Quick Start Guide

A Quick Note on Accessibility

The Descent into Midnight team is committed to creating a game that's accessible to all players, no matter what tools they might use to interact with the game materials. To that end, this Screen Reader Quick Start Packet contains accessible PDFs of the rules and editable playbooks that were designed with screen reader users in mind (and that were tested by two blind members of the TTRPG community: Aser Tolentino of The Redacted Files podcast and Tyler Palermo of DOTS RPG).

Our hope is that these documents will be easy to use and navigate with a screen reader. However, just like the originally published Quick Start guide materials, they're works in progress. And for the playbooks, they won't be the only accessible version offered: we're also working on developing HTML playbooks, which should help overcome some issues that can arise with different screen readers, PDF viewers, and word processors.

We're committed to creating a quality, accessible product. If you use any of these documents with a screen reader, we would be very grateful for any feedback (positive or negative), and any suggestions, that you have for us. When Descent into Midnight is fully released, it will be with a fully accessible core book PDF and multiple options for screen reader-friendly playbooks.

Feel free to reach out to us at info@descentintomidnight.com, or to me, Rhi, the accessibility consultant, at rhi@rpgskillcheck.net.

What's in this Quick Start Guide?

Welcome to the Descent into Midnight quick start guide!

We've had an open playtest for most of the development cycle of the game, and we're not going to stop that just because we're doing the Kickstarter for the project. You'll find all the documents you need to run a game of Descent into Midnight here in this folder.

There are all ten of the character **Playbooks** available in the game, collected into one PDF. If you're not sure where to start, we recommend taking a look at the **Redeemed, Awakened, Muse,** and **Cultivator** playbooks first.

The **Community Playbook** has shared Advancements and Corruption moves available to all characters to choose from when they fill their Harmony or Corruption tracks, respectively.

There is also a **Move Sheet**. All of the Basic and Special moves available to everyone are on the Move Sheet.

Additionally, for the Guide, who runs the game, there is a reference sheet of **Agendas - Principles - Reactions**. The first page lists the **Agendas**, **Principles**, and **Reactions** the Guide should keep in mind during play.

- Agendas are big picture tenets of the game. It's what the game is trying to do.
- Principles are big picture approaches for how to accomplish the Agendas.
- Reactions are things you as the Guide do to move the story forward, whether that is in reaction to something a player has just done or there's a lull in the conversation.

Mechanics Basics

There are many Powered by the Apocalypse games on the market, and most of them share the same basic resolution mechanic: roll two six-sided dice, add them together, and add any modifiers. The result will fall into one of three range bands:

- **6 or less:** six or below, or a **miss**, is generally a failure, or success at a great cost. *In our game any time you roll a 6 or less total, mark Harmony*
- **7 to 9:** this is a **hit**, meaning you were successful, but there may be some consequence or the success may only be partial
- **10 or more:** a roll of 10+ is also a **hit**, and generally means an exceptional success or a success with no or few consequences

NOTE: there are a few moves where you want to roll low. Namely, Endure and Resist Corruption. You still mark harmony on a 6- for these moves.

In Descent into Midnight, the game is a conversation. If you want to do something, describe your character doing it. Stick to what makes sense based on what the fiction has established so far, and look out for when something you're doing in the narrative sounds like a move.

Moves have narrative triggers, meaning that you use them when what you're describing seems to fit the description of "When you…" in the move. When you trigger a move by doing that thing, follow the instructions in the move to see how the story changes.

There are some moves that say take +1 ongoing toward something. That means any roll you make where the description applies gets a +1. So if you get +1 ongoing to Defend Another during a scene, any time you roll to Defend Another, you'll get +1.

Others say +1 forward toward something. That means you get +1 to your next roll where the description applies. If there's no specific description and it just says +1 forward, it's whatever roll you happen to make next where a +1 would be beneficial to you.

Harmony and Corruption

The playbooks have a Harmony and Corruption track. Certain moves will tell you to mark Harmony or Corruption, which means filling in an empty box in the track. When you fill all of them up, you will clear the track.

If you filled the Harmony track, you get to pick an advancement from the list on your playbook or the community playbook, and you gain a Harmony token to place on the map.

Advancements are permanent upgrades to your character. Moves you gain from them are just like your normal moves and can be used any time you perform the narrative trigger for them.

Alternatively, if you filled the Corruption track, you get to pick a Corruption move to unlock from your playbook or the community playbook, and you gain a Corruption token to place on the map.

Corruption moves are one-time use. When you gain the Corruption move, you get the ability to use it whenever you choose, but once you've used it, you can't use it again. Corruption moves on the Community playbook can be unlocked and used by multiple characters, but each character can only use the move once.

We use a community map for Descent into Midnight. As you discuss the city together, you'll mark down important elements. You can use simple drawings or just list the city features on index cards. You'll be placing tokens on them so make sure there's some room for whatever you'll be using.

Harmony and Corruption tokens are indications of how a certain part of the city or community is doing. They are placed on the community map as soon as it makes narrative sense to describe how the character's actions have affected the community. Placing a Harmony token on a map element that has Corruption tokens on it removes a Corruption token as the community comes together. However, placing a Corruption token on a map element with Harmony tokens does *not* remove a Harmony token. The game is about working together, through hard things, to build a community in the face of danger.

How to Run a One-Shot

While most games of Descent into Midnight play out over multiple sessions with trusted friends, here we're getting you started with a tight & quick dive into Descent into Midnight. This section will help guide you in creating a tight experience in a few hours with calibrated expectations for the table to make sure everyone's on the same page. The instructions below default to a 2 hour session or so, with a few additional steps if you have time for a longer game.

The first thing you should do is introduce the game. You can read aloud to the table:

"Welcome to Descent into Midnight. This game is a weird one so take a moment and let's set some setting elements in our minds. First of all, we're going to be playing guardians of an underwater community in a world where humans have never, and will never, set foot. This is an alien ocean. We'll build our world in just a moment together but since this is a shorter game, let's focus first on our characters since this is their story."

Ask everyone if they have played a Powered by the Apocalypse game before. If some haven't, review the basics:

"We're going to have a game of What If and play in a setting that we're going to create in a moment. Occasionally while telling our story, the players may bump into some mechanics of the game called Moves and you'll roll 2 six sided dice, or 2d6. Depending on the result we'll be prompted to complicate the story in fun and interesting ways."

Pass out the playbooks randomly or spread them out in the center of the table. Ask the players to grab a playbook and read out loud the flavor text to the group. Once you've done this for a few playbooks, ask the players to pick a playbook that they find interesting. If someone isn't sure which one to pick, ask them some questions like "why does this one stand out to you?" or "What's cool about that one?"

Help each person create their character by walking them through the Looks, Gifts, and Home. Tell them to ignore the Attitude if they want to. These choices should be quick and you can always come back to them later or while you're playing. We're creating sketches that we'll flesh out later, the whole painting doesn't have to be done right now.

If the players haven't played Descent into Midnight before briefly review Stats, Conditions, and Moves by saying:

"The inside of our playbook is going to have some game mechanics that are pretty cool. You can see a chart of Stats and Conditions. Stats are truths about your personality, whether you are more or less Driven, Altruistic, etc. than the average person on your world. Your stats will influence the outcomes of your Moves when you make them. As you engage with the story, you may run into danger and instead of getting physically hurt, you'll instead reflect your adversity through Conditions which are like Stats but negative. When you mark a Condition it reflects your character getting overly Angry, or Conflicted about their world. Each Stat has a Condition that effects it and if you have a Condition marked, you'll take a penalty to Moves with that Stat. Your Stats and Conditions on your sheet are what you start the game with but as we play we might change these.

You'll also see Playbook Moves on your sheet. These are things only you can do, and they allow you to drive the story in cool ways. You'll always start with your Playbook's Signature Move which is listed first, and you'll have a chance to choose a couple others as well. Take a moment to read over your Moves and make your choices."

Give the players time to read over their playbooks and make some choices, but try not to spend too much time. Tell your players to trust their instincts. You may not get to use every Move in a short game and that's ok. It's better to make a quick decision and get into the action.

Turn the Playbooks over and have the players read over their Team Moves (they get both of them), then point out the Corruption and Harmony tracks. Tell the players:

"As we play this game we'll be confronted with some insidious Corruption that threatens our world. To represent how Corruption touches our characters we have a track to represent it. Since we're playing a quick game, go ahead and fill in three boxes on that track. We're gonna play messy.

As our characters learn and grow, we will become more harmonious with our Community, and we have a Harmony track to show this as well. Go ahead and mark three boxes on that track, too.

When we fill all the boxes in the track, you'll clear it and either gain an advancement for the Harmony track, or unlock a one-time use Corruption move if you fill the Corruption track."

Links are cool. But at this point you've probably spent a good 20 minutes making your characters and it's time to dive into the world. Tell your players that they can read over the Links section and establish them during play if it's relevant but for now we're going to get moving.

Establishing The World

Place the Community playbook out on the table and create your Community with some or all of the following Questions. We generally find three to four players ideal, but we've run with as few as two and as many as seven.

As you identify elements within the community, either draw them on a piece of paper or note them on index cards.

1. "What is the most defining feature of our Community? If this were a movie, what would the camera show first?"
2. "What kind of flora and fauna live in our Community?"
3. "What do we do for food here?"
4. "What's something we're afraid of in the Community?"
5. "What ritual or celebration happens in our Community? This can be a daily event, something that rarely happens, or anything in between."
6. "What's something that happens behind the scenes that we don't often see?"

These questions should help to frame a quick storyline and create some interesting conflict.

Hand the players two Harmony tokens and two Corruption tokens. It doesn't matter what they are, as long as they're distinguishable from each other. Have them place them on elements of the city you've created, and discuss how those elements are bolstered by Harmony, or harmed by Corruption.

Harmony tokens represent parts of the community that are particularly resistant to the Corruption, often due to strong bonds between members of the community or the importance placed on it. Life, growth, friendship, and love can all be tied to Harmony.

Conversely, Corruption tokens represent the encroaching Corruption, in whatever form you come up with together at the table. It could be a dangerous creature, a mysterious sickness, or strange fits of negative emotions seeping into the community from the Echo.

Links & The Sanctuary

If you want to run a tight game in about two hours, go ahead and skip to the next section and get the action started!

If you have more than two hours and want to run a longer game, now is a great time to circle back to the Links on the back of the playbooks. Have the players read through them and talk through which of the other characters they think makes sense in some of the links. You don't have to use all of them, but everyone should try to fill in at least one link to another character.

Additionally, you can define the Sanctuary that the characters share. The characters are a team of especially gifted Guardians who have a uniquely powerful psionic bond. Because of that, they have the ability to project their consciousness into a portion of the Echo they share. This Sanctuary is a psychic reflection of the physical space the characters share, but also reflects the emotional and mental state of the characters.

For instance, a Cultivator may project a feeling of life and growth, and images of a vibrant kelp garden. After an encounter with the Corruption, their presence in the Sanctuary might feel withered and subdued.

If you have time, you can start and end each session with a sort of guided meditation where we talk through what the Sanctuary looks and feels like. Have everyone take a few deep breaths and close their eyes. Describe a little bit of the general look and feel of the Sanctuary (usually it reflects some of the physical elements of the city and the general mood of the beings within it), then ask each player to describe an element of what their character is sharing with the others and experiencing in the Sanctuary. Colors, water temperatures, light, plants, tides, terrain, and feelings are all equally valid ways to engage with the description.

Once everyone has described their portion of the Sanctuary, take another few deep breaths and begin the adventure.

Telling a Tight Story in Three Major Scenes

Start in the middle of the action and confront them with Corruption right away. If you have a limited amount of time, focus on the characters and the threat. If you have more time, you can have them interact with the Community, building non-player characters who are threatened by Corruption. For short games it's easiest to have the Corruption something physical, like a bleaching fungus or an entity stuck in the Echo, something the characters can perceive and interact with immediately.

Focus on the fallout of 6- rolls. Have the action spin out around these results and hit hard with your Reactions. At the same time, encourage closeness and take time for interpersonal moments.

I like to have three major scenes for short two-hour games. The first scene is When Something Goes Wrong. This scene introduces the Corruption and bumps the characters into it. Something is wrong in their Community. Show them what it is and make it scary. Let them see that the Corruption is a threat and give it fangs. Build on the 6- rolls and add complications to the inciting incident. In reacting to the Corruption the characters may "solve" it for now, but make it clear that this is temporary.

The second scene is a recovery and investigation. Once they "solve" the Corruption for now, ask the characters about their emotions. Maybe they've picked up Conditions or marked Corruption during the first scene. Ask them how they feel with this new development and build off of their interactions. Ask what they plan on doing to keep the Community safe and try to encourage them to take further action.

The third scene is a Confrontation. Bring them into the Corruption's lair and have a climactic encounter. Put one or two of them in danger, perhaps by building off of Corruption marked or off of interpersonal drama from the other scenes. Show how scary the Corruption is and make it a Now Or Never threat. Give one of them a noble sacrifice if they've been leading up to it. Finally, take a moment to rest afterwards. You can use the move What Have We Done? to confront the characters' actions.

If you took the time to create a Sanctuary earlier, this is the perfect opportunity to revisit it. Before you give them the final "post-credits" scene to show what might happen in a future session, calmly bring everyone back into a visualization of the Sanctuary with some deep breaths and closed eyes. Describe the general elements of the Sanctuary you started with at the beginning of the session, highlighting any changes that may be reflected in it after the events of the session. Then, ask each player how what they are sharing and experiencing in the Sanctuary is different now.

"Where before you projected the feeling of wild growth and deep green kelp brushing against your fins, what are you sharing and experiencing in the Sanctuary now?"

As before, end the visit to the Sanctuary by taking another few deep breaths and opening your eyes.

Whether or not you use the Sanctuary, take a moment to rest after the dramatic finish to the action, and maybe give a hint as to how the Corruption might manifest in a future session.

And finally…

"Welcome to Midnight."