



Scattered across the islands of the Caribbean are dark graveyards, watched over by the mysterious spirits called the Loa, and the priests and priestesses of Vodou.

Every midnight, on the night of the full moon, Lady Erzulie Ga-Rouge offers a graveyard's buried souls the chance to resolve their mortal affairs. Using mystical gifts bestowed by the loa, and possessing the bodies of mortals they use the skills and memories of their former lives to prove their worthiness to walk once more in daylight.

Yet the very portal that allows them to manifest as ghosts in the lands of the living acts as a beacon to creatures far darker, and lures forth shadows and nightmares that truly test the strength and resolve of the restless.

A Single Page RPG

This game assumes you are familiar with the conventions of role-playing games. So, only a small description of the Players and Game Master, and what you do in a game. Then it's just straight into the flesh and bones; designing characters, game mechanics, setting the scene and getting to the drama.

In this game, each of the players takes on the role of a lost soul, unable to continue their journey into the afterlife until they have faced the demons of their past and overcomes the regrets of their life. The Lady offers a prize to a worthy soul, the chance to walk among the living until the next full moon passes, a final hope of redemption.

The Game Master in Gambit of Erzuli Ga-Rouge is known as the Gravedigger. It is this person who draws the dead from their graves and presents them with the opportunity to prove their claim to walk again amongst the living.

Playing this game requires 4 chessboards, a full set of chess figures, a full set of checkers counters, and about a half dozen six sided dice for each player. If you don't have four chessboards, there are plenty of websites with chessboard images that you can print as large as you need on 4 separate pages.

Stepping into the Graveyard

Lady Erzulie Ga-Rouge permits her mortal souls a single night to prove their worthiness to complete their unfinished business; from midnight to dawn. Those who do not attend to their mortal affairs in this time are lost to the seas of oblivion.

Everyone taking part in the Gambit of Erzulie Ga-Rouge creates characters on scraps of paper, scrunching each character up and throwing it into a communal pile at the centre of the table. Including the gravedigger, each player does this three times.

When making a character, simply choose three things that they are automatically good at. If you want the character to be exceptionally good at something, you can put two of these choices into the same thing. [No, you can't put all three into the same thing!!!]

Then choose a situation that brings joy to the character, and a situation that reminds them of a regret, then assign these situations numbers from 1 to 6 [don't give them the same number]. Situations of Joy could include: family, proud achievements or sex, while situations of Regret could include: drunkenness, violence, or maybe bad experiences with family.

Finally, choose the character's gender this will determine if they become promoted into a king or a queen during play.

That's it...make a note of them on a piece of paper, with spaces saved for the favour of the loa and injuries. Remember to scrunch it up and throw it to the centre of the table.

Awakening

Each player takes a random three characters from the centre of the table. They may keep one of these for themselves (but may not keep one that they wrote); the others are given to the Gravedigger. The players then each claim a chess piece (rook, knight or bishop), and a black checker.

Once players have chosen their characters, 4 chessboards need to be laid out at the centre of the table; these represent the graveyard into which the characters were buried.

At the centre of the four boards, place four red checkers. This group of counters is called the Asagwe Altar. Do the same at the four furthest outer corners, as illustrated. These outer corners are called the Vévés.



Each player may then place another red checker anywhere on the board to represent where their grave is located in the graveyard (player may choose to remember these locations, or could mark them in some way for easier identification). Finally, all players place a white pawn indicating themselves at their grave sites, and then take a single d6 from the communal pool.

Game Rules

The game begins with a communal pool of standard six-sided dice equal to four times the number of players (and another 4 for the Gravedigger). These dice represent the mystical forces at work in the area, the available resources for the characters to play with.

At the beginning of the game, everyone gets a single die from the pool and the Gravedigger claims a number of dice equal to the number of players. The die assigned to players may never be taken from them, and if the player is removed from the game, they take their die with them. Over the course of

play, most players will gradually accumulate more dice and it is in possessing these dice that they become more powerful and have a better chance of proving themselves to Erzulie Ga-Rouge.

All players begin at their respective graves.

Politics in the Graveyard

The Gambit of Erzulie Ga-Rouge begins at the stroke of midnight, with a show of favour. Starting with the player to the right of the Gravedigger, everyone gives their black checker to another player (some groups may choose to do this by writing names on pieces of paper, others may do it openly). After everyone has passed their checker, the Gravedigger randomly assigns his chip to one of the players (by dice or other suitable method).

The player with the highest number of chips becomes "houngan", the leader of the group. If the houngan is a male character, they exchange their pawn on the board for a King. If the houngan is a female character, they exchange their pawn on the board for a Queen.

The player with the second highest number of chips becomes "hounsis", bestowed with lesser powers. The exchange their pawn on the board with the piece they reserved at the beginning of play (rook, knight or bishop). If there are more than four players, additional hounsis may be assigned, but there may be no more hounsis on the board than pawns. Depending on the houngan at the time, the hounsis may be assigned to either king or queen. For example, a Rook becomes the King's rook if the houngan is male, or becomes the Queen's rook if the houngan is female.

Piece	Movement	Power
King	One square in any direction.	Provides all other characters with an automatic success during every vignette.
King's Rook	Any distance horizontally or vertically, as per a rook in chess.	Gains +1 to all die rolls in scenes where a conflict is initiated against them.
King's Knight	Two jumps as per a knight in chess (may leap horses or other obstacles)	Opponents never gain the bonus from situations of joy.
King's Bishop	Any distance diagonally as per a bishop in chess.	Restore a die to any character finishing their movement on an adjacent square.
Queen	Any distance horizontally, vertically or diagonally, as per a queen in chess.	Gains a number of bonus single-use successes equal to the character's black checkers possessed.
Queen's Rook	Any distance horizontally or vertically, as per a rook in chess.	Never suffers the penalty from situations of regret.
Queen's Knight	Two jumps as per a knight in chess (may leap horses or other obstacles)	Gains +1 to all die rolls in scenes where they initiate the conflict.
Queen's Bishop	Any distance diagonally as per a bishop in chess.	Steal a die from any enemy finishing their movement on an adjacent square.
Pawn	Two squares in any direction.	No special powers.

The Dark Souls

At the stroke of midnight, the gates of the graveyard are opened in a release of dark energies. The gates are in the middle of the graveyard's outer edges (where two chessboards join). Spread between the gates, the Gravedigger places a number of black pawns equal to the number of players. To survive the night, the players must prevent these dark souls from reaching the Asagwe Altar.

But every time a dark soul is destroyed, a new one emerges through a gate to take its place...and the more dark souls are destroyed, the more powerful are their replacements.

Improvement of Dark Souls

Most of the Dark Souls that enter through a graveyard's gates are pawns, and they follow the rules described. But as a game gets more intense, more dangerous types of Dark Soul come into play. This is based on a value called the Gambit. The Gambit starts each hour equal to the number of hours that have passed so far in the game, it is increased by 1 for every Dark Soul successfully confronted and eliminated.

As long as the Gambit is lower than the number of players, all Dark Souls to enter the graveyard gates will be pawns. They appear once at the gate immediately once another dark soul has been removed from play and move like all other pawns in the game. If the Gambit is higher than the number of players, the Gravedigger may reduce the Gambit by 2 to introduce a vengeful soul. These are represented by a rook, knight or bishop and move accordingly. The bonus skills of these characters are worth double the usual value (providing two automatic successes in vignettes instead of one).

If the gambit is more than double the number of players, the Gravedigger may reduce it by 3 to introduce a Bokor, a dark sorcerer. These are represented by a King (who gives a bonus success to all Dark and Vengeful Souls in play), or a Queen (whose bonus skills are worth triple the usual value).

The Gravedigger can always introduce a regular Dark Soul at no cost.

Horses

Among the blessed children of Haiti are the horses; mortals whose connection to the Afterworld is so strong that they can act as physical conduits for the great Loa spirits and the restless denizens of the graveyard. Horses are strongly valued by both the communities of the physical and spirit worlds.

On the nights of the Gambit of Erzulie Ga-Rouge, horses flock to the graveyards, in the hope that they might be ridden. For in their eyes, being ridden by a spirit is a great honour and a method to reinforce their bond between worlds.

Horses are represented on the board as black checkers; there are initially a number of horses equal to twice the number of players. These are begin the game clustered around the Vévés.

Traversing the Graveyard

The player to the left of the Gravedigger makes a single move across the graveyard with their piece. If they are using a pawn they may move into any adjacent square twice, if they have had their rank improved by their peers, they may move in a manner similar to the chess piece they are using. Pieces are unable to move through each other, if there is an obstacle such as a horse, dark soul or Asagwe Altar in the path of a movement, the character cannot proceed any further on their course.

If the player has moved adjacent to a dark soul, they may engage in a vignette. If they have moved adjacent to the one of the Vévés, they may attempt to recover a single die. If they have moved adjacent to a horse, they may automatically choose to “ride” it. Otherwise play continues clockwise around the group, with each player moving their pieces across the board.

Once everyone has moved once, the Gravedigger moves every dark soul a distance of two squares in any direction then claims a die from the communal pool (as long as there are dice in it).

Finally, any unclaimed horses are moved. Each player may move a single horse by up to two squares, or may move two horses by a square each. A horse may be moved by multiple players.

Vignettes

When a player engages a dark soul, they are forced to confront an aspect of their character’s history. The original writer of the character uses a few short sentences to set a short vignette scene where the character faced a life decision, and a die is rolled. If the die results in a value equal to the character’s situation of joy or regret, then these situations will be present in the current vignette. The gravedigger selects a random character from the

discarded pile and must determine some way to work this character (and any situations of joy or regret) into the narrative.

Once the vignette has been set, the character now attempts to resolve the situation using their three talents, and by rolling a number of dice from their pool. The player may choose to roll as few a single die, or may invest all of their dice into a vignette.

Natural 6s

Before any modifiers are applied, there are special effects if a die rolls a face value of 6. When this happens, a player may make choice between the following options:

- Gain an additional degree of success.
- Return a die from your exhausted pool to your active pool.
- Move a die from the communal pool to your exhausted pool.
- Strip a die from your victim’s exhausted pool and add it to your own.

(They may only choose one of these options per 6 rolled. Note that if the character has confronted the story in this scene, they may remove a die from the communal pool in this manner.)

When a situation of joy is present in a scene, all dice being rolled by the character gain +1 to their face values; conversely, when a situation of regret is present, all dice being rolled by the character suffer -1 to their face values.

The gravedigger takes a number of dice from their pool and uses these for the dark soul.

Once the dice have been rolled, the Gravedigger and the player involved in the vignette take turns narrating the events. Each takes one of their successes and describes how this pushes the events in their favour. These descriptions could revolve around a fight, a discussion, a car chase, a sex scene, anything...it’s up to the imaginations of the narrators. If a character is specifically using one of their automatic successes, they will need to relate how this specific action is incorporated in the vignette. In their descriptions, players may attempt to bring harm to their opponents. Every success may be used to deal damage to your opponent, or to their mystical resources.

If either the current player or the Gravedigger is being damaged by their opponent, they may exhaust a die or destroy an exhausted die (returning it to the communal pool) to prevent a single level of incoming damage. If any damage is not prevented, mark off a health level instead.

Attacks on a character’s mystic resources can only be blocked by spending on of their successes for the scene. Other attacks automatically exhaust one of the victim’s unused dice, if the victim has no unused dice, then an exhausted die is returned to the communal pool.

Damage

If any damage gets through to a person, they are wounded for the remainder of the scene. Such an injury could be physical or psychological; it all has the same basic effects. Characters have five basic health states: Healthy, Battered (-1), Bruised (-2), Bloodied (-3), Out. The injured states impose a penalty to the face values of all die rolls, while “Out” characters are removed for the remainder of the hour, only to return when the hour turns.

A character may only heal wounds at the end of an hour. For every black token of favour they possess, a single level of wounds may be healed.

Every time a player wants their character to perform a task they roll one or more dice from their active pool (which fluctuates in size as the game progresses). Any die resulting in a 4 or better counts as a success. If you’re doing something that you’re good at, you get to add an automatic extra degree of success to the attempt (if you’re exceptionally good, you can add two degrees of success). Any die resulting in 3 or less is ignored. All dice used in the task are considered “exhausted” and they can only be restored by visiting the Vévés or allowing the story to progress to the next hour.

Dark Souls do not have damage levels; a single successful wound removes them from play (awarding the player with a die for this). If a player fails to damage a Dark Soul during a vignette, play proceeds with the movement of the next player.

Riding a Horse

When a character moves adjacent to a horse, they may choose to ride it. This is done by immersing the spirit into the host, possessing their flesh and moving through the mortal body.

The character’s piece is placed on top of the horse and the two now traverse the graveyard as a single unit. While a Horse is being ridden, a character gains an extra die in any vignette they engage. But if a dark soul manages to damage the character’s health levels, the horse is immediately removed from play.

Burning Horses and Vévés

When a character is touching one of the Horses or Vévés, they may roll a single die at the end of their movement. If the player succeeds, they may recover one of their exhausted dice, but the Horse or Vévé being touched is removed from the game.

Recovery and the Turning of the Hours

Once any player has either exhausted or lost all of their dice, they may call for a turning of the hours. This signifies that a full hour has passed in the graveyard, and the energies renew through the rituals of the mortal vodou in Erzulie Ga-Rouge’s service. The decision for turning the hours must be unanimous among the players.

This begins with injured characters sacrificing their black checkers to improve their health state on a 1-for-1 basis. If character have any remaining black tokens they may now be spent to automatically recover exhausted dice (again on a 1-for-1 basis). Any unused tokens are then discarded.

All players then roll their exhausted dice, any dice that result in a value of 4 or higher are returned to the player’s active pool (if they are adjacent to one of the Vévés at this point, they may recover any die that results in a 3 or higher). If a die is attempting recovery and shows a natural face value of 1, it is returned to the communal pool.

The gravedigger automatically recovers all exhausted dice. Any Vévés burned are restored (horses burnt during the hour are not restored).

Finally, all characters claim a token to use for showing their favour in the next hour.

Ending the Game

There are two ways that a game can end, the first is for the sun to rise over the horizon after 6 hours have passed. If this happens, all players make one last vote to show their favour on their companions. Erzulie Ga-Rouge then bestows her blessing on the player with the highest sum of favour and dice in their possession.

The game also ends if any Dark Souls reach the Asagwe Altar. If this occurs, Erzulie Ga-Rouge deems none of the characters worthy and they are all sentenced to suffer their fate in the afterworld with no chance of completing unresolved duties in the mortal lands.

