

Divinity

A Game by Fred Hicks
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About This Game

This game is meant to be a pocket role-playing game (RPG).

By *game*, I mean something you get together with your friends and play.

By *role-playing game*, I mean a game where you and your friends take on the roles of different fictional characters and play through their adventures.

By *pocket* role-playing game, I mean that everything you need to play the game should fit in your pocket, easily. Looking at this as a central design principle, this means the game should fulfill these goals:

- No player should need to roll more than one six-sided die.
- Despite rolling a single die, the results should be complex and interesting.
- The game should fit in a “travel game” case, such as Yahtzee.
- Character “sheets” should be able to fit on a business card.

The game that fulfills these goals is what you are reading now.

In the Beginning

In the Beginning, there was the Word. Perhaps this Word was spoken by a Creator for, indeed, the Word was Creation and Creation was the Word. But perhaps, instead, there was nothing before the Word. It does not matter.

Creation was a small thing then, but suffused with Divinity, the essential nature of godhead.

Each syllable of the Word embodied one of the four elements of Creation.

That which accommodated change and presented uncertainty was a syllable, or sign, of Water. That which inspired passion and went to war (and war was a pleasant past-time then) was a sign of Fire. That which protected, healed, and endured was Earth. And that which sped to and fro was Air.

All Creation pronounced the Word in every moment and every action, giving birth to itself over and again, an ever-present paradise of now, an abundant garden of the gods.

But One among their number became dissatisfied. While the others had a memory only for the fleeting moments of the present, this One recalled the past. For the One, there was no rebirth, and so within One’s heart the seed of mundane things began to grow. One knew regret, pain, loss, failure, and perhaps worst of all, boredom. But One could do nothing about it so long as the Word was Creation and Creation was the Word.

So the mundane seed grew, slowly and secretly, within his breast. And then one day – the last day of its kind – the seed grew so large that it extinguished One’s syllable.

The effect was immediate, and disastrous. The Word was incomplete, and worse, with the One having no part of the Word, the Word was not all of Creation, and Creation was no longer simply the Word.

The Word unraveled in a cacophony of sudden disorder and chaos. Some syllables ruptured

entirely, spraying tiny sparks of Divinity throughout the void. Many of the syllables of Fire flew into the sky and became the stars; the syllables of Water rained down upon the larger phrases of Earth and became oceans. The syllables of Air, terrified by the unraveling, clung to whatever others they could find.

Creation grew, and with it, the One. The One oozed and flowed into everything that was not a sparklet of Divinity or a drifting syllable or phrase. Creation, it turned out, had existed within a void, sealed off from it; but that seal was now broken, and the One had plenty of room to grow. By the end of the first aeon, the One was, indeed, the majority of Creation, and while Divinity could be found everywhere, when found, it existed only as the barest scintilla.

But still the signs of the elements walked throughout Creation. But with the One surrounding them, they soon forgot the Beginning, and many lost the ability to pronounce themselves. And on the rarest of moments then, and even today, two would find one another and, in clarity, sing a line of the most ancient song ever sung.

The first such meeting gave birth to Man.

The One That Was

The dawn of Man was a shock to the One. It was clear that Man was largely the One’s to infuse, but there were parts of Man that the One simply could not touch. Each one of their number drew into his or her breast a spark of

Divinity and could know the capabilities of excellence that came with it.

More rarely – but more frequently than the One would like – there were those of Man who could speak, if not a full syllable of the Word, certain trace consonants and vowels that contained within them a great power.

It was on the backs of these certain few that the first nation Auraia was born. The One was not ready for such things, and as such, for a brief time, Auraia knew peace, prosperity, and an age of things golden and true.

But the One never let such things stand for long. Into the heart of Auraia, the One gave birth to strife. Auraia, now an empire spanning the continents of the world, fractured into the Thousand Nations.

Many such nations housed leaders and subversives, scoundrels and heroes, all touched by the Word. These were the Luminaries, and their wars that followed shaped the earliest times of Man in ways that can only be told in story and song.

Does the dawn of man end in Divinity and light, or in the darkness of the One?

The song is yours to sing.

The One That Is

In time, the wars tore Man asunder and eventually even reshaped the land itself, into the form we know today. In the final evaluation, the One won the past, as man descended time and again into regrettable mundanity – but then, the One is inexorable, and eventually wins all

things. So it is best to ignore him and focus on what can be done today.

And today is where we find ourselves. The blood of the Luminaries of Auraia still breeds true, and is known throughout the modern nations of man. At times it has shown itself perhaps a little too truly and openly, and has given rise to names such as *vampire*, and *demon*, and *angel*.

More often, however, the touch of the Luminaries is felt not in creatures both infernal and divine, but in everyday man. Well, perhaps not so *everyday*, as such Inheritors inevitably find themselves drawn into adventure and strangest circumstance. These Inheritors are the men and women with strange psychic powers, or the simple, two-fisted wherewithal to delve into the secrets of the past and present.

But the One has drawn a shroud over all the songs of the past, and this inheritance is not easily come by. Those the One can bend to its will are arrayed to prevent the truest Inheritors from realizing their full potential – the potential to change the world, to bring Divinity to the fore, and bring man close once again to godhead.

The responsibility is yours alone.

The One That Shall Be

Man will survive and, better still, shall strive to touch the face of Divinity itself. In the time to come, he will reach for the stars and – beyond the stars themselves – he will reach into himself, not simply altering his genome, but altering his soul.

But such questing comes at a price. There are horrors and abominations among the stars, and most all of them are Man's doing. The One has seen to that.

The Bane ravages whole planetary systems in a wrath that seems fit for the zombie movies of old. Vast artificial intelligences routinely and jealously make a bid for Man's birthright of godhead. And more. The One is nothing if not patient, and its resources, vast.

But there are those whose spiritual soul-splicing has done something wonderful. These are the Awakened. Once thought lost, the bloodline of Auraia now lives entirely within the souls of Man, and the Awakened have discovered the recombinant alchemy to bring enough of the consonants and vowels of the Word together in themselves to truly shape Man's final age.

At their best, the Awakened have saved suns from being eaten by the Bane. They have stood firm in the face of the most psychotic of manufactured intellects. The One has its victories – many, even, in the cold spaces between the stars. But even now, it still knows defeat at the hands of Man.

But the One does not tire, and those who Awaken are fragile and vulnerable before it. The Bane, after all, was born at the hands of one who fell.

It is the final age of Man. This is the time, foreseen, foretold, and forgotten, when Man will finally rise to his birthright – or forever fall away from it, into darkness, into the One.

Man's fate is in your hands.

Characters

Players play characters that have been suffused with some of the elemental touches of the Word. Together with the game master (GM), who plays all the characters that the players don't, they should determine the time in which they play (The One That Was, The One That Is, The One That Shall Be) – thus, they are the Luminaries of the past, the Inheritors of today, or the Awakened of tomorrow.

Most everything else is up to the players and the GM to introduce into play as fits the moment.

Stats

You have three stats (statistics, really, but stat is shorter and easier to type) and six points to spend among them.

The stats are: Body, Mind, and Persona. We'll explain these in a moment.

Each point spent on a stat allows you to select an element (Water, Fire, Earth, Air) to associate with that stat. Each element (called a **sign**) signifies certain aspects of the stat, which we'll discuss shortly. To get an idea of the theme of any given element, please refer to "Reading the Die", below.

You cannot double up; for example, for two points, you could select Water and Fire for the same stat, or Water for one stat and Water again for a different stat, but you can't select Water and Water again for the same stat.

For example: Fred wants to create Dogan, a man who tends to speak with his fists. He figures Dogan will be potent in Body, decent

in Persona, and so-so or even mediocre in Mind.

He spends three points on Body, two points on Persona, and one point on Mind. For Mind, he selects the sign of Air. For Persona, he selects the signs of Fire and Earth. For Body, he selects the signs of Earth, Fire, and Air.

Body

Everything having to do with physical activity (running, jumping, punching) is governed by the body stat.

A Body of Water...

- survives change
- surprises opponents
- sneaks magnificently

A Body of Fire...

- goes on the offensive
- possesses great strength
- stays ever ready

A Body of Earth...

- heals well
- stands firm
- resists punishment

A Body of Air...

- runs fast
- jumps far
- evades capture

For example: Dogan has three signs in his Body stat, and is missing only the sign of

Water. While Dogan isn't necessarily very adaptive or subtle, he's strong, tough, and fast, and that's quite enough for him.

Mind

Everything having to do with mental activity (scholarship, memory, creativity) or perceptual activity (investigation, alertness, insight) is governed by the mind stat.

A Mind of Water...

- absorbs new information
- creates clever forgeries
- notices small details

A Mind of Fire...

- creates works of art
- forms plans of attack
- sees weaknesses

A Mind of Earth...

- maintains discipline
- builds defenses
- sees strengths

A Mind of Air...

- can't be pinned down
- jumps to conclusions
- sees the big picture

For example: Dogan's Mind has the sign of Air. He's not very creative, nor is he disciplined, and he's certainly not one to pay attention to the details – but he has flashes of great insight, strangely clever plans, and can take in the big picture well.

Persona

Everything having to do with social activity (seduction, debate, leadership) is governed by the persona stat.

A Persona of Water...

- laughs off insults
- delights at surprises
- lies like a devil

A Persona of Fire...

- kills with words
- enflames passions
- wins arguments

A Persona of Earth...

- reveals nothing
- can't be tarnished
- inspires confidence

A Persona of Air...

- has perfect timing
- knows everyone at the party
- avoids entanglements

For example: Dogan's Persona embodies the signs of Fire and Earth. He's a leader of men, knows exactly how to insult a man, and is the kind of guy whose reputation doesn't suffer scandal. And while he's got a sly touch with the ladies, he doesn't lie especially well, and isn't much of a social butterfly.

Talents

You have three additional points which you may use to buy talents. Talents are like skills and special powers and more. They define a particular, reasonably broad activity (such as Swordplay, or Seduction, or Flying) which the character excels at.

Each point spent allows you to select one element to associate with a talent, be it an existing talent or a new one. Thus, you may have three one-element talents, one two-element talent and one one-element talent, or one three-element talent.

For example: Dogan is a fist-swinger, first and foremost, fluid in a fight, able to take on anything, and a hard and fast hitter. Fred spends two of Dogan's talent points on a Fist-Fighting talent, giving it the signs of Water (for adaptability) and Fire (for hard-hitting blows). Dogan is also a ladies' man, so Fred decides he should have a Seduction talent as well. He considers; seduction is classically a Fire activity, but Dogan is as much about personal magnetism and self-confidence as anything, so he decides to give the talent the sign of Earth.

Dogan's Sheet

Mapping each sign to its numbers (see "Reading the Die", below), Dogan's sheet is expressed succinctly, as follows:

Body: 345 **Mind:** 5 **Persona:** 34
Talents: Fist-Fighting (23), Seduction (4)

Dogan's player can now write the above down on a simple, blank business card, and put it, a mechanical pencil, and a single 6-sided die into his pocket.

So armed, he's ready to play.

Resolutions

Whenever a character's success at a task must be resolved, it is time to roll a die.

Reading the Die

Whenever you are asked to roll, you roll a single six-sided die. The numbers correspond to six concepts, four of which are the four elements.

- A roll of **one** is the *Sign of the Mundane*.
- A roll of **two** is the *Sign of Water*, representing Adaptation, and Deception.
- A roll of **three** is the *Sign of Fire*, representing Passion, and Aggression.
- A roll of **four** is the *Sign of Earth*, representing Stability, and Protection.
- A roll of **five** is the *Sign of Air*, representing Alacrity, and Evasion.
- A roll of **six** is the *Sign of Divinity*.

What these signs mean in play is discussed below.

Rolling the Die

Whenever you're asked to roll, roll a single six-sided die, and call out the sign (see above) that shows.

For example: Fred is asked to roll, so he rolls a single six-sided die, and gets a 4. This is the Sign of Earth, and he says as much.

The activity the roll represents should be covered by one of your three stats, and may involve one of your talents.

If you rolled the Sign of the Mundane (a one), your performance is **basic** – you've done nothing to distinguish yourself as better or worse than the average man.

If you rolled the Sign of Divinity (a six), your performance is **excellent** – your action is executed very well, and would easily mark you as someone of distinction or, at the least, great luck.

If you roll a sign that matches the sign of the applicable stat, your performance is **commanding** – you are clearly someone whose natural talent puts him at a cut well above mortal men.

If you roll a sign that matches the sign on the relevant talent, your performance is **masterful** – you have marked yourself as one of the best in the field of your endeavor.

If you roll a sign that matches *both* the applicable stat *and* the relevant talent, your performance is **perfect** – very simply, you did the best anyone ever possibly could.

If you roll an elemental sign that matches neither talent nor stat, your performance is considered **competent** – a little better than basic, but short of excellence.

For example: Fred rolled a 4, and he's playing Dogan. If he was doing anything involving his Body or Persona stats, this would be a commanding result. If this was something involving Seduction, bringing in his talent, he'd match both Persona and Seduction, making it a perfect result. If it

was anything involving the Mind, it would merely be competent.

The Hierarchy

This gives us the following hierarchy of results, in descending order of value:

- Perfect (Talent and Stat)
- Masterful (Talent)
- Commanding (Stat)
- Excellent (Divinity)
- Competent (Elemental)
- Basic (Mundane)

The only exception to this hierarchy is if the action is one where *power* is more important than *skill* or *precision*. In such a case, a commanding result may be considered better than a masterful result.

Description

This is a short section but it wishes to make an important point: *the nature of the element that's rolled should guide the description of what takes place*. In other words, if you roll the Sign of Water on something, then the description of what takes place should emphasize deception or adaptation, and so on. This becomes particularly appropriate when looking at how appropriate a particular result is (see "Ties", below).

Opposition

Sometimes, the die is rolled merely to determine how well someone did at a particular task – they're not facing any sort of opposition,

and the obstacle they face is not particularly difficult. In such a case, it's merely a question of how ascendant the success is – failure doesn't really enter into the range of possibilities. If failure does enter into it, then this is a case of **opposition**.

Opposition comes in two forms: man (which is to say, other characters), or the environment. We'll talk about the latter first.

Environmental opposition is a single die rolled by the GM. Unless circumstances are *dire*, the environment is not considered to have any sort of elemental sign associated with it. This means the best result the GM can hope for is excellent (divinity). The player rolls a die as well, and compares his result to the GM's result. If the GM comes out higher on the hierarchy (see above), the player's character has failed at the task. If the player's result ties or is higher, the player succeeds, as indicated.

For example: Dogan is climbing a sheer cliff. This is a Body roll for him. The GM rolls her die, and gets a 6 – the Sign of Divinity. This is bad news for Dogan, who must roll Divinity or a match in order to succeed at the task. However, since Dogan's Body is rated 345, he can only fail by rolling a 1 (basic) or 2 (competent).

If circumstances are in fact *dire* – if, for example, Dogan was climbing a sheer cliff in a driving rainstorm – the GM can assign one elemental sign to the environment, as a stat. This should be done only rarely.

For example: Dogan is in fact climbing a sheer cliff in a driving rainstorm. The GM

decides to give the environment the Sign of Water (2). If she rolls a 2, she'll have a commanding result, and Dogan will have to roll a commanding or better result himself (which he'll only be able to get on a 3, 4, or 5).

Character opposition comes up when a player's character faces another player's character or a GM's character in a contest of some sort. This might be as simple as one character swinging a punch while the other dodges, or may be as complicated as determining who comes out looking best at the ball.

In such cases, all parties involved roll, and the one with the highest result on the hierarchy (see above) is the one who “wins”.

For example: Dogan's in a fist-fight against Rogar, a crime boss who's no slouch in a slugfest. He has two signs in Body (Water, 2, and Fire, 3) while Dogan has Fire, Earth, and Air (345), as well as Water and Fire (23) in Fist-fighting. Dogan definitely has the upper hand.

They roll. Dogan attacks first, and rolls a 2 – Water. This is a masterful result, since it matches his Fist-fighting talent. Rogar can't possibly beat that, since he doesn't have talents to bring to bear, but he rolls anyway, and get a 3. This matches his Fire stat, so he has a commanding result. That's scary, sure, but Dogan has him beat.

Ties

In the case of a tie – say both Dogan and Rogar had gotten a commanding result – it's time to look at the nature of the action and the signs that were rolled. Ties are broken by the side that got the most **appropriate** sign on their result. Appropriateness is simply judged by looking at the activity and determining what element it would be – then comparing that element to the rolls.

If the tie cannot be resolved, then neither side wins: it's a standoff.

For example: It's Dogan's turn to get attacked, and Rogar comes at him. Dogan rolls a 4 (Earth), giving him a commanding defense. Rogar rolls, and get a 2 (Water), giving him a commanding attack. It's a tie, so the appropriateness needs to be judged.

Rogar rolled Water, which is about adaptation and deception. That's not much for outright attacks, which is what he's doing, so it's not appropriate.

Dogan, on the other hand, rolled Earth, which is about stability and protection. Earth is definitely appropriate for someone taking a few punches and mounting a defense.

Since Dogan's sign was appropriate, and Rogar's wasn't, Dogan's defense wins out.

If Rogar had rolled a 3 (Fire) instead, he would have gotten a commanding result, and it would have been appropriate as well. That would mean that both sides were appropriate, and thus, a standoff.

Concessions

Whenever someone fails, they must offer **concessions**. Concessions are various setbacks and defeats on the part of the loser that yield advantage to the winner.

Concessions are done entirely through negotiation and narration, and once established, must be respected by the GM and all players.

The loser offers the concessions, and must keep offering them until the winner accepts up the necessary amount of them.

The necessary amount is determined simply by counting the number of steps on the hierarchy (see above) between the winning result and the losing result. If a win is the result of a tie, a single, very minor concession is indicated. A concession needn't be outright defeat, though the loser is certainly within his rights to offer defeat if he feels it's time. And, after all, the defeat is on his terms.

More often a concession is simply giving up control of some single important, but not necessarily major, thing that the loser previously controlled in some fashion. This might mean losing a weapon ("I get disarmed!"), a hostage ("Your sister elbows me in the gut and dives clear!"), the moral high ground ("I see you've discovered my indiscretion!"), or the hostess's favor ("The Countess stops smiling upon me!").

When facing multiple concessions, the loser may either offer several standard concession as described above, or may offer a single concession with a larger impact, *e.g.*, instead of

simply losing the hostess's favor, he's thrown out of the party ("My lady, please reconsider!"). As a rule of thumb, if three concessions are indicated in a single win, outright and total defeat is fairly priced at three ("The Countess not only kicks me out, but suggests that perhaps I won't be invited back again. Ever!").

The GM may step into these negotiations at any point and suggest that a particular concession is worth more than the loser priced it as. Once all parties agree on the appropriate cost, negotiation continues.

***For example:** Dogan takes his next attempt to lay a real hurtin' on Rogar, and his roll backs it up. He gets a 3 (Fire), which is a perfect result, matching both his Body stat and his Fist-fighting talent. Rogar rolls to defend, and gets a 6 (Divinity). Sadly for him, this is still a pretty massive failure – an excellent result is three steps below a perfect result.*

Since Rogar's forced to offer three concessions at once, the GM sees this as time to offer outright defeat. She suggests that Dogan grabs Rogar by his shirt, lifts him up over his head, and then slams him down into the ground, knocking him out. Dogan loves the image, so he accepts the concession, and the fight is over.

Whenever dealing with multiple opponents, the number of concessions indicated by a win is the difference between the winner's roll and the worst loser's roll. The winner may spread these concessions around to each of those who failed to match his roll. However, he may not allocate

more concessions to someone than they would have received if they faced him individually.

***For example:** Rogar comes back for revenge, and Dogan finds himself in a fight again. This time Rogar has a friend, Taelen, who's fast on his feet (Body 5, Air).*

Not willing to fight this one defensively, Dogan charges right at them, rolling the first attack. And he comes out the door with a bang: he rolls a 3, giving him a perfect result.

Rogar and Taelen are forced onto a defensive footing, but Rogar curses as he rolls a 4 – only competent! Taelen does a bit better, rolling a 5, giving him a commanding result.

Dogan most thoroughly beats Rogar, by four steps on the hierarchy. So Dogan is able to force four concessions.

He'd love to take Taelen out of the picture early, but to really do that for certain, he'd need to force three concessions. But he only beat Taelen by two, so he could give Taelen two at most. Rogar on the other hand could take three or even four, so, laughing, Dogan slams into him, for three concessions again. Rogar reels, and the GM offers that he blinks a few times and falls over, seeing stars. Dogan accepts, and inflicts the final concession on Taelen.

Taelen looks at his fallen friend, gives Dogan a quick smile, and turns tail and runs. Dogan accepts this as well, and lets him get away, laughing all the while.

Burning

Since opposition and other tasks are resolved with a single die, it may seem very harsh that falling short of the mark is so easy to come by – after all, rolling a basic result occurs a sixth of the time. There is, however, a path of recourse in situations where falling short of the mark is unacceptable: **burning**.

You may choose to burn one of your character's signs, on either a stat or a talent, any time you get a roll you don't like. Pick the sign you wanted to roll, indicate that sign on either a talent or stat that you're trying to match, and say that you're burning it.

For the action in question, you may instead treat it as if you did in fact roll that sign, hitting all matches possible (this does mean that someone can guarantee himself a perfect result if the sign exists both in the talent and the stat).

Once the action's resolved, however, the indicated sign is considered gone from the character's sheet for the rest of the session (draw a line through it in pencil). He's pushed himself too far, and this is the consequence. In general, you may want to consider burning a stat sign before a talent sign, since a masterful result beats a commanding one (see the hierarchy, above), but that said, talents are more specific than stats, and losing the general capability from a stat can be pretty nasty.

For example: As usual, Dogan's in a fist-fight again, and disaster has happened – he rolled a one. He's up against some talented thugs, but they've rolled a commanding

result, and he's not ready to give them three concessions right out the gate.

He could take a few of them down if he rolled perfect, but he wants to save his chance at a sure-thing perfect result for later in the game.

Looking at his Body stat (345), he figures he can afford to lose the Sign of Air (5) for the game, so he burns that, and gets a commanding result as well, describing his first roll as a feint, pouring on the speed and managing to put himself everywhere the thugs don't expect him to be.

Air's quality of evasion is appropriate to this, so Dogan wins the tie, and the thugs now have to offer him a single minor concession.

With this resolved, Dogan now has to cross off his Air sign. For the rest of the game, his Body stat looks like this: 345

Given a considerable amount of in-game recovery time, the GM may allow the character to regain his burnt signs without waiting for the next session.

Goons & Named Folk

Named characters are significant GM characters that have some elemental signs, and even talents, of their own. Named characters should always roll individually in a conflict, as they've been shown to do above.

When dealing with unnamed characters – we'll call them **goons** – the GM is within her prerogatives to decide to treat several goons as a single character, in order to simplify die rolling.

(And truly, individual die rolls should only be done for named characters most of the time).

Goons can either be **regular** or **highly skilled**. As a rule, one to two regular goons shouldn't have any signs, and for every two added to their number after that, they should get a single sign to add to their sheet. As their numbers reduce, they should start losing signs.

Highly skilled goons should be fewer in number, but get one sign each (though at times the GM may choose to skip the first goon before counting).

For example: Dogan faces down six goons. These guys are regular, so the GM considers their numbers before assigning them signs. The first two don't count, but she has four beyond that, indicating two signs. She decides to give them the signs of Fire and Water, both in Body (they're an ambush squad).

Early in the fight, Dogan scores a palpable hit – he rolls a 4, commanding, while they only roll a 1, basic. This indicates three concessions, and the GM offers that Dogan has taken out half their number, simply by striking them down as they charge at him. Dogan accepts.

Since the number of goons has been cut in half, the GM should drop one of their signs. She decides to get rid of the Water sign.