

Pretty Princess Death Dowry

The Secret War Playtest Edition

A One-Shot political player-conflict RPG. Intended for 4-6 players, taking about three hours.
Can be run with or without a GM.

By Vitenka

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

Using:

- Tied mechanic (conspiracies, concealment)
- Creative equipment (all does the same stuff, but is declared to have a target player it is effective against)
- Secret War (players fight each other, the more secretively the more effective they are)
- Contested Succession (what they are fighting over, also hitpoints)
- And, of course, the dowry.

Poetry Credit:

“Golden journey to Samarkand “ - James E. Flecker

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 the great city of Samarkand it came to pass that the ruler had only one son.

However, the 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 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...

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.

They do this by using unusual items, setting up complicated plots and spending the money they intend to inherit.

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)
- Index cards.
- Pens or Pencils.
- Players.

Game Setup

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

The larger the dowry, the longer the game will be.

For a typical game, of 4-6 players to last about three hours, a dowry size of 10 piles (each of thousands of priceless gems) is about right.

Decide which optional scenario you are using, if any.

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).

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 http://www.quizopolis.com/princess_name.php

Next; take a moment to count your expected riches. (Take the tokens). 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 the seven virtues between the four skills (Passion, Prattle, Politics and Poison) on your card. Write them in.

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

Finally; create up to three items of equipment.

This uses the same rules as creating items during play.

Although expensive, you will find it well worth purchasing at least one of these items.

The first player to finish writing their virtues and creating their items goes to the top of the succession, 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.*

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.

Objective

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 harem 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 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. Prepare: Create a new conspiracy, or acquire a new item.
2. Spy: Investigate what the other princesses are doing.
3. Defend: Prepare a defence against a conspiracy that you know about.
4. Attack: Activate a pre-prepared plan.

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 all princesses except one are killed. That one, obviously, wins.

Otherwise, the game ends when real-life intervenes and you run out of time.

If any princesses are left alive, the one highest in the succession 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.

The other princesses are beheaded for, amongst other things, non-payment of debts to the dangerous men who have been doing their evil bidding.

Actions

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 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, you can simply pay. Money can close mouths, one way or another.

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

Thirdly, 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.

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.

Then work out the concealment value:

- The number of piles of dowry-gems you spend on it. (Minimum of one.)
- For each skill that this card cannot be used with, add one.
- 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.

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 something to attack with...)

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.

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

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

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

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

Defend (Against something you are sure about)

The best offence is a good defence. No one says that, because they're all too busy killing each other.

Take a card, and write down that it is a defence against the particular card. Write up how you interfere with it. Defences are created against specific card. The easiest way to do this is to have previously spied and seen that card; however you can speculatively write down defences against thing that you've only heard about. Beware! You might have been tricked!

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. This 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.

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.

Work out your total by adding the number of virtues you have in dedicated to 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.
 - If a plan is particularly audacious or fun – if the other players really enjoy it – add a bonus point.
 - 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 they negotiate.
 - Defence cards work as if you had played them.
 - Otherwise, the concealment value of such cards is reduced by one.

Keep going until whoever is currently losing does not wish to throw anything else in.

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

The winner (**attacker** wins ties) decides whether they want to send the loser to the back of the succession (Everyone else moves up one) or if they would prefer to move up to the head of the succession (Pushing everyone else back one) themselves. One only.

The loser also takes damage equal to the difference in their scores.

Taking Damage

You take damage by losing an attack, or by being attacked and losing.

You can pay off this damage by:

- Paying dowry. Each pile of gems eliminates one point of damage.
 - The attacker takes the first pile of gems that you spend this way. Only one.
- Crossing off virtues from the relevant skill. Each virtue you cross off eliminates one point of damage.
 - Once you've run out of virtues in that skill, you can cross off virtues from other skills instead.

Note that crossing off virtues reduces your ability to attack and defend on that skill in the future; whilst paying out dowry leaves you less able to buy attacks.

If you've got no dowry, and no virtues left and there's still damage left – you're out. You are socially, romantically, politically or physically dead.

Characters

The Virtues

*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.*

The seven virtues, taught to all young princesses are:

Gentleness, Loyalty, Intelligence, Artistry, Faith, Calmness and Honesty.

You know that these are the virtues shared by your competitors. What you don't know is which skills they have applied them to.

When attacking or defending, you should, when possible, explain how the appropriate virtues help you. When you take damage, crossing off a virtue, the victor of the conflict should explain how their attack has indelibly damaged your reputation as having that virtue.

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 rival's 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

In particular, the “With a GM” option makes the game play in a more traditional manner and is advised.

Optional Rule: 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.

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

In addition to this; the GM can help bring the city of Samarkan to life by adding information about where the conflicts occur and introducing short events.

- As the warm night draws in, the sands whisper dances into the ears of the young.
 - Attacks specific to romance have a bonus.
- Chinese prisoners are being paraded through the streets. Each princess is asked whether she would pardon them or have them executed.
 - Double up 'gentleness' or 'loyalty', depending on which they choose.
- It is market day. The bazaar is bustling with merchants selling to each other, drinking tea and sherbet.
 - If a player wants, they can sell a card for a pile of gems.

Optional Rule: 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.

Optional Rule: Grudges

This rule is useful if you find that players are unwilling to defend, preferring to only ever attack, instead. The rule is: If someone attacks you, and you destroy a card with a defence card in that conflict, then you are rewarded with a grudge against them. A grudge card can only be used on that person, and cannot be destroyed with defence cards – but it only has a concealment value of one.

Todo:

Todo: Character Sheet
Todo: Quick cheat-sheet of rules.
Todo: Add more flavour text.
Todo: Sample characters.
Todo: Sample plots
Todo: Sample items
Todo: Sample play
Todo: Add events, add sequel possibilities.
Todo: Add design notes, rationale, what bits can be omitted.
Todo: Layout.
 Todo: Add boxouts for optionals, hints and design notes.
 Todo: Cover.
 Todo: More art.

Optional setting Discussion:

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. Using an entirely different meaning of 'Pretty Princess' we get a 'magical girl' game, where the princesses destroy each other in a frenzy of cartoon frenzy; 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. All it takes is changing the skills to be “Magical sparkles” “Slapstick Violence” “Sappiness” and “Explosives”. And encouraging people to be SILLY with their items.

Optional Rule: Infallible Virtue

{Design note; I was trying to make virtues be the important thing – but I couldn't make it work GM-less and I couldn't come up with a decent way to discover where each player had their virtue beyond 'attack them and see'. Still, I like this rule and although I can't replace the skill/player bonus mechanic with it, I'll leave it here as an optional.}

This is an optional rule only because it's a little bit complicated, and people are likely to forget about it if the play gets fast.

Simply – you can have an additional point of concealment for every two virtues you select that your item or plan is vulnerable to.

If it turns out, when you try to use the card that your opponent has one of those virtues **active** in the skill you choose to make the conflict about, then your attack fails. (That is, they assigned the virtue there, and haven't crossed it out due to damage yet.)

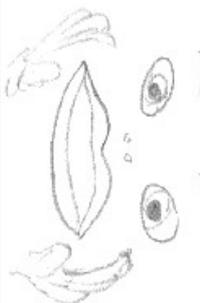
No one takes any damage, but you have just revealed one of your master plans, and made an enemy, to no effect.

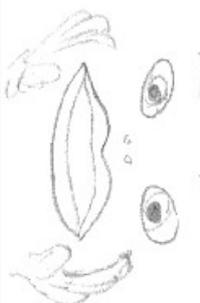
So be careful when choosing virtues to be vulnerable to.

Character Sheets

Name:	
 <p>Passion Prettle</p>	 <p>Poison Pollices</p>

Name:	
 <p>Passion Prettle</p>	 <p>Poison Pollices</p>

Name:	
 <p>Passion Prettle</p>	 <p>Poison Pollices</p>

Name:	
 <p>Passion Prettle</p>	 <p>Poison Pollices</p>

Item Cards

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

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