

Guilty Before God by Judd Karlman

GBG is a game about dueling in 19th Century America using dice, cups, imagination and honor.

“We are murderers, a nation of murderers”

- Reverend Lyman Beecher

Introduction

Guilty Before God is a game of judicial dueling. Duels took place for a great many reasons in American history. Ultimately, someone's honor was besmirched and they felt that the only answer left to them was to resort to violence. Dueling pistols were kept in wooden cases, lined in velvet. Knives and swords were also good and honorable dueling weapons. Shotguns and rifles were also used, sometimes at a range that would shock these gentle game readers.

There is a tale of a sailor challenged and he asked his captain to be his second. The captain, not wanting to lose a valuable crewman, proposed they duel with barbed harpoons. When the challenger, a landlubber, saw the weapon, he withdrew his challenge. Moral of this story as it relates to this game? If the pistol, knife or sword doesn't work for your duel, use your imagination. (Thanks to Pete Kautz for telling me this wonderful tale that he uncovered while reading about 18th century New Orleans and its bloodthirsty dueling oak.)

The gentleman in GBG duels with three cups: Blue, Red and Crystal. The Blue Cup is where one puts their dice that will be rolled for one's defense. The Red Cup is where one puts their dice that will be rolled to strike down one's foe, displaying their guilt for the world to see. The Crystal Cup is for control of the story that led to the duel. The story is the wrongdoing that led to the duel. The duelist's companions who they declare as their seconds manage the story's currency.

Step 1 Character Creation

The Players gather around a table. They should envision the kind of place in history they want their persona to come from. This persona will be given life through dice. Before dice are picked up, the players should talk about and consider the kind of persona they will seek to build.

The d12's represent Honor and are thusly called Honor Dice. The d4's represent Heart and are thusly called Heart Dice. The d20's represent Steel and are thusly called Steel Dice. Each of these kinds of dice have different implications in play that will be gone into later on.

For each Player at the table, numbering at least three, there should be 5d20, 5d12 and 3d4. Players take turns, the eldest going first. If there are two of the same ages, the tiebreaker should go to she who has survived the most duels. If there is an equal amount any gentlemen or lady should be able to come to an agreement. If not, perhaps the evening's first duel is in order, to happen first after the dice are allocated.

The players go around the table clockwise, starting from the afore mentioned eldest.

They take an Honor, Heart or Steel die as they see fit, announcing to the table why they are choosing said die. They should go around the table until none are left

Example: “I am picking up this Steel die because I went to a reputable fencing academie in Exchange Alley, where I gained notable credentials.”

“I am picking up a Heart die because I never yield, stubborn not unlike a mule.”

“I am picking up an Honor die because when I take the field, it is not just me that is going forth but all of my righteous ancestors who fought to gain and keep my station in life.”

“I am taking an Honor die because my pappy told me that honor is the measure of a man’s worth.”

There is a fourth type of die. This is the Pain die and it is represented by a d6. The Pain Die is put into a cup when a player takes a wound. It is also taken whenever a player takes two of the same types of dice twice in a row. Pain Dice must be defined as a shortcoming in the player’s persona, just as Honor, Steel and Heart are defined, so are the Pain Dice. Pain Dice subtract their total from other dice. This process is gone into with greater detail later on.

When all of the dice are gone, the players should have defined their personas and have a fine pile of polyhedral dice before them, representing their Honor, Heart, Steel and perhaps some Pain.

If a player has no Pain Dice in front of them, another Player may assign them one. The player accepting it must define this Pain Die, even if said player accepts it through gritted teeth. One could hand a fellow player a die with a gracious manner or they may point to their pile of Dice, with no d6's to speak of any say, "Nay, trollop, none may have a life without pain!"

Once the players have their dice before them, character creation is over. One does not write down information on paper, as the player's life is a fleeting thing and paper is far too permanent a record. The only memory the world holds for a player will be their victories or defeats on the proving fields and their righteous honor with which they comport themselves.

Players may put their dice in their cups, so that the other players might have trouble keeping track of their die pools. However, the truly honorable player will keep all of their dice on the table, for all brother and sister duelists to see. This player gains an extra Honor Die at the end of character generation, so long as they keep the dice on the table whenever they are not required to be kept in cups. This player is a stand-up gal or fellow, not some shifty sop with a heart of milk.

Anyone who tries too hard to hide their dice, peeks into another's cup, or accuses others of looking in their cup should be swiftly kicked in the fork and ejected from the table.

None benefit from gaming with such a one as this.

If the players wish to play historical figures, this is entirely possible. One only needs to gather a list of facts about said figure and when gathering Steel, Honor and Heart, reading aloud said facts. This can be a good way for history to be learned. Aaron Burr, Alexander Hamilton, Jim Bowie and many more historical figures are available for personas in this period of history.

Step 2 – The Challenge is Issued, Seconds are Declared

If anyone has no Honor Dice none at all, they must declare a duel first. If all have Honor Dice, she with the least Honor Dice must declare a duel first. If there is an equal distribution of Honor Dice, the player who came to the game latest, putting their fellow players at the most inconvenience must declare a duel first. If all players arrived at the same moment, by some miracle, the player who neglected to bring food to the table must declare a duel first. If none meet this standard or all do, the host can decide who will declare first.

If the players are vagrants, playing at a local brothel or the like, then the youngest will declare a duel first.

In order to declare a duel, one must point at the accused and let them know, in full view of all, what their grievance with the player is. This grievance is not declared to the offender but to the table. Then the accuser names another player his second. The second goes to the offender and asks that restitution is made and suggests recompense, usually in the form of dice, although food, picking up refreshments or the loan of a new game book are all viable ways to give the accuser satisfaction. If satisfaction is in fact met, the accuser's second gains an extra Honor Die for brokering peace. If not, the offender must declare her own second, so that an honorable duel can be had.

The seconds must take a moment and confer with their companions, in full view and hearing of everyone at the table. There are no secrets in polite gaming society! Once those ensconced in the duel have told their seconds of their noble intentions, the seconds must then confer with one another.

It is among the seconds that the time and place of the duel will be decided. At this point, the weapons and stakes of the duel will be decided. First blood, death, or just until the accuser declares satisfaction are all honorable stakes for a duel.

Before the duel begins, the Second, the duelist's trusted companion, may propose a toast of wine. This toast is a way for the Second to give the duelist a die, only to be given back if the duelist wins. If they duelist loses, the Second gains a Wound die.

“Men, this man has come here to preach to you...you need preaching to, and I’ll be damned if he shan’t preach to you. The next man that disturbs him shall fight me.”

- Jim Bowie, quote taken from *Duelling in America* by Major Ben C. Truman

Part 3 The Duel

If the stake is first blood, as soon as a Wound Die is issued in the course of the duel, the duel is over. The accused may sacrifice one of his Honor Dice in order continue the duel, although the offender’s second may bid an Honor Die in order to stop the duel. If the accuser’s second offers a counter-bid to the offender’s second’s bid then everyone must roll all of their Honor Dice, not including the three dice at the table. The winner not only wins all three Honor Dice being bid and counter-bid but their wish concerning the duel’s end or continuance is honored.

If the stake is death, the duel continues until one of the duelists has more than two Wound Dice. Once the duelist has more than two, their honorable opponent may make them take a Stand Check. A Stand Check is when the duelist scraps their rolls. They take all of their Steel Dice and rolls them against their Wound Dice. If their Steel Dice total is greater than their Wound Dice total, they stand fast. Not only may they continue the battle but they gain either an Honor, Steel or Heart die, whichever their opponent offers them. When giving them this die, their opponent must admit to their honorable opponent’s more sterling qualities.

Example: ::hands opponent a d20:: “Despite having spit my sister’s name from your vile mouth, you have Steel, sir, I will give you that.”

Once the duelist has more wound dice in any of their cups than heart dice, their persona can no longer continue, falling over due to blood loss or cowardice.

Before the duel begins, players put their dice in the three cups. No cups may be empty.

The play that declared the duel attacks first. They take the dice in their Red Cup and roll these dice versus the dice in their opponent’s Blue Cup. Heart Dice explode upon the rolling of a 4 and continue doing so until a roll that isn’t a four is rolled.

For each meeting of the Red and Blue Cups, the duelists take the two highest dice from among their cup. For every five the two highest Red Cup are above those in the Blue Cup, a Wound Die is given. The duelist who is given the Wound Die may decide into which cup it is decided.

If the duel is with pistols or another firearm, only the highest two dice are taken and the rest of the dice are ignored. If the duel is with knives, swords or sabers, the duelists go back and forth, trading their pairs until none are left.

The Crystal Cups are rolled right against one another. Wound dice from all other cups also go into the Crystal Cup, though they do not count for reasons of being taken out of

the duel. The Crystal Cup's dice are all added together. The Second is allowed to say a sentence of what really happened to lead to the duel for every five their duelist's dice beat the other's dice total.

If the contents of the Crystal Cup are always a draw, the real reason for the duel will always be shrouded in mystery and rumor.

When all of the players have dueled, they will take up all of their Wound Dice and their Honor Dice. Whoever has the highest total, Honor – Wound Dice wins the game.

Reasons for Dueling:

Political Smears

Public Insult

Jilted Lover

Argument over a Debt

Love of a Man or Woman

Governmental Appointment

Insulting Editorial in the Paper (most pressrooms kept a loaded pistol)

Political Disagreement

Pro-Slavery vs. Abolitionist (in some parts of the south, being called an abolitionist was insult enough to bring about a duel)

Inspirations:

The Riddle of Steel by Jake Norwood

Dogs in the Vineyard by Vincent Baker

Universalis by Ralph Mazza and Mike Holmes

“Here and there, though, the tradition lingered on. In 1959, in Hollywood, Barney Silva, co-owner of a chain of Los Angeles restaurants, experienced irreconcilable differences with jazz musician Jack Sorin over one Dorothy Simon. Resolving to do the thing right, the two men marked off ten paces in Silva’s living room, wheeled and fired. Both died.”

- Bang! Bang! You’re Dead by Barbara Holland, Smithsonian Magazine, October 1997