

DIESEL EMPIRES

Core Rules v31 | 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) Trait* starts at *rank one (1)*.
- Pick *one Background* from their *Path* to *unlock* and *each Ability* of the *Background* begins with a *rank of two (2)*. 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 Abilities* starting at *one (1)*. The character also gains the *Background's extra assets*. *Players cannot unlock new Paths*.
- *One (1) point* will increase a *Trait* or *Ability* rank by *one (1)*, but players can *only* increase *Abilities* from *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, or the *increasing risks* of a scene. *Strain* is dealt to the player *face down* and affects the character's *next Check*.

Checks

Anytime the player takes action to overcome a challenge, a *Check* is used to determine the outcome and its consequences.

One Trait

The player picks *one (1) Trait* for their *Check*, which determines the *suit* of the *Check*: Spades (♠), Hearts (♥), Diamonds (♦), or Clubs (♣).

The *Base Value* of *all cards (except Jokers)* matching the *suit* of the *Check* are increased by *one (+1)*, so in a *Clubs (♣)* *Check* every *Pip Club* card is worth *one (1)*, every *Royal Club* card is worth *two (2)*, and the *Ace of Clubs* is worth *three (3)*.

Messy Outcome

An outcome is *Messy* if the GM thinks that a *Trait* is *only partially* relevant to a challenge. In *Messy* outcomes, the character will always suffer *one (1) extra Strain* at the end of a *Check*. If a character is trying to be *Quick* when *precision* is required, the outcome might be *Messy*.

One Ability

The player also chooses *one (1) Ability* for the *Check*, but the GM decides if it actually *applies* to the challenge, and a character might have *no usable Abilities* for a *Check*.

If the GM decides that an *Ability* is *only partially applicable*, the player can still use *half its rank*, rounded down.

The Opposing Cards

Every challenge in a scene has a *difficulty (df)* level, and the GM draws *Opposing Cards (face-down)* equal to the *total difficulty level* that the character is facing. If a character is chasing a *good* driver (df 2), on *bad roads* (df 2), the GM draws *four (4)* *Opposing Cards*.

All of the character's *current Strain* are added to the *Opposing Cards*.

Opposing Cards stay *face down* until the *outcome* is revealed, but the player *always* gets a chance to play *more* cards if the GM adds *additional* *Opposing Cards*.

Draw, Play, Discard

The *total rank* of the player's chosen *Trait* and *Ability* is the number of cards that player gets to draw and play from the deck, so a *rank one (1) Trait* and a *rank two (2) Ability* means that a player gets to draw and play *three (3)* cards from the deck. Sometimes, a player might draw *zero (0) cards*.

The player can always play cards from their hand, even if they draw *zero* cards from the deck.

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 the GM can draw *additional* *Opposing cards* for any challenges that the *helpers* face.

The *Check's suit* does *not* change and *helpers* only get to draw for *one (1) relevant Ability*, but they can *play* and *discard* from their hands *normally*.

Every helper suffers the *same consequences* and *rewards*, even in *Messy outcomes*, so on a *Bad* and *Messy* outcome, every helper suffers *one (1) Hit*, gains *one (1) Strain*, and has *one (1) Success*.

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. The *final total* determines the *outcome*:

Total	Outcome	
1+	Good	All Success, no drawbacks.
0	Mediocre	1 Success, but the character gains one (1) Strain.
-1 or lower	Bad	1 Success, but the character suffers one (1) Hit.

Each *challenge* requires a certain number of *Successes* to resolve, usually two (2) or more, but sometimes it only takes *one* (1), so it may take *multiple Checks* to resolve a *challenge*. If a character is facing *multiple* challenges, **the *player* gets to decide how to distribute their *Successes*.**

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.

Finally, *all of the cards in play, including *Opposing Cards*, are discarded.*

Hits

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

The trauma level of a character **affects the difficulty level of their Checks.**

Trauma Level	Hits	Effect
Wounded	1 Hit	+1 Difficulty
Critical	3 Hits	+2 Difficulty

Scars

After *three* (3) Hits, convert any Hits to Scars. At the *end of the game*, draw cards, from a *full deck*, equal to the number of Scars *plus any permanent injuries*. The *total Base Value* of the cards decides the character's fate:

Scar Total	Outcome
0	Lucky. No permanent effects.
1+	Scarred. The character gains a <i>permanent injury</i> , and the player describes what this looks like for their character.
3+	Gone. The player narrates how their character <i>exits the story</i> .

Scars *cannot* be healed during the game, but they are *reset* to zero (0) 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 <i>safety to eat a quick meal</i> or take a <i>similar</i> level of rest.	<i>Three</i> (3)
Full	A <i>Full rest might only be a handful of minutes or a full night of sleep</i> , but it's <i>always enough of a delay to cause problems</i> (risks grow, enemies fortify, damage is being done).	<i>Zero</i> (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

Once during a *Full rest*, a character can **make a Check to heal Hits**, and *each Success heals one* (1) Hit. Other characters *can help*, but only ***medical* Abilities** can be used.

Healing Hits happens *after* you recover cards for a Full rest.

Combat

Combat Checks are *no different than regular Checks*, but the GM might **only allow Abilities with the *combat* keyword**, usually when a character is *fighting* someone with a *combat* Ability.

The ***combat*** keyword also includes a *focus* (in parenthesis), and the GM may **decide that a *combat* Ability is only *partially* applicable if an action does not fit the *focus***. A character with *Combat (Fury)* is not as skilled with taking *precise long-range* shots.

Magic Keywords

Characters can *only* use magic if their Ability has one of these *magic keywords*, which indicate the specific *method* the 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 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 and **adds *extra Successes* to a challenge requirement**. Alternately, rituals can be *rushed instead*, *increasing the difficulty* of a Check.
- 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, even if they *succeed* or if the outcome is *Messy***. 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, even if they *succeed* or if the Check is *Messy***, and since psychics rely entirely on *instinct* and *intuition*, psychics *cannot* inscribe their rites as a *ritual*.

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

Equipment and Weapons

Equipment and weapons modify Checks in different ways, but **they can only be used when the GM feels it is appropriate**. A *gun* is not helpful for identifying *magic*.

Here are the general modifiers for equipment and weapons:

Modifier	Abbreviation	Effect
Difficulty	-/+Xdf	Decreases or increases the difficulty of a Check by X. -2df <i>reduces</i> the difficulty of a Check by <i>two</i> (2).
Successes	+/-XS	Increases or decreases the number of Successes of a Check's outcome by X, <i>regardless</i> of the outcome. +2S on a <i>Bad</i> outcome means the character takes <i>one</i> (1) Hit, but gets <i>three</i> (3) <i>Successes</i> .
Outcome	+/-XCh	Increases or decreases <i>the final total of a Check</i> by X. If the final total of a Check was zero (0), a +2Ch modifier increases it to two (2).

These modifiers can be combined, so -1df/+1S will reduce the difficulty of a Check by *one* (1), and *add one* (1) Success to the outcome.