

# Red Rain

A role-playing game about pain  
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## INTRODUCTION

Red Rain is a role-playing game about boxers dealing with serious issues inside and outside of the boxing ring.

The game requires three players. Two players take on the role of opposing boxers getting ready for their fight against one another. And, one player takes on the role of the “referee,” overseeing the drama that builds around these two fighters, their relationships, and their ultimate confrontation in the ring.

The game has two distinct phases. First,

players explore the tough lives of the two boxers, resolving the fighters’ personal issues and working through their difficult choices as they prepare for the big fight. Then, players actually play through the boxing match, round by round and blow by blow, to decide which of the two fighters emerges the victor.

Players will need a deck of poker-style playing cards (remove the jokers), and a couple pieces of paper to keep track of the fighters and their relationships.

## PART 1: IN THIS CORNER!

**B**efore play can begin, each player controlling a fighter must create his fighter character. Everyone takes part in this process, and everyone will contribute ideas for the character. Players should follow these steps for each of the two fighters in the game.

### Step 1: Name & Concept

First, each player needs to come up with a basic idea for who his fighter is and what he is like. Create a name, and talk with the other players about what the fighter is like. Is he young or old? What ethnicity is he? Why is he a fighter? What does he look like? What color shorts will he wear in the ring? Does he have a championship belt? What’s his record? Does he have any money? The controlling player should record the fighter’s name on a piece of paper, and add any notes he wants to remember.

### Step 2: Specialty Move

Most fighters have one move in the boxing ring that makes the fans love them and their opponents wary. (See *Boxing Moves* on page 3.) The controlling player selects one Move as his fighter’s specialty, and writes this on his character record..

### Step 3: Pain

Each player (including the referee) must create one new Pain descriptor for the fighter. These are used to help players come up with ideas for new scenes:

This means that each fighter will have three Pain descriptors, and a starting Pain rating of 3. The controlling player should record his Pain rating and descriptors on the character record.

Players should try to create descriptors that refer to other people in the fighter’s life, especially those he has relationships with.

Here are some examples of Pain descriptors:

- The mob demands that the fighter “throw” his next fight.
- The fighter is getting old, and going blind in one eye.
- The fighter is broke, and needs to borrow money from someone.
- The fighter’s girlfriend wants him to stop fighting and start a family.
- The fighter’s brother is in jail.
- The fighter’s trainer has died, and he has no trainer for the fight.
- The fighter is in love with his rival opponent’s wife.

### Step 3: Relationships

Now, each player (including the referee) must create one new Relationship for the fighter. Each player names someone in the fighter’s life, like his trainer, a wife, a family member, a mob connection, a friend, and so on. It’s important that the Relationship has emotional ties, rather than, say, distant and casual ties (like a sports reporters might, for example).

The controlling player writes down each re-

relationship and includes a brief explanation of the relationship.

Now, the player assigns 10 points among his fighter's Relationships. The player may also add more Relationships to his character record, as long as he has points to assign to those relationships. Each relationships must have a rating of at least 1.

## Step 4: Grief

At the start of the game, fighters have a Grief rating of 0. As they suffer through life, they may earn Grief, which can lead to their downfall in the ring as they lose the will to fight.

The controlling player simply records Grief on the character record at rating 0, but this may increase later on.

## Step 5: Repertoire

At the start of the game, the controlling player holds no Repertoire. These are cards the player will earn during Phase 1 (the build-up to the fight)

of the game that he will keep in a pile and then use in Phase 2 of the game (the actual fight).

## EXAMPLE FIGHTER

### Luiz "Pepper" Castillo

**Specialty Move:** Hook

**Pain:** 3

- Luiz is broke, and needs to borrow money from someone.
- Luiz's girlfriend, Anna, wants him to stop fighting and start a family.
- Luiz's brother is in jail.

**Grief:** 0

**Relationships:**

- Anna, his live-in girlfriend (4)
- Tommy "Chief" Douglas, a veteran trainer (3)
- Harry Romano, a slick So-Cal promoter (2)
- Alphonso, his good-for-nothing brother (1)

**Repertoire:**

Currently empty. Luiz's player will add cards to his repertoire during Phase 1 of the game.

## Boxing moves

### Offensive moves

Fighters use four different kinds of punches in a fight. In this game, each type of punch corresponds to one playing card suit. To throw one of the punches, a player reveals a card with the correct suit. For example, if a player wants his fighter to punch with a Jab, he plays a spades card.

### Jab (Spades)

The jab is a quick, forward punch with a long reach. Fighters use jabs to gauge distance to their opponents, which helps them follow up with combinations of other punches.

### Cross (Clubs)

A cross is a straight punch with the fighter's dominant hand. The fighter puts his whole body into the punch, twisting his hips and using his legs for power.

### Hook (Diamonds)

The hook is a punch in a sideways arc, and effectively avoids parries. The fighter can punch the head or body, sometimes angling the punch to come up under the opponents ribcage.

### Uppercut (Hearts)

The uppercut is an upward punch aimed at just under the opponent's chin. It can devastate the opponent on a solid hit, or simply open a larger target for another blow.

### Defensive moves

When on the defensive, fighters also use four different techniques. Each defensive maneuver corresponds to one playing card suit. To use a defense for his fighter, a player reveals a card with the correct suit. For example, if a player wants his fighter to Bob & Weave, he plays a hearts card.

### Slip (Spades)

A Slip twists the fighter's stance and head position so that incoming blows "slip" by, losing their power.

### Clinch (Clubs)

Fighters use the Clinch to stall, rest, and make an opponent's long punches ineffective. The fighter closes distance to the opponent and grapples him, buying a few seconds as the referee separates the fighters to continue the fight.

### Parry (Diamonds)

The parry is a simple block effective against straight punches. The fighter moves his palm toward the opponent to "catch" the blow and direct it away.

### Bob & Weave (Hearts)

Fancy footwork is the key to defending with a Bob & Weave. The fighter ducks below a punch, and presses with his legs to come up along the side of the opponents arm, preferably outside the opponents' body.

## PART 2: LIFE IS PAIN

Once players have created their fighters, they can begin to play. In this phase of the game, players are building up to the boxing match. So, they'll role-play through various scenes as the fighters deal with issues in their lives and prepare for the fight.

## SCENES

When a new scene begins, the referee describes a new imaginary scene involving the player's boxer character. The players can request scenes or make suggestions, even for the opposing fighters. The referee's job is to introduce a gut-wrenching issue or conflict the fighter must contend with in his life. To help him get an idea for the scene, the referee should use the fighter's Pain descriptors and Relationships as a guide.

The referee must include at least one supporting character in the scene, and it must be a character the fighter has a Relationship with.

The *other* player (the player who controls the opposing fighter) will play the role of that supporting character. The referee will portray any additional supporting characters involved in the scene. If there several supporting characters in a scene, the referee decides which supporting character the other player will portray, but he should choose the character that appears to be most important or significant in the scene.

Scenes can involve both fighters. For example, a scene could be a press event for weighing in the fighters. Or, a scene could involve a shared relationship between the fighters, like a love triangle or an old trainer who worked with both fighters. In that case, the players take on the roles of their respective fighters, and the referee portrays other supporting characters.

But, the both fighter characters must have a relevant Relationship in the scene. They could both share a Relationship—with the old trainer, for example. Or, they may even have a relationship with each other.

## Trading scenes

The referee should alternate scenes between each player. To begin, he simply chooses one of the players and sets a scene. The referee should frame an equal number of scenes for each play-

er in this phase of the game.

## CONFLICT

As players work through the scene, they *must* reach a conflict. This is a point when the players have different, conflicting ideas about what should happen to the characters in the scene, good or bad. Players should not shy away from messy situations, nor should they try to "get along." Without conflict, the fighters' Repertoires will not be equipped for the upcoming fight in Phase 2.

Each scene should involve one conflict. If the scene demands more than one conflict, the referee should attempt to mirror that same opportunity for multiple conflicts when he frames the next scene for the *other* player.

## Stakes & Consequences

When that happens, players must decide what's at stake in the conflict. Usually, this is obvious and intuitive. The players will state goals for their character at the beginning of the conflict.

For example, a player's goal might be "My fighter convinces the promoter to give him an advance in money before the fight." If the player wins the conflict, then the fighter gets the advance. But, he has to win the conflict first. Conversely, the player controlling the promoter says "OK, then the promoter's goal is to talk the fighter out of that advance and make him wait for his winnings until after the fight."

Players should also recognize the consequences. What will happen if they lose the conflict? Entering the conflict means they accept that possibility. Consequences for loss in this game should be painful! Any player is free to make suggestions. If players can't agree on consequences they either need to let the referee decide or choose not to enter the conflict at all. But, in doing so, players may lose the chance to earn more cards for the boxing match in phase two of the game.

Going back to the example above, what will happen if the fighter fails to convince his promoter to give him a cash advance? The referee decides that the promoter will get angry and reduce the fighter's percentage of the winnings.



The referee should prepare each conflict by explaining the stakes aloud, and also announcing to players what the consequences of their failure might be.

## Drawing Cards

Next, players draw a number of cards equal to the fighter's Relationship rating with the other characters in the conflict.

- The player portraying a supporting character draws a number of cards equal to the fighter character's Relationship rating for that supporting character.
- The referee also draws a number of cards equal to the fighter's Relationship ratings for supporting characters he controls. However, because the referee may control multiple supporting characters, he draws cards for each supporting character's Relationship with the fighter and adds them together in his hand. The referee may use any of the cards for any of his characters during the conflict, even if the characters' goals are different.
- The player controlling the fighter draws a number of cards equal to the *total* of his Relationship ratings for all supporting characters in the scene.

**For example**, Luiz Castillo is in a scene with his promoter, his girlfriend, and his brother. They are all arguing about money. Luiz has a Relationship with his promoter (Relationship rating 3), his girlfriend (Relationship rating 4), and his brother (Relationship rating 1). The other player portraying the promoter draws three cards. The referee, who portrays both the girlfriend and the brother, draws five cards total. And, Luiz's player draws a total of eight cards because all his Relationships are involved in the scene.

## Resolving the Conflict

With their cards in hand, the players now choose a single card from their hands and reveal the card to their opponents. Players must reveal their cards simultaneously. The card with the highest value between conflicting characters wins the conflict. With a win, a player's goals are fulfilled, and the loser must deal with the consequences.

- If the player controlling the fighter wins the conflict, he chooses a single card from the any players' hands and puts it in his Repertoire. These are the cards the fighter will use in his boxing match during the next phase of the game.

- If the player controlling the fighter loses a conflict, the *other* player (the player who controls the other fighter) chooses a single card from any player's hand that the losing player must accept for his Repertoire. (The *other* player chooses even if the player controlling the fighter is in conflict with the referee only.) The losing player also increases his fighter's Pain rating by 1.

## Card values

Cards rank in this order from highest value (top of the list) to lowest value (bottom of the list):

Ace
King
Queen
Jack
10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2

The player can decide instead to escalate the conflict (see Escalating Conflict). If he does, he returns the card to the other player's hand and does not increase his fighter's Pain rating by 1.

## Escalating conflict

If the player controlling the fighter in the scene has lost a conflict and he still has cards remaining in his hand, he may *escalate* the conflict to try again. This means he does not accept the loss and its consequences (including the card he must accept from the *other* player and increased Pain). Instead, he wishes to make another attempt to win the same conflict. However, to escalate the conflict, he must jeopardize one of his Relationships with any supporting character he opposes in the conflict. He agrees to lose that relationship if he loses the conflict.

Players then select a single card from the remaining cards in their hands. If a player controlling a supporting character has no remaining cards, he draws from the top of the deck and

plays that card. The players reveal their cards simultaneously. The highest value card wins the conflict.

- If the player controlling the fighter wins an escalated contest, he does not lose the relationship. The player chooses a single card from the any players' hands (including revealed cards) and puts it in his Repertoire.
- If the player controlling the fighter loses an escalated contest, he immediately loses the Relationship and adds the Relationship rating to his Grief. The player may continue to escalate so long as he has cards and Relationships remaining. However, he cannot save the lost Relationship, nor can he reduce the Grief, even if he wins a subsequent escalated conflict.

If the player cannot or will not escalate again, the *other* player (the player who controls the other fighter) chooses a single card from any player's hand (including revealed cards), and the player must accept in for his Repertoire. (This is true even if the player is in conflict with the referee only.) The player also increases his fighter's Pain rating by 1.

Players should describe what's happening in the game that explains the escalation. For example, maybe a disagreement erupts into a shouting match as the player escalates. Similarly, players should narrate why the fighter lost his Relationship. For example, maybe the shouting match leads to the fighter's wife leaving him.

## GET IN THE RING

Players continue to trade scenes using the preceding rules until they reach a stopping point. Players may agree to a set number of scenes (for example, six scenes per player), and then move on to the next phase of the game, the boxing match (see *Part 3: In the Ring* hereafter). Alternatively, players can simply decide when to end this phase of the game as the drama reaches a good conclusion and the fight is imminent. The referee should frame at least four or five scenes per fighter.

## AN EXAMPLE SCENE:

The referee sets up the first scene involving Luiz "Pepper" Castillo, a young, ambitious fighter. He describes an apartment in a rough neighborhood in Los Angeles where Luiz and his girlfriend Anna live. He then drops the bomb on Luiz's player – Anna has just told Luiz she is pregnant.

The referee tells the other player that he'll be playing the part of Anna in this scene, while the referee will portray anyone else the players might introduce.

The two players work through some dialog between Luiz and Anna. Anna decides she will go to Mexico to live with her family. But, Luiz wants Anna to stay with him, and he promises they will move after the fight and the prize money.

At this point, the game master interjects, and announces that this will be the conflict in the scene. The players agree, and they clarify the stakes. If Luiz is successful, Anna will stay. In that case, Luiz's player will also get to choose and keep any card the other player holds. Conversely, if Luiz's player loses and does not escalate the conflict, then Anna's goal is fulfilled. She will leave Luiz alone to prepare for his fight. It also means the other player will chose a single card from his hand and give it to Luiz's player. And, Luiz's Pain rating will increase by 1.

Luiz has a Relationship rating of 4 with Anna, so both players will draw 4 cards for this conflict.

Both players choose a card, and they simultaneously reveal the cards to each other. Anna's player reveals 10C. Luiz reveals the 8D. Luiz loses. But, his player decides to escalate the conflict because he doesn't want Anna to leave, and he doesn't want to accept the card Anna's player will put in his Repertoire.

Luiz's player says he will put his relationship with Anna on the line for another shot at the conflict. To explain his escalation, he says Luiz asks Anna to marry him, but only after the upcoming fight.

The players chose a new card, and reveal their choices to each other simultaneously. Anna's player reveals the 9♥, and Luiz plays the 9♠. It's a tie, so they reach for another card. This time, Anna has the 7♣, and Luiz's player has to play his 5♥. He loses again! He immediately loses his Relationship with Anna and he increases his Grief from 0 to 4. Life hurts!

Luiz's player can choose to escalate again, but he decides against it. Anna's player looks at both of their hands, and chooses the 3♣. Luiz's player must put the 3♣ in his Repertoire.

The players and referee narrate a few details about the argument between Luiz and Anna, and close the scene. The referee then begins to set a new scene for the other player. Luiz's player will have to wait his turn for another chance.

## PART 3: IN THE RING

**T**he players controlling fighters hold several cards in their Repertoires as the result of dealing with issues before the fight. They will now use their Repertoire cards in a series of rounds for the fight, playing cards as their fighters punch and defend.

### ROUNDS

By default, fights last up to 12 rounds maximum, but may end sooner. Alternatively, players may agree to fights that last anywhere from 4 to 12 rounds.

A round lasts until at least one fighter has played all of his available Repertoire cards for the round. Once a round ends, the players pick up all the cards they used during the round. Note, however, that one option may permanently remove cards from a player's Repertoire for remainder of the fight.

At the start of each round, the players begin their first *exchange*. Players controlling the fighters announce whether they wish to start the round on offense or defense.

- If both players announce they wish to start on offense, they both draw a new card from the deck and reveal their cards simultaneously. The player with the highest card is on offense, and the player with the lowest card defends. Players do not add this drawn card to their Repertoires. The card from the deck is reshuffled into the deck.
- If both players announce they wish to start on defense, the fighters circle but do not exchange blows. Both players discard one card for the Round. Players again announce their move as offensive or defensive. This may occur for several exchanges (see *Exchanging Blows*), even until at least one player runs out of cards and the round ends.
- If one player wishes to start on offense, while the other starts on defense, play proceeds and the players begin exchanging blows.

### EXCHANGING BLOWS

The player on offense plays a single card for his first punch, and the other player defends with his own single card for his defense. The card suits indicate the type of boxing move the

fighter uses. (See the description of Moves in *Part 1: In this Corner*.) *Players always reveal the cards simultaneously*. They then compare the cards. Their goal is to play a higher value card than their opponent and land a superior move, and potentially earn points to win the round or possibly even knock out their opponent.

If the card values are tied, neither player earns Points. However, the attacker maintains momentum and may continue on offense. Players discard their revealed cards, and the players choose a new single card for the next exchange.

If the defender's card value is higher than the attacker, he has successfully defended and now takes a turn at offense. Both players discard their card, and choose a new single card from their hands for the new exchange. Normally, defenders earn no points. However, if a defender successfully defends with his specialty Move (by playing the corresponding card suit), he earns 1 Point.

If the attacker's card value is higher, he maintains momentum and will continue to attack on the next exchange, setting up a possible combination punch. (See *Momentum & Combinations* hereafter.) It also means the attacker earns one or more Points for the round:

- The attacker earns one point if the defender's lower card is a different color than his card. For example, if the attacker punches with a Cross – a black card (spades) – and his opponent defends with a Parry – a red card (diamonds) – then the attacker earns 1 Point.
- The attacker earns two points if the defender's lower card is the same color as his card, but a different suit. For example, if the attacker punches with an Uppercut – a red card (hearts) – and his opponent defends with a Parry – a red card of the other suit (diamonds) – then the attacker earns 2 Points.
- The attacker earns three points if the defender's lower card is the same suit as his card. For example, if the attack punches with a Hook (Diamonds) and the defender defends with a Parry (Diamonds), then the attacker earns 3 Points.

In addition, any time an attacker earns points by using his specialty Move, he earns an additional 1 Point.

## MOMENTUM & COMBINATIONS

When an attacker successfully lands a blow, he wins *momentum* and can continue to attack in up to three exchanges total. In addition, the fighter may set up combination punches and earn bonus Points.

During any exchange, if the defender's move successfully defends the attacker's punches, the attacker loses momentum, and the defender becomes the attacker in the next exchange. If the attacker and defender tie, the attacker maintains momentum.

Any time a fighter lands successful punches in two or three consecutive exchanges, he lands a combination, or "combo."

For a two-punch combination, the player doubles his earned Points for the last exchange in the combo. For a three-punch combination, the player triples his earned Points for the last exchange. This multiplier should include any bonus points earned for the fighter's specialty.

Note that only one of these multipliers will happen in a combination exchange. A player cannot earn the two-punch combination bonus multiplier, and then go on to earn the three-punch combination bonus multiplier as well.

Tied exchanges disrupt combinations. If an attacker's first exchange ties, he continues his momentum, and still has a shot at a two-punch combination in his next two exchanges. However, if an attacker's second exchange ties, he may continue to punch. However, his chance at any combination is disrupted.

## Ending Exchanges

After the third exchange, the fighter becomes defender, and his opponent now gets a chance to attack in the next exchange.

## ENDING THE ROUND

When one player has used all the available cards in his hand, the round ends. However, if

other player has any cards remaining in his hand, he has a choice.

The player may earn 1 Point for each card remaining in his hand. The points do not threaten a knock out against the other player, but they do add to the fighter's Point total to help decide who wins the round.

Alternatively, the player may permanently remove a card from his hand to increase his Pain rating by one. The player may sacrifice only one card per round this way.

## Winning a Round

The fighter with the most earned points in a round wins that round. Players should keep track of how many rounds each fighter wins; the fighter with the most rounds wins the fight by decision at the end of the final round. If players have the same number of Points for the round, the round is a draw. Similarly, fights can end in a draw if fighters have equal numbers of victorious rounds. If there is a draw in a title fight, the champion retains his belt.

## KNOCK DOWN & KNOCK OUT

When an attacker scores a number of Points in a single exchange that meets or exceeds the opponent's Pain rating, the opponent is knocked down. Obviously, combinations are the most effective means to do knock down opponents.

If a player's fighter is knocked down, the fighter may also be knocked out. If the fighter has accumulated any Grief (that is, if his Grief rating is greater than 0), then add the Points from the exchange and the Grief together. If the total is 10 or greater, the fighter is knocked out and immediately loses the fight.

## Technical Knock Out

If a fighter is knocked down three times or more (but not knocked out) in a single round, he loses the fight by Technical Knock Out.