, and it is the *safest* since the body can be purposefully built to *endure* channeling (like a , 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)**. However, **evocation** rites can be cast as a **ritual** instead, which *does not* inflict Strain.
- **Psychic** evocation *also* channels magic through the *caster's body*, but *without* a spoken component, so 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 **ritual** keyword means that a character can operate on a patient using *conventional* means, but they can *also* use **ritual** magic to help heal their patient.

## Weapons and Armor

If a target is *hit* by a weapon, they suffer *one (1) extra Hit in addition to any Strain or Hits from a Check*, so if a character is hit and their Check outcome is *zero (0)*, the character takes *one (1) Strain* from their Check, and *one (1) Hit* from the weapon.

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

Each “+” marker *after* a weapon's Strength (ST) score *increases* the number of Hits inflicted by *one (1)*, so a 3+ ST weapon will inflict *two (2) extra Hits*.

## Armor

If the **Armor Rating (AR)** of a character is *equal to or greater than* the Strength (ST) of a weapon it stops the weapon from inflicting *any extra Hits*, but **any Strain or Hits from the Check will still be inflicted**, so if a character is hit with a 3+ ST weapon because of a *minus one (-1)* Check outcome, 3 AR will stop the *two (2) extra Hits*, but the character will still suffer *one (1) Hit* from the *Check* outcome.

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*.