



Pretty Princess

Death Dowry

The Secret War



A One-Shot political player-conflict RPG. Intended for 4-6 players, taking about three hours.
No GM needed.

By Vitenka

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2	5. For revenge.....	12
Setting.....	2	6. Forced into it.....	12
Inspirations.....	3	4. How Does She Act?.....	13
Setting up the game.....	3	1. Brat princess.....	13
Things that you will need.....	3	2. Ice princess.....	13
Game Setup.....	4	3. Innocent.....	13
Player Setup.....	4	4. Sneaky.....	13
Playing The Game.....	5	5. Righteous.....	13
Objective.....	5	6. Noble.....	13
Play Order.....	5	Optional Rules.....	14
The End.....	5	Events.....	14
Actions.....	6	Event Generator.....	14
Spy (To Discover the plans of your fellow princesses).....	6	How do they Decide it?.....	14
Prepare (a new Conspiracy or Item).....	6	What is the Reward?.....	14
Defend (Against something you are sure about).....	7	Playing With A GM.....	14
Attack (Use conspiracies and Items to destroy your rivals).....	8	Bringing Samarkand To Life.....	15
Resolution.....	9	Where is the Meeting Place?.....	15
Getting Hurt.....	9	1. Palace - hidden room.....	15
The Reading of the Will.....	9	2. Palace - Open court.....	15
Characters.....	9	3. Palace - gardens.....	15
The Virtues.....	9	4. City - Rug shop.....	15
The Skills.....	10	5. City - Market.....	15
Passion.....	10	6. Desert - Oasis? Cave? Trackless waste?.....	15
Prattle.....	10	Who else is present?.....	16
Politics.....	10	1. Seemingly no-one else.....	16
Poison.....	10	2. Many well hidden spies.....	16
Creating Your Princesses.....	11	3. Courtiers.....	16
Where Does She Come From?.....	11	4. Common folk.....	16
1. Fair and white from the mysterious west.....	11	5. Many warriors.....	16
2. From the palaces of Samarkand.....	11	6. A monster.....	16
3. From the city of Samarkand.....	11	What is the Ostensible Purpose of the Meeting?.....	16
4. From the deserts, surrounding the city.....	11	Sudden Death.....	17
5. Africa/Egypt.....	11	Other Settings.....	17
6. Russia / China.....	11	Magical Princess Pretty Death Race 3000.....	17
Why is she involved in this competition?.....	12	Mad Science Boys.....	17
1. For the power.....	12	To Win The Royal Heart.....	17
2. For the riches.....	12	Quick Reference Rules.....	18
3. For love.....	12	Character Sheets.....	20
4. For someone else.....	12	Item Cards.....	22

An “[a tro challenge] my game-fu is stronger than yours” entry, by Vitenka.

Vitenka offers us a game about pretty princesses who have tea parties, gossip, and plot each other's baleful downfall so that they alone can marry the unsuspecting prince, kill him, and use his piles of jewels to pay off their debts. --Codex Arcanum

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Poetry Credit: “Golden journey to Samarkand “ - James E. Flecker
All else by Vitenka.**

Introduction

*We are the Pilgrims, master; we shall go
Always a little further: it may be
Beyond that last blue mountain barred with snow,
Across that angry or that glimmering sea,*

In this game, each player takes the part of a Princess, desperately seeking to vanquish her sisters and marry the Prince, assassinate him, inherit the dowry and then succeed to the throne.

You will do this by using unusual items, setting up complicated plots and spending the money you intend to inherit.

Setting

In this game, the details of the setting get filled in by the players during play – both by the item cards they create and through their descriptions of how they are used and interact.

The usual rules of shared world-building apply;

- Don't directly contradict facts that are created by another player.
- If someone adds on to things that you have created, then roll with it.

Of course – the goal is to have fun. So if one player introduces an element to the world that everyone else finds breaks the mood, then they may veto it.

But don't use this veto rashly. Just because my Samarkand is devoid of oracular cacti and talking spaceships doesn't mean that yours *has* to be. Do whatever you find fun!

If this is your first read-through, then as a quick guide:

- The rules are all contained in the “*Quick Reference*” section.
- Traditional 'RPG with a GM' play is an optional rule, and contained within the optional section.
- It's pretty hard to go wrong – the game will generally be fun even if you forget some of the rules; as long as you don't change your mind halfway through a game.
- If you want to prepare handouts, then the obvious things to copy are:
 - The character sheets
 - The item cards
 - The “Quick Reference” rules
 - The “The Skills” page, because it explains what each skill is for and gives example items.

Inspirations

*In the great city of Samarkand it came to pass that the ruler had only one son.
However, this prince was young and healthy and vigorous – and much to be desired.
All of the great princesses of the realm wished to be his bride.
Seeing in this situation an advantage, the ruler declared that his son would marry the most deserving princess,
she whose family could provide a suitable dowry.
To his surprise, several families stepped up to announce their interest.
Several princesses got a gleam in their eyes and came up with a plan...*

Instead of providing you with a single coherent background, this section will give you a huge grab-bag of stuff to inspire your own ideas.

Sources include 'Aladdin', '1001-nights', 'Sinbad', 'Ali-Baba and the 40 thieves', 'Lawrence of Arabia' and many more...

Our time period is set firmly in 'the mystical past' – a time of romance which never actually happened and which blends the best (or at least most interesting) periods of history and mythology.

So the Chinese are trading, the Persian, the Ottomans and even the Turkmen rule the Caliphate – but the Sultanate is strong; and equally T.E. Lawrence roams with the desert Bedouin; whilst Persia fights against the Roman legions, and to the east Genghis Khan's empire of the wolf prowls (and Timur will some-day make it his capital of the world) and the Shahanshah (king of kings) prepares to bring his Sassanid army to bear on the enemies of *Iran and not Iran*. Alexander the great, thankfully, already conquered these lands once and has gone off to India.

Samarkand is a great city, located on the river Zarafshan. As old as Rome or Babylon. The poets call it “Rome of the East, The pearl of the world”. It is first among cities – a major trading town on the Silk Road. (Incidentally, although these days it is in Uzbekistan, it would be better to say that it is within Persia, or the Satrapy, or the Caliphate.)

Through Samarkand pass many caravans; bringing wealth in silks and teas, spice and poppies. As well as ceramics, glazes, precious metals, medicines, perfumes, ivory, jewels, rare animals such as peacocks, lions and elephants and even Chinese inventions such as printing, paper making and gunpowder.

It is a place of mystery and contradiction.

Of cool marble halls and hot desert days. Of the Soukh and the Hareem.

Rugs are woven for the faithful to kneel upon, the artists always leave a flaw (for none is perfect but god) even as new weapons of war such as the stirrup and the deghan (a type of heavy cavalry) are invented. The printing press is stolen from the Chinese in a place where astronomy is advanced. A place where the disgraced are killed for their own honour, whilst guests are welcomed to share “obi rahmat” (mercy water).

Great black stallions jealously guard their herds and somewhere to the South the Sphinx stands watch over the Pharaoh's lands. Sharazad waits in her lonely tower, thieves run rings around the guards but wealth is in abundance. The dervishes whirl in their desert dance but the oasis is green. . The mountains are tall and snow covered, within await Griffins and Manitcora and the fabled Phoenix whilst winged serpents guard the fields of myrrh.

A place where, technically, there weren't competing Princesses. But if there were, they would surely have been like this.

Setting up the game

*White on a throne or guarded in a cave
There lives a prophet who can understand
Why men were born: but surely we are brave,
Who take the Golden Road to Samarkand.*

Things that you will need

- Fake money. (Monopoly money, or glass beads)
 - The smallest unit of currency in this game is “a priceless pile of gems”. Use the really high denomination notes. Or very shiny tokens.
- Tokens to count how many spies you have remaining.
- Index cards.
- Pens or Pencils.
- Players.
- Optionally:
 - A Leader-board. (A clipboard, or largeish piece of cardboard that you can pin cards to)
 - A single normal (six sided) die.

Game Setup

Set the size of the dowry, depending upon the desired length of game.

The larger the dowry, the longer the game will last. 7 is a good default number – but with a large number of players, you will want to reduce it slightly.

If you wish to change the duration of the game, then you can also set a target number for favours (say, ten) – and the first princess to get to that number wins.

For a typical game, of 4-6 players to last about three hours, choose a dowry size of 7 'piles of gems' (each of thousands of priceless gems) and a target of ten points of prince's favour.

Decide which optional scenario you are using, if any.

Set up the event cards, if you are using them.

Player Setup

This is the house of gentle learning. All the greatest young ladies of the realm are educated here. Over the course of seven years we teach the cardinal seven virtues of Gentleness, Loyalty, Intelligence, Artistry, Faith, Calmness and Honesty.

How could such foul rumours of our teaching the skills of poisoning have reached your ears? Certainly no young lady would be taught such things here.

My my. You are right. That is a large pile of gems....

Let us talk inside, over a glass cup of apple tea.

If you feel lazy, or uninspired then choose one of the sample characters.

Otherwise:

Prepare a character sheet – either using the ones in the back, or by dividing an index card into four areas (one for each skill) and take a leader-board card. (A blank card which will have your name(s) and current score on it.)

First; Write down your princess name. This should be long, flowery and include some titles.

For example: Princess sylvia of the Rose Garden

or maybe: Princess julia-sam-shar, duchess of the clouds

Or maybe use [A Princess Name Generator](#)

Also write this name, and your own name in **big** letters on your leader-board card.

Now: Decide upon your motive. The obvious (and default) motive is that you wish to rule the city. But perhaps instead you have a grudge against the other princesses, or wish to honestly bring the city to peace. Maybe you're simply daft and don't realise what you're getting into. Regardless, the result is the same – that you are going to compete.

See the “*Creating Your Princesses*” section for suggestions.

Next; take a moment to count your expected riches. (Take seven 'piles of gems' as your dowry). That money isn't technically yours until long after the wedding - but that's not going to stop you from spending it to ensure your success.

Now; decide what you did for your seven years at school, and write up your character sheet.

Secretly distribute seven points amongst the four skills on your character sheet.

(You may choose to have zero in an skill, but you are taking a risk doing so.)

Note down that you have five spy networks available.

You also have three points of favour with the Prince. (It is useful to use tokens for these, if you have enough different colours available, otherwise noting it on your leader-board card will do.)

Note: If playing with 3-4 players, increasing the number of starting favour points is a good idea, otherwise it can take a long time for anyone to win.

Finally; choose or create three items of equipment.

This uses the same rules as creating items during play, except that you don't have to pay for them.

The first player to finish writing their virtues and creating their items goes to the top of the leader-board, the next player goes in second place, etc.

Playing The Game

*Sweet to ride forth at evening from the wells
When shadows pass gigantic on the sand,
And softly through the silence beat the bells
Along the Golden Road to Samarkand.*

Objective

It has long been said that the most secret and most focussed plans are always the most potent. A careless plan will be discovered early and thwarted easily. To succeed, ones plans must be buried deep.

Your objective is to be the last princess standing, or failing that the most likely to succeed to the throne, or failing that to be teamed up with she who wins – or failing that you'd at least like to be alive.

Play Order

It is said by the wise that more plans are hatched within the walls of the hareem than in any nobles court. The truly wise, however, only say such things whilst the lady is not there to hear.

Play takes place in turns, going around the table. Start with whoever is highest in the succession. Don't bother changing order as the succession changes though - just keep going round anti-clockwise.

Whilst not taking their turn; the other players are heavily encouraged to talk and plan and conspire amongst themselves. Really. This is where the main game occurs. Plot and plan and promise mutual support against the clearly traitorous and backstabbing princess who is busy making new plots. Then say the same things to her whilst your co-conspirator is busy...

Still, occasionally you will want (and have the opportunity) to actually act.

On your turn, you may:

1. Spy: Investigate what the other princesses are doing.

You may also do **one** of the following:

2. Prepare: Create a new conspiracy, or acquire a new item.
3. Defend: Prepare a defence against a conspiracy that you know about.
4. Attack: Activate a pre-prepared plan.

After every player has had a turn, take a five minute break for all the Princesses to sip tea, eat loukoum (Turkish Delight) and discuss their business. Promises can be made, alliances formed and items traded on any terms the Princesses can agree upon.

Item cards, Dowry-gems, Information, Spy-networks and even the Prince's favour can all be traded freely, whether it is your turn or not, unless you're actually involved in an attack. (When you can't trade Prince's favours until the combat is over.) The only thing you can't trade is skills.

Trades are enforced – if you promise something, you have to give it. Honourless princesses who don't keep their word have no chance with the prince.

The End

In all these lands, these things are true. The songs of the bird will end, and so will you.

The game ends early, if the all princesses but one have been knocked out. That one, obviously, wins.

Alternatively, if one princess manages to meet the score condition (the number of prince's favour points chosen at the start of the game, or more than ten points ahead of all the other players); that one wins.

Otherwise, the game ends when real-life intervenes and you run out of time. Give each princess one turn as a final chance.

- The winning princess marries the prince, murders him, and keeps whatever remains of the dowry.
- She may choose one other princess and declare her to be her most loyal friend in the entire kingdom. This princess is pardoned of all crimes, and comes second.
- The other princesses are beheaded for, amongst other things, non-payment of debts to the dangerous men who have been doing their evil bidding. They lost.

Actions

Spy (To Discover the plans of your fellow princesses)

In the morning, my lady in waiting came to me, and as she served the tea she leaned over and whispered "They know of your plans with the mirror." And I smiled, for I had intended them to know this.
In the afternoon sun, a page came to me, and gave me a note which told me that they had discovered my plans for the horse. But I was not yet worried.
In the evening they discovered that I had talked to the Djinn; but the sun had already set.

Note that you can spy before you do some other action in your turn.

Spying costs one of your spy networks. Even if you don't habitually execute spies, you aren't use them again in this game.

Pick two other princesses. Each of them shows you their least well concealed (lowest value) card that you haven't already seen. (If they have several cards with the same concealment value, pick one at random.)

Note on it that you've seen it. (So they don't show you the same card over and over.)

They only show you defence cards if they've got no normal cards that you haven't seen yet – and show you one at random.

This is mainly a defensive thing to do – although since you can share that information with their enemies, it can be offensive. Of course, you can also lie, to trick them.

Note: It is deliberate that it is to your advantage to create a few low concealment plots that are more or less harmless, since the other players will discover these first; leaving your real plans hidden.

Prepare (a new Conspiracy or Item)

There is great beauty in an item crafted solely for the sake of love. There is greater beauty in an item crafted solely to destroy the one you hate.

Pay out one 'a pile of gems', from your dowry, to fund your new creation.

Take a new blank card.

On it, write a short description of your item or plan. It can be anything, and doesn't need to be obviously useful. (In fact, the less useful it looks the better – as long as you can think of a way to use it, since you want the other players to discount it.)

At the moment, your creation is going to be pretty badly hidden. You can do several things to hide it better. Keeping it a secret is key to increasing its power.

Simplest of all; the fewer people it is intended to harm the fewer spies will be interested in it and the fewer rumours will reach the ears of anyone.

Additionally; the fewer ways in which your item benefits you the less obviously suspicious it will be.

Make sure you write down the restrictions.

Make sure, also, that you leave some room on the card to note down which other players have seen it. (The back is useful for this.)

Then work out the concealment value:

- One, for the dowry-gems you spend on it.
- For each player that finds the card harmless, add one.
 - Obviously, you don't get a point for it being harmless to you.
 - You would get lots of points if you made it useless against everyone, but it would be useless. So don't.
- For each skill that this card cannot be used with, add one.

Note down the concealment value on the card.

This is a neutral thing to do. The cards can later be used offensively or defensively. It's just preparation. I'm not creating this object purely to attack you. Honestly.

(Seriously; you will want to create an item or two to use defensively – perhaps covering a skill you're not so good at, as well as cards to attack with...)

Defend (Against something you are sure about)

I love to thwart my opponents plans. Primarily because thwart is such a fun word. Thwart thwart thwart thwart...

Defences are created against specific card. This can be a card that has been used and revealed publicly, or a card which you have spied upon.

However, it can also be a card which another player has told you about. Beware! You might have been tricked!

Take a card, and write down that it is a defence against the particular card. Write up how you interfere with it.

This is, obviously, a defensive thing to do.

Note that creating a defensive card does not use up any of your dowry. It does use up your turn.

Attack (Use conspiracies and Items to destroy your rivals)

She brought me one day a fine bird in a gilded cage. A present fit for a rival. But its song was bright and to refuse would have been disgraceful. It sat in my window. Many passers-by remarked upon its song, and despite its source I was proud and accepted their praise. That night, the Sultan's guard came – for it was his bird. his morning finds me hanging in a cage. So it goes.

This is the way conflicts occur and are resolved.

Choose one of your cards and declare a target player - and choose which skill the conflict is going to use. (The card must not disallow either the player or the skill.)

- Announce, to everyone, what you are doing – and that they'll never be able to prove that you were behind it.
 - Specifically: Announce the name of the card, the skill used and the player you are using it against.
 - Explain how your card in some way harms your chosen target. The plan can be convoluted, even Byzantine – but it shouldn't be completely impossible.
- The card is shown to everyone and remains revealed.
- Work out your total by adding the score you have in that skill to the concealment value of the card. (The later a plot is discovered, the harder it is to defend against it.)
- Your opponents value is just their skill.

The conflict then proceeds in stages.

The current loser (or the defender in the case of a tie) may:

- Use up a defence card to destroy the card it defends against (this destroys both cards).
 - Laugh at the pitiful efforts of your competitor and explain how your counter deflects their strike.
 - Deduct the amount that card was adding from their total.
- Alternatively, you may throw in any other card that applies to the conflict.
 - Explain how your cunning plan actually harms your opponent.
 - Add the concealment value of that card to your total.
 - The card is shown to everyone and remains revealed.

Cards can only be used once in any given conflict.

But (unless they get been destroyed by being cancelled out by a defence card) they can be used again in a later conflict. Other players might want to think about creating defence cards, if you haven't already got them...

- As a last gasp defence, you can bribe any other player to intercede and throw in a card on your behalf.
 - The compensation to this player is whatever you negotiate.
 - **But:** favours from the Prince only transfer after the conflict is resolved. (So no, you can't say “Help me, and I'll give you my last favour and that way the Princess fighting me won't get it” - you have to **win** for that promise to have any meaning.)
 - Defence cards work as if you had played them.
 - Otherwise, the value of such cards is one less than the concealment value. (Plans are less effective when used on behalf of others.)
 - The card is shown to everyone and remains revealed.

Keep going until whoever is currently losing gives up, and does not wish anyone else to throw anything else in. (Or does so wish, but is out of luck, and friends.)

Note: The current winner isn't allowed to throw in extra cards just to increase the amount of damage they will do.

Resolution

In a speech, which to this day kills any bard that tries to learn it, the king said..

Well, only the queen understood what he said.

For the speech of the court is not like that of normal people - it can say one thing and mean quite another.

- The winner (attacker wins ties) chooses some number equal to or less than the amount they won by.
- The loser gives that number of “Prince's Favour” points to the winner.
- The winner also gets an extra point for free. Even if the person they beat had none left. The Prince thoroughly approves of Princesses who win fights.
- Update the leader-board to reflect the new standings.

Getting Hurt

The loser, if they do not have enough favours to pay up, crosses off one point from their skills for each point of remaining damage. (Start with the skill the conflict was in.) The winner does *not* get points of favour for this damage.

If you've got no more skills and still more damage to soak up, then you're knocked out of the competition.

The Reading of the Will

Though the speech of queens is often-times plainer than the speech of kings; still it is as the swirls in sand.

Dead characters can still have one final impact on the game. Their will.

As is the nature of such things, a Princess's will is long and complex and will take many years to be fully understood.

However, at any time the player chooses, their lawyers can finish interpreting a sub-clause and work out who some of their property belongs to.

Take some time to explain exactly why you feel she deserves it, and give one of your erstwhile (and surviving) competitors some of your property – cards or dowry or some or all of both.

You can also still be spied upon.

Characters

All men dream: but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dreams with open eyes, to make it possible. - T. E.

Lawrence

The Skills

Passion.	The ability to romance the Prince.
Prattle.	The ability to spread malicious rumours and hurt people socially.
Politics.	The ability to undercut a rivals support in the nobility.
Poison.	Somewhat more direct action.

Passion

Passion covers all ways and means of impressing the prince that you are the most worthy bride.

A conflict on Passion might be attempting to impress him, or his family – or alternately trying to prove that your rival is unfit.

Items of Passion are works of art, music and jewellery.

Sample passion items:

- “Love potion number nine” (to imply that a rival is less than untouched) – passion only.
- “Fireworks display” (Just for you, my love.) - passion, but also poison (point at rival and light blue touch paper...)

Prattle

Prattle covers all forms of gossip, rumour-mongering and reputation demolishing.

A conflict on Prattle might be shoring up your own reputation – or more likely demolishing someone else's.

Items of Prattle are usually innocuous – what is important is the tale spun around them. Also items such as pens, letters and such.

Sample prattle items:

- “A delightful Laugh” (to support you) – prattle only
- “A hideous dress” (to harm an opponent) – prattle and passion.

Politics

Politics covers all forms of complex manoeuvring that involves innocent third parties.

A conflict of Politics might be as direct as getting someone's family banished, or as obscure as suggesting that they supported an unpopular policy.

Items of Politics include all the symbols of rulership, but also those innocent third parties.

Sample politics items:

- “Alliance with the Griffons” - Politics to impress, or Poison (get them to attack)
- “A one way mirror” (to spy on the noble's conferences, or to imply that an opponent did...) - Politics or Prattle.

Poison

Poison covers all forms of direct action and assassination.

A conflict of Poison could, obviously, be attempting to poison someone – but it might also be hiring thugs to beat them up, burning out their house or just slapping them in the face.

Items of poison include all weapons, but especially the most subtle and secretive.

Sample poison items:

- “Poisoned apples” (just to be traditional) – Poison or Prattle (did you see what her stepmother gave me!)
- “Private army” (all forms of violence, but this one is purely to defend me. Honest.) - Poison or Politics.

RPG : Random Princess Generation

*We travel not for trafficking alone;
By hotter winds our fiery hearts are fanned:
For lust of knowing what should not be known
We make the Golden Journey to Samarkand.*

Your princess only actually needs those four numbers. But the game is a lot more fun if you flesh her out with an interesting name and a bit of a personality.

Ask yourself three things:

1. Where does she come from?
2. Why is she involved in this competition?
3. How does she act?

And here's some ideas. Pick an choose – or just roll a die and see what luck gets you!

Where Does She Come From?

1. Fair and white from the mysterious west.

You come from a mysterious land in the far off west. A land which must be very high, since it is said that snow falls even upon the fields! Shockingly fair of skin, you represent a rich and exotic treasure to this land far from your home.

2. From the palaces of Samarkand

This battle takes place on your home ground, for you have lived your whole life within the palaces of fair Samarkan. A confined life, but a pleasant one.

3. From the city of Samarkand

This fair city, its bustling markets, its tall spires and deep alleys - are your home. Perhaps you are the daughter of a grand merchant and lived in his walled compound of cool marble. Or perhaps you rose from the street, a gutter runner who lived on what she could steal.

4. From the deserts, surrounding the city.

A bedouin, you lived your life in the wild plains and deserts - a place where life is so hard that your worst enemy can expect to share your camp fire for a night. A cloudless place of endless planes, and plenty of ponies.

5. Africa/Egypt.

A princess from the far off lands of darkest Africa, your people remember the Pharaohs and are famed for their sailors. You are heir to a great trading family, and are well practiced in using your exotic appearance to spread rumours of sorcery.

6. Russia / China.

You come from the far end of the silk road, a princess from the land of silk and warlords. This place is, to you, primitive and uncouth. Where others see towering achievements, you see only tawdry aping of their betters. Make sure the other players know that you feel this way!

Why is she involved in this competition?

1. For the power.

You wish to take the throne, for the power it will convey. The power to shape destiny, to set in motion a dynasty that will be famous throughout history. You wish to mould this kingdom in your image.

2. For the riches.

You have that most base of motives - money. Money for the comforts it can bring and for the wonderful things it can bring to you from far-off lands. And to pay off the creditors, of course. Your family has little enough money these days.

3. For love.

How odd. The man you wish to marry, to whom your heart is devoted; is the crown prince. Strange to think that, amongst all these vultures, your motive is pure. And such a tragedy will be written when you have to murder him on your wedding night. A tale for the ages.

4. For someone else.

You act not on your own behalf, but as the agent of another. Perhaps you are a relative, or perhaps a trusted retainer. Maybe they don't know that you are doing it at all! Still, the best way to help them is to marry this prince.

5. For revenge.

You couldn't care a whit about this prince, or his measly kingdom - though his wealth is great enough that the risk gives the game spice. No, instead - his family have wronged yours, and you will have your revenge.

ALTERNATIVE:

You have a rival. You hate her and want her to suffer. To revenge yourself against her, you will snatch this prince from her and see her beheaded. Choose another player, and let rip. Be aware that this **will** destabilise the game and probably wreck your chances of winning.

6. Forced into it.

You really don't want to be here. But, nonetheless, here you are. Perhaps it was a mistimed boast, perhaps the city guard seek your head - whatever it was, somehow, you've ended up in this situation; competing against these princesses - and your only escape is to win and marry the prince.

4. How Does She Act?

1. Brat princess.

Scream and yell. Demand better cushions. Demand the servants be flogged. Demand ice in your tea. Ice from the tall mountains! Be unreasonable and overbearing. Nothing is ever good enough. You are, after all, a princess, and you demand that everything be perfect.

2. Ice princess.

Cool and calculating. Regal and calm. Unhurried, unruffled, unkind. Keep your eyes on the prize; and avoid distractions like being nice to people.

3. Innocent.

Somehow, amongst all of these horrible scheming princesses, you have kept a core of human decency. Sunshine, life and fluffy things - everything will come out rainbows and happiness in the end. Nothing bad will happen, and there's no need to be nasty about it. Make your items and show yourself the best princess, of course - but be sickeningly nice about it.

4. Sneaky.

See above: Little miss innocent. That's you. When you aren't giggling and dancing about laughing at the misfortune of others, anyway. Hide your true, devious, nature behind a (thin and often pierced, because if the other players don't see it, what's the point?) screen of niceness. But be evil and scheming and downright nasty. Try and perfect your cackle, maybe you can get a step-daughter when you're queen.

5. Righteous.

You are better than everyone, destined to rule - and you know it. There's no need to scream and shout about every little thing - but the others do sometimes need to be reminded of your divine rights. Everything shall be yours, and you can take great (and condescending) pity on those poor deluded fools who seek to dethrone you.

6. Noble.

Ah, you are a gem amongst gems - a princess worthy of the name. Everything you do is right; neither cruel nor overly merciful. You laugh when it would be polite to laugh, and order a beheading when such is needed. You would make a most wonderful queen. Your only flaw (for all things but god have flaw) is that you aren't quite smart enough to not let it show.

Optional Rules

The basic rules above should provide a fun experience. However, regular gamers might like to expand the game with the following extra options.

Events

Events can be added into the game in order to add spice. One of the best ways to do this is to write 'EVENT' on a few of the blank item cards and shuffle them in. Then, when a player draws a card to create a new item and an event card is revealed, take a gossip break and run one of the events.

Here are some suggested events:

1. Chinese prisoners are being paraded through the streets. Each princess is asked whether she would pardon them or have them executed. The majority decision stands. If the prisoners are pardoned then each Princess who chose to pardon them gains a spy network. If they are executed then each executing princess gains a gem.
2. The nobles hold a great meeting. They declare that only the purest and most noble shall succeed to be the Princes' bride. The Princesses must vote for the most stately and noble amongst them. That princess is rewarded with a spy network.
3. It is market day. The bazaar is bustling with merchants selling to each other, drinking tea and sherbet. Each player may sell a card for a pile of gems.
4. A great whirlwind approaches, and for a time the city is enveloped in sand; hiding many things. Each player can take one revealed card back into their hands, and hope that the other players forget what it was.
5. The silk caravan arrives. They bring wondrous fabrics and clothes. The Princesses must vote amongst themselves as to who has acted in the most queenly manner. She is rewarded with a great dress, and a pile of gems.
6. There is a great race held in the desert, as the Bedouin compete to see who has raised the most valiant stallions. Each player can sponsor a horse – it only costs a pile of gems. One random entrant wins the lot, and a point of princes favour.
7. The night of the restless dead comes around. The Princesses take part in a seance to talk the dead. If any players have been knocked out of the game, then they can come back to life, with one point in each skill.

Event Generator

Of course, you can create your own events. But if you're stuck for ideas, you can combine these.

How do they Decide it?

1. A show of hands. Each player, even the dead ones, votes. One vote per player.
2. Most revealed cards. Which of you has the most item cards face-up? You can always trade some now, if you like.
3. The pauper. Which of you has the least remaining cash? Perhaps now is a good time to buy things from the other players?
4. Bid for it. Who is willing to pay the most cash?
5. Most spies remaining. Have you managed to keep your spy network intact? Can you convince the other players to loan you theirs?
6. Who is the most badly wounded? Lowest total stats (Use this one to bring back dead players)

What is the Reward?

1. +1 spy
2. +2 cash
3. +1 cash, losers -1 cash (0 to abstainers)
4. Take a card from someone else.
5. +1 to one of your stats
6. Everyone may sell a card for 1 cash, winner may sell one for 2.

Playing With A GM

If you play with a GM, then the various cards can stay much more secret for much longer.

One important change is that the GM can keep track of the cards so that players are not immediately informed when they have been spied upon.

Also you can choose to have the actual statistics of cards only revealed to those actually involved in the attack; or even to keep everything except that a card was usable in that attack hidden.

Equally, although an attack will reveal the number of points a player has in a skill it will no longer reveal all of their skills.

This keeps the game more secretive and makes spying more important.

In addition to this; the GM can help bring the city of Samarkan to life by adding information about where the conflicts occur and running the short events as traditional roleplaying segments, playing up minor characters and such.

Bringing Samarkand To Life

Playing with a GM and need some ideas for portraying this fair land? One easy way to build it up is to flesh out the places that the princesses meet to discuss, bargain, threaten and cajole each other.

One way to come up with ideas for this is to split it up:

1. Where is the Meeting Place?
2. Who else is present?
3. What is the Ostensible Purpose of the Meeting?

Where is the Meeting Place?

1. Palace - hidden room

Your meeting occurs in a hidden room, deep within the less travelled corridors of the palace. Cloistered from sight, shaded by vines - it is crumbling, but is - usually - a place where you can avoid being overheard, and can trade secrets in relative safety.

2. Palace - Open court

Your meeting occurs hidden in plain sight - in the press of court. Perhaps a party is scheduled? Regardless, none would think it odd for princesses to meet and talk whilst all around nobles of every stripe do the same.

3. Palace - gardens

Your meeting occurs within the wide cool gardens of the palace, surrounded by exotic plants and animals brought from all across the world. This place provides a haven from the sun's heat at the height of the day, and many nooks and hidden places for private conversations.

4. City - Rug shop

The silk caravan arrives, bringing wondrous fabrics and clothes. The rug shops of the city become, for a while, THE place to be seen. And seen you are, as you wander the stacks of Ab's Teract. Four brothers famously fight over this shop, their inheritance; arranging rugs to best advantage, trying to claim the shop as their own. It seems... appropriate.

5. City - Market

It is market day. The bazaar is bustling with merchants selling to each other, drinking tea and sherbet. A fine place to stroll, with a small entourage of ladies in waiting. To view the fine goods being traded - that form this city's lifeblood. To talk, for a time, with other ladies who happen to be viewing the same wares.

6. Desert - Oasis? Cave? Trackless waste?

For some reason, you have all taken it into your heads to hold your meeting deep within the desert. Perhaps you hope that the ever-shifting sands will cover your tracks. Perhaps, you feel, that this far away from the palace your deeds will be hidden from the ever-present spies. Or perhaps you just felt that you couldn't visit this land without seeing the real home of the Bedouin.

Who else is present?

1. Seemingly no-one else

As far as you can tell, there is no one here except you princesses. No, no one hiding in the shadows, no spies, nothing. You can talk entirely openly.

2. Many well hidden spies

As far as you can tell, there is no one here except you princesses. No, no one hiding in the shadows, no spies, nothing. Well, just the ever-present spies. They're hidden though, and protocol holds that you can talk entirely openly.

3. Courtiers

There's a whole host of courtiers, servants and general hangers-on. The full bustle of court. No matter how little sense this seems to make - if important ladies travel, their baggage trains and syncophants are sure to travel with them.

4. Common folk

Someone has let in the normal, common folk of this city. Fat merchants, thin merchants, grubby little urchins, matrons and mothers - all and sundry.

5. Many warriors

There's a small army here! Someone is sending a not-so-subtle message by sending guards here. But you each know that it wasn't you. And since you still have your head, it wasn't any of the other players, either. Maybe one of the other innumerable plots the nobles are involved in has gone off the rails?

6. A monster

There's a monster here!

- The manticore (a man with a lions body and a spiked poisonous tail)
- Pahlavi Senmurv, the Saena bird (a falcon who spreads rain over all the earth)
- Azhdaha - the three-mouthed, the three headed, the six-eyed, who has a thousand sense - demon.

It doesn't appear to be interested in eating you right now, and instead listens in, amused, as you plot. You dare not antagonise it by leaving early...

What is the Ostensible Purpose of the Meeting?

1. The Princesses must decide upon the most stately and noble amongst them.
2. The nobles hold a great meeting. They declare that only the purest and most noble shall succeed to be the Princes' bride. Which of you is that?
3. Which of you has the best support at court?
4. Everyone loves the underdog - which of you has least chance to marry the prince?
5. Which of you has been most ruthless?
6. The Princesses must decide upon who is the Queenliest of them all - what meaning you attach to this is up to you.

Sudden Death

You can use this rule if you are short of time, or if all of the players prefer to spend forever preparing their positions and never actually attack.

Continue playing as above until the day of the wedding (make sure you have about half an hour of real time remaining) at which point all options other than 'Attack' vanish - carnage is then pretty much assured.

Once everyone is done playing their cards, the game is over.

Other Settings

The default setting is that of calm unruffled princesses who carefully lay their secret plans, and then stab each other ruthlessly, to a backdrop of arches and sand.

But other genres are equally possible.

Magical Princess Pretty Death Driver 3000

In this setting, the princesses destroy each other in a frenzy of cartoon fury; giving each other big bombs (spherical, with fizzing fuse, and 'Bomb' written on the side) as presents, dropping anvils on each other and so forth.

The princesses race spaceships for a living and must win the cup in order to win the hand of the prince of the cosmos (whose collection of almost-spherical balls of junk are a prize beyond price...)

Think 'Whacky Races' meets 'Wipeout'.

All it takes is changing the skills to be "Magical sparkles" "Slapstick Violence" "Sappiness" and "Driving fast". And encouraging people to be **silly** with their items.

The Prince alternates between a social useless klutz (whenever he actually talks to one of the Princesses) and the fine and noble dream figure that the Princesses imagine him to be.

Mad Science Boys

Children imbued with the power of *Science!* yet fearful of normal school days – and especially the beloved one they watch from afar. Luckily, aliens are invading the earth, replacing authority figures with strange pod-people (thus neatly explaining all the insane behaviours of adults, such as encouraging physical exercise and failing to recognise your innate brilliance).

You can use this opportunity to impress your beloved, discredit all others and save the day! And maybe get, you know, noticed. (Not kissed. It's not safe even to fantasize so far ahead.)

The skills are "Complex plans" "Nifty gizmo's" "Knowing Everything" and "Improbable Inventions of *Science!*" Playing defence cards largely means revealing your opponents plans to the ~~adults~~ aliens. The dowry is replaced with the raw unmitigated power of *Science!*

To Win The Royal Heart

This one is slightly different. One player plays the princess, whilst the rest play various courtiers who would like to become the prince. The princess wins by fighting off the advances of all the suitors, whilst another player can win by beating the princess. The princess starts with twice the normal number of items, and should encourage the courtiers to oppose one another – saying she does not want to marry another.

Courtier items should mainly be attempts to impress, rather than violence. The rest of the game is the same.

Quick Reference Rules

Setup:

7 x 'pile of gems' as the Dowry. (Default – less makes for a shorter game.)
7 points amongst four skills. (Don't tweak this, it makes people die too fast.)
5 spy networks.
3 Items.
3 Points of favour. (If you've got only 3-4 players, raise this, otherwise it'll take forever for anyone to win.)
Decide the win condition – default '10 points ahead of everyone else'.

Card value:

1 + number of blocked skills + number of players immune to it.
(One less when used in support of another player)

Turn:

You may spy once (two players each show you their least concealed card that you've not seen) (Uses up one spy network.)

And choose one of:

- You can make a new attack card. (Costs one 'pile of gems'.)
- You can make a defence card. (No cost.)
- You can attack one princess. (No cost.)

Combat:

Choose a skill. The **whole** combat uses this skill. All cards used must not have that skill blocked.

All cards used must not have the opponent listed as immune.

Attacker **must** use at least one card.

Current loser chooses whether, and what, card to throw in.

Defence cards destroy the card they target, and themselves.

Otherwise cards add in their value.

Or they may ask someone else to help. If they do, cards work the same, but at one less strength.

Continue until the current loser gives up.

Damage:

Do damage up to the difference in values – attacker may choose to do less.

Attacker gains a point of princes favour.

Defender pays damage in princes favour first (which is given to the attacker) and then in skill points (which is not)

Dead players may choose to give away their possessions – both money and cards – to any of the other players, as the rest of the game continues.

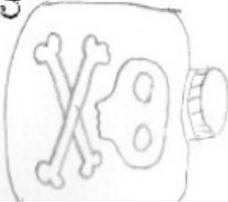
Winner:

The game ends early, if only one princess is left alive. That one, obviously, wins.

Alternatively, if one princess manages to get more than ten favour-points ahead of all the others; that one wins.

If you're about to run out of time, announce the game end – and then everyone gets one final turn.

Character Sheets

<p>N'ame:</p>  <p>Passion</p>		<p>N'ame:</p>  <p>Passion</p>	
 <p>Prettle</p>		 <p>Prettle</p>	
 <p>Poison</p>		 <p>Poison</p>	
 <p>Pollice</p>		 <p>Pollice</p>	

Item Cards

<p>What is it?</p> <p>What Skill(s)?</p>	<p>What targets it?</p> <p>Who's seen it?</p>	<p>What is it?</p> <p>What Skill(s)?</p>	<p>What targets it?</p> <p>Who's seen it?</p>
<p>What is it?</p> <p>What Skill(s)?</p>	<p>What targets it?</p> <p>Who's seen it?</p>	<p>What is it?</p> <p>What Skill(s)?</p>	<p>What targets it?</p> <p>Who's seen it?</p>