

Downside

Introduction

The Forefathers knew the Burning Times would come and destroy the world, and so they built Downside – a vast, sophisticated underground city. There, a remnant of humanity would survive and thrive, and emerge one day to reclaim the earth.

That was hundreds of years ago. Downside survives, yet it is no paradise – rather, it is an oppressive state ruled over by a mysterious and dictatorial being known as “the Elder”. Science and innovation have stagnated, and much of Downside is in disrepair.

It is also surrounded by enemies. The massive lower levels were abandoned long ago – they are now called the Underside, and are inhabited by psychotic robots and the Renegades, humans who have fled Downside. Meanwhile, Topside is overrun by giant mutant animals and the Wilders, primitive humans with frightening psychic power.

You are a member of SecOps, an elite group of trouble-shooters from Downside. You will conduct dangerous secret missions for The Elder, even as your own doubts grow about this troubled society.

Welcome to Downside, a science-fiction RPG set in a dystopian future. The game requires only pencil, paper and a number of ordinary 6-sided dice. In this guide, numbers that have a "D" appended indicate a pool of 6-sided dice. For example, 2D means "two dice".

Character Creation

Your character needs a name, abilities, quirks, contraband and health – you should record all these on a character sheet.

Abilities

Characters are defined by their abilities. You have 8D to distribute amongst the list below – Tough must be at least 2D, and all other scores must be at least 1D.

Tough – combat skills, and the ability to absorb physical hurt

Cyber – skill with computer systems

Rogue – various streetwise skills

Psy – psychic power

Quirks

Quirks give colour and life to your character. Choose *at least* one quirk from the following list – alcoholic, angry, argumentative, belches, condescending, covetous, cowardly, depressed, dirty, disorganised, dry wit, foolhardy, greedy, growls, indecisive, keeps journal, kleptomaniac, lisps, mumbles, naïve, narcissistic, nervous, over-clean, over-organised, paranoid, pessimistic, phobic, pyromaniac, rude, sarcastic, shy, superstitious, talks to self, uses catch-phrase, uses clichés, uses puns, vengeful, verbose.

Weapons

Weapons are outlawed in Downside, and possession of one can be grounds for execution. You will be allocated a weapon when deployed on a mission – it must be returned afterward. The most common weapon is a very powerful, long-range, semi-automatic handgun.

Contraband

There is no official currency in Downside and no private possessions – the Elder provides for all your needs. In reality, there is a thriving black market. The default currency is the silver dollar, which is also recognised by the Renegades and some Wilder tribes. Just about anything imaginable can be purchased on the black market. Your character starts the game with 3D silver dollars, and at least one item of personal contraband (be creative).

Health

Your health can be one of four levels - healthy, wounded, disabled or dead. When healthy, you can use all abilities without penalty. If wounded, you can still use any ability, but you will suffer a 1D penalty. If you are disabled, you are lying prostrate on the ground and can do nothing - without assistance, you will die within the hour. Dead is dead.

Conflict Resolution

When you wish to use an ability, you must make an ability check. You do this by rolling the number of dice indicated by your ability score. The person or object opposing you also makes an ability check. If you roll **more sixes** than your opponent, you succeed - otherwise you fail. For an example, see **Combat** below.

A short-hand way of referring to these checks is “[action ability] vs [target ability]”. For example, using your Tough ability against your opponent’s Tough ability would be called a “Tough vs Tough check”.

Combat

Combat takes place in rounds of about 30 seconds each. The players always go first, followed by their opponents. During a combat round you may attack with a weapon, initiate a Psy attack (described later), or perform any other reasonable action. If attacking with a weapon, you must make a Tough vs Tough ability check. If you succeed, you have struck your opponent. If you fail, you have missed.

Example You shoot a Renegade with your handgun. Your Tough is 5D, and his is 2D. You roll 53162 and he rolls 52. You have rolled **more sixes** than the Renegade – you hit him, and inflict a wound.

Wounding

When you hit something, you decrease its health by one level. That is, a healthy creature becomes wounded, a wounded creature becomes disabled, and a disabled

creature dies. Weapon type makes no difference to the amount of damage done.

Stimpacks

A stimpack is a self-administered medical kit that is depleted on use. When used on a wounded or disabled character, it restores one level of health. Proper medical attention is required within 72 hours of using a stimpack, or permanent damage may result.

Advanced Combat

Critical Hits - If you roll more sixes than the defender has total Tough dice, it is a "critical hit" and the target's health decreases by two degrees rather than one.

Multiple Attacks – You may split your Tough dice in order to attack multiple targets in the same round. For example, you are fighting two Wilders and decide to split your Tough dice into two pools of 2 and 3 dice each.

Reckless Attack – You attack all-out with no thought to defence. Double your Tough dice when attacking that round – however, when defending, your Tough dice is just 1D!

Aggressive Attack – You attack aggressively with only minimal attention to defence. For that round, increase your Tough dice by half when attacking, but reduce by half when defending.

Defensive Attack – You strike cautiously, with a focus on defence. For that round, reduce your Tough dice by half when attacking, but add half when defending.

Defend – You spend all your effort defending yourself. You can't attack that round, but double your Tough dice when defending.

Robots

Robots are ubiquitous in Downside, but they are also inconspicuous. They tend to be highly specialised in function, and their artificial intelligence is strictly limited. No robot is ever armed. It is rumoured that robots were once far more intelligent and versatile, and that such robots still exist in the Underside.

Vehicles

Mass-transit systems are the norm in Downside, so private vehicles are rare. If required, a ground car may be issued for a mission. It will be driven by a sophisticated, though unimaginative, AI system.

Psy

If you have a Psy of 4D or more you may choose one of the following four skills -

Blast – you can administer a severe mental shock to another person. Make a Psy vs Psy ability check – if you succeed, the target is stunned for 1D rounds.

TK – you can lift objects with your mind. You can comfortably move around 25kgs for every 1D of Psy you possess.

Pyro – you can create a stream of fire. If you direct it at an enemy, make a Psy vs Tough ability check – if you succeed, you inflict a wound.

ESP – you can read minds. Make a Psy vs Psy ability check – if you succeed, you can read the surface thoughts of the target.

For all of the above powers, the range is 5 metres for every 1D of Psy ability. If you have one of these Psy skills, you also have the ability to create a mental **Shield** to protect yourself and those near you from Blast and ESP. This takes all of your concentration. A Shield can be destroyed with a Psy vs Psy check. After your Shield is destroyed, you cannot re-create it for 1D hours.

Rogue

This is a collection of streetwise skills such as climb walls, sneak, hide, pick pockets, and spot secrets. When attempting any of these skills, you must make a Rogue ability check vs a target ability score, as advised by the Referee.

Cyber

This is the ability to use and hack into computer systems. Downside has its own tightly controlled **Net** connecting all devices and information; but there are areas, called the **Dark Net**, beyond the control of the Elder. Access to the Net is via a wireless neural interface. When attempting to hack something, the Referee will provide a target ability score.

Opponents

Following are some typical opponents -

Renegade (Tough 2D, Rogue 2D) – Fled from Downside, now living in the Underside.

Renegade Gang Leader (Tough 6D, Rogue 4D) – As above.

Wilder (Tough 2D, Psy 2D) – Primitive tribesman, living Topside.

Wilder Shaman (Tough 2D, Psy 6D) – As above.

Gigantosaur (Tough 10D) – Very large mutant elephant, with fangs.

Security Robot (Tough 6D) – A simple security robot, basically a machine pistol on tracks.

Missions

Missions are prepared by the Referee. Following are some typical mission hooks –

- Renegades from the Underside have penetrated an area of Downside. Clear them out.
- Something has damaged one of Downside's air intakes. Escort a technician Topside to repair it.
- The Elder has learned of a valuable item in the Underside. Travel there and retrieve it.
- Escort a VIP Topside on a dangerous journey to another underground city – then come back.
- Renegades have captured a VIP and taken him to the Underside. Fetch him back.
- Wildlings have raided Downside and carried off an important item. Go Topside and retrieve it.
- And the perennial favourite - go find out what happened to the *last* party we sent on a suicide mission.

At the end of each adventure, the Referee will award players 1-3 points each, with which to improve their abilities.

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