

# GENESIS UNDOONE

a tragedy in five acts

by Jim Ryan

*What a piece of work is a man! How noble in Reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an Angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! and yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me*

(Hamlet, Act II, Scene ii)

In the beginning, the gods created the First Race, making them in their own image. But that race, having free will, felt the hand of temptation. They committed the First Sin. And because of that First Sin, the gods exiled the First Race from Paradise.

You are members of that First Race, all of whom are in exile. All of whom have been tainted by the First Sin. Some have forsworn that sin, but others have not. You have had to keep your true Natures hidden from each other, for whomever sees your Nature knows your weakness. But despite all this, you have worked together to make up for what was lost. You have built a new civilization together.

You have founded the First City.

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## The Game

This is a role-playing game. In it, the Game Master (or GM) is referred to as the Bard and the players as... well, Players.

In this game, the Players take on the Roles of members of the First Race, who inhabit the First City. It is a corrupt race whose members plot and plan against each other and seek each other's destruction.

## The Genesis

Start by getting all the Players together and figuring out what the First Race is like and what the First Sin was. The First Race may simply be human beings, which is fine (and probably should be the default), but there are plenty of other possibilities: elves, cat-people, robots – whatever you like. Everyone should agree, because everyone will be playing members of the race.

The First Sin has tainted the entire First Race – it is a constant temptation for them. It should probably be general enough that it can provide ready quandaries for the Bard to throw in as needed. I recommend selecting one of the classic “Seven Deadly Sins” because they're convenient to use: *Wrath, Greed, Sloth, Pride, Lust, Envy or Gluttony*.

## The City

Now everyone should collectively decide what the First City, where the game will be taking place, is like. The whole of the First Race is living in exile, so the environment may be a harsh one (or perhaps it merely seems harsh compared to Paradise). The civilization could be a large, powerful city-state overseen by an Emperor or a King, or could simply be little more than a walled village. Some of it will depend on how large you want the population to be and if there are strange things out in the world from which people must defend themselves. You can also choose to draw from examples of historical civilizations: Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Rome, Ghana, China, the Aztecs. Or you can base it on later examples like Elizabethan England, Renaissance Italy, Colonial America, Napoleonic France, etc. Or you can do something completely odd and different, like having them floating out somewhere in space. Whatever you like.

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## Character Creation

### 1. Choose a Role

Time to create your characters. In the self-contained environment of the First City, there is a limited number of Roles available. A character's Role determines their place and responsibilities in society. The Roles are:

*The King* – The one in charge, within the scope of your narrative. This can be a literal king, or can be an emperor, a duke, a warlord, a religious leader or simply the patriarch of a family.

*The Queen* – Like the King, the Queen may be the highest authority within the scope of your narrative. There need not be a King for there to be a Queen, but you can certainly have both.

*The Prince* – The “favored son” or one who is in line to receive wealth, power or authority.

*The Princess* – The “favored daughter” or one who is in line to receive wealth, power or authority.

*The Warrior* – A fighter. Perhaps a knight, perhaps a mercenary. Perhaps the city's military arm.

*The Cohort* – The trusted companion. One who supports another character in what they do, like a squire, a servant or a noble friend.

*The Counselor* – One whose duty is to advise or to teach, like a vizier or a tutor or a court magician or a lawyer or a scientist.

*The Herald* – One who sees to it that news is known – like a town crier, a journalist or the kind of herald one would find in a royal court.

*The Nurse* – The one who cares for others; a nurse or a doctor, a healer or an herbalist.

*The Fool* – The one whose job it is to entertain. A court jester, a musician, a comedian, a poet.

The Players each choose a Role for their player characters (PCs). Once a role is taken, no one else may select it. If more than one person wants a Role (or just to make things interesting) the Bard can assign the Roles randomly.

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## 2. Choose a Nature

As a player, you must decide what your character is like. The Nature is important because it helps define the character's personality, but it also is a reflection of the PC's true self. If a character's Nature is revealed, they become vulnerable to anyone who knows it. The available Natures are:

*The Advocate* – One who has adopted a cause, and that cause is everything.

*The Avenger* – One who has been wronged or acts on behalf of one who has been wronged, and seeks retribution.

*The Bully* – One who has the need to dominate others for personal satisfaction or survival.

*The Hedonist* – One who wants to sample life's pleasures (or a lot of one pleasure in particular) and holds satisfaction as the highest virtue.

*The Hero* – Perhaps not literally the hero of the story, but someone who steps forward to represent a virtue or ideal – a paragon.

*The Innocent* – Someone who has been sheltered and uncorrupted. One who sees the world in a positive light and has been thus far untouched by its evils.

*The Penitent* – Someone who seeks to atone for something in the past, to do good to make up for a personal sin or for the First Sin.

*The Savant* – An expert. A genius. One who is particularly gifted with knowledge and understanding.

*The Trickster* – One who habitually obfuscates the truth, seeking to trick or inveigle others for good or ill.

*The Villain* – Perhaps not necessarily the literal villain of the story, but one who is the lowest of the low, acting solely for self-interest.

Like Roles, once a Nature is taken, no one else may have it. If they wish, the Players may communicate their choices of Nature secretly to the Bard so as not to tip each off. Or the Bard can simply assign Natures randomly.

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## 3. Choose Qualities

Each character possesses three Qualities – words that describe important things about them. Generally a Quality will be an adjective, like *Artistic, Brutal, Creative, Miserly, Attractive, Witty, Conniving*, etc.

A PC's first Quality is decided by the Player – make up something appropriate.

The second and third Qualities are determined by *other* Players. When you create your character, you must decide on a Quality that your character **likes** about one of the other PCs and a Quality that your character **dislikes** about a *different* PC. One of the easier (and perhaps more interesting) ways to do this is for your PC to like a Quality of the PC being created by the Player sitting to your *left* and for your PC to dislike a Quality of the PC being created by the Player sitting to your *right*.

When creating or assigning Qualities, make sure it's something that not only helps describe the character in question but that can also be considered advantageous (even if that's not necessarily the case in all situations).

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#### 4. Answer Questions

There are a few questions to which you will need to record the answers. These answers will help flesh out your character.

*Who possesses a Quality that you like, and what is that Quality?*

*Who possesses a Quality that you dislike, and what is that Quality?*

The answers to the above two questions will have already been determined.

*Have you Forsworn the First Sin?*

If your PC is trying to resist the Sin that taints his or her people, the answer is yes. If not, the answer is no. When a conflict arises, you may be more likely to side with others who have answered this question the same way – but the choice will ultimately be yours.

*What do you desire most, and who is preventing you from having it?*

This question speaks to your character's motivation and will help to shape the game's conflict. Think of what your character wants more than anything else, but cannot have easily. The answer to the second part of the question – who is preventing you from having your innermost desire – will be one of the other player characters. Choose one.

#### 5. Discuss

The final step is to talk to the other Players to discuss what your characters' relationships are and what they mean to each other. Flesh out your PCs' identities and situations. Make sure you've given them names.

The Bard should, at this point, create any non-player characters (NPCs) that are needed for the story the Players are creating. Their Roles and Natures should be chosen from those that the PCs have not yet claimed. Unlike the PCs, they will each only have one Quality, which is determined by the Bard. This will ultimately make them more vulnerable, but that's as it should be. The above questions should be answered for NPCs just as they are for PCs, with any answers relating to another character always

mentioning a PC.

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### **Game Play**

Once everything is decided and everyone is comfortable with their characters, the game begins.

Game play follows a five-act structure. Each Act has two Scenes. In this case a Scene is defined as an exchange or series of exchanges between characters taking place over a continuous space of time in a single location.

Scenes are framed by the Players. Each time there is a Scene, the setup for that Scene is described by one of the Players – this includes what characters are there and what they're doing. From that point on, the role playing takes over.

The game begins with the first Scene – Act I, Scene 1. The first player (chosen randomly) frames the Scene, and play proceeds. Once that Scene's business concludes, the action moves on to the next Scene (Act I, Scene 2), which is framed by the *next* player. At the end of that Scene, the first Act ends and the action proceeds to the first Scene of the next Act (Act II, Scene 2), and so on all the way to the last Scene (Act V, Scene 2).

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### **Trading Barbs**

When the characters come into conflict, either with each other or with NPCs, the following mechanic is employed.

Conflict is primarily realized through dialogue, so for conflict to occur, the characters must speak to each other – physical actions can also be taken, but the initial dialogue must be present to help define the purpose of the acts being committed. To initiate a conflict, you must target another character (be it PC or NPC). Typically this is only done when you wish to do something that another character wishes to prevent from happening, or if you are attempting to test that character's resolve (wearing them down psychologically).

You must also make use of at least one of your Qualities. Describe to the Bard how you are doing what you are doing and include the Quality in that description.

You get to use one six-sided die (d6) for being part of the conflict, and one for each Quality you invoke. Make sure that you include something related to those Qualities in your dialogue (though speaking those specific adjectives hamfistedly is not required – you need merely *refer* to the Qualities in question).

You may use another d6 if you are attempting to use one of your opponent's Qualities against him or her – and you must make sure to refer to that Quality in your dialogue as well.

If someone else in the scene is attempting to assist you, you gain another d6 for their help. That Player must, however 1) be making use of a Quality and 2) describe what they are doing to help you, whether it be a physical action or additional dialogue.

Your target then may respond to your attack in the same way – through dialogue and subsequent action. The target receives dice in the same fashion.

Roll the dice and ignore all but the two highest results, then add those together for your total. Whoever's total is higher wins the conflict.

The loser of the conflict must then expend one of his or her Qualities. That Quality is exhausted and may no longer be used. If the winner used one of the loser's Qualities, that is the one that is exhausted. Otherwise it's up to that PC's Player. If there is a tie, the conflict is a stalemate and one Quality of EACH party is exhausted.

A character may only be killed (or otherwise removed from play) in such a conflict if 1) all of the character's Qualities are exhausted and 2) it is during Act III or Act V. If both conditions are not met, the character survives. It takes a good deal of effort to slay someone, and the act reveals much. If a character is killed, with their dying breaths they may make a brief speech targeting a Quality possessed by another PC and **automatically** cause it to be exhausted.

A character may only be involved in one conflict per Scene (except in Act V, see below), and when that conflict ends, they are done. If the situation is one that neither party wishes to back down from at that point, role play may continue, but the PCs involved must enter another scene before they can engage in full conflict again.

If all of a PC's Qualities are exhausted, that character's Nature is revealed. The exertion of the situation has caused the cracks in the character's armor to show and he or she is vulnerable. When rolling against someone whose Nature is known, you may add three to your final result, but must also invoke that Nature, referring to it in your dialogue.

If a conflict is desperate, you may also reveal your Nature (invoking it in your own dialogue) to gain three additional dice for that one conflict. In this case, your opponent does not receive the +3 bonus to his or her roll, but will in subsequent conflicts. You may only do this once during the game, for once your Nature is revealed, it will not be forgotten.

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### **Soliloquies**

If you are in a Scene in which your character is alone, you can gain an advantage by performing a Soliloquy – your character speaks aloud, considering the difficulties of his or her situation.

A Soliloquy can be used for one of two things:

- You can use a Soliloquy to refresh an exhausted Quality. Have your character speak about the situation, and how that Quality can be used to deal with it – in so doing, your PC regains confidence in that Quality.
- You can use a Soliloquy to prepare yourself for a difficult task ahead. If your character talks about his or her plans to bolster their resolve, they will receive a +2 bonus to their next conflict.

Only one Soliloquy can be performed per Act (except in Act IV, see below). If a character performs a soliloquy, another character must wait until the next Act to perform one.

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## **The Acts**

In general, action is meant to according to the following structure, though this may vary. The Bard should utilize NPCs to help things along and to make sure the main action remains focused on the PCs.

*Act I – Setup:* The characters' relationships are displayed. The background for the coming action is established. Two sides of a greater conflict emerge – the Bard may encourage a strong line to be drawn between those who have Forsworn the First Sin and those who have not.

*Act II – Opening Moves:* By this point, the characters make their initial moves against each other. Those who have not chosen sides are encouraged to.

*Act III – Threat:* The plotting of one side or another shows them to be a serious threat. Conflicts can end in the death of a character. (If a PC dies during this Act, the Bard may permit them to return as a ghost if the action warrants it – the Player may continue to establish Scenes if it is his or her turn to do so).

*Act IV – Reaction:* The threatened side prepares their plans. Defenses are shored up and final pacts are made. In this Act, two Soliloquies may be performed instead of just one.

*Act V – Confrontation:* The final conflicts ensue. Death is once again on the table, and any number of conflicts may be engaged in to reach a final resolution. The fight is to the bitter end.

It is possible that all conflict may be played out by the end of Act V, Scene 1 – if that is the case then the final Scene may be used as a coda, wrapping things up and hinting at what comes afterward. By the end of the game, those PCs who survive may be battered, bruised and low on Qualities and the stories of those who do not will have met their tragic conclusions.

**THE END**