



Star-Crossed Lovers:



A role-playing game of courtship in Shakespeare's time

By Jarad Fennell

Inspirations and Credit: *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*. *Kagematsu*, a game by Danielle Lewon, and *Misspent Youth*, a game by Robert Bohl. The guys with which I play: Remi Treuer, JJ Lanza, Rich Rogers, and Arnold Cassell.

Premise-

Your father has had enough. It is time that you married.

After a fierce negotiation, he has arranged for you to visit Signore Torregrossa at his villa to find a spouse. The signore possesses fabulous wealth and a brood of unwed children. Although the plans for the match have been drawn up already, during this visit you should impress upon the signore that you will make a suitable spouse for his child, and it would be in your best interest to have a word or two with your intended as well.

In this game, the players take the part of Renaissance suitors, courting both the favor of their father-in-law and the affections of their bride or groom-to-be. While the rules assume a group of male suitors suing a father for the hand(s) of his daughter(s), the game could just as easily center around a group of ingénues or a mixed group visiting the villa with marriage on their minds. The action takes place over the course of a week spent at the default setting of an Italian villa. While the match is all but assured due to careful planning on the part of the suitors' parents, what the suitors do and say during this week will determine the future happiness of their marriages.

One player takes the role of the Patriarch (Signore Torregrossa in the default setting) and his children, while the other players take on the role of suitors. The game is divided into five Acts, in which each suitor frames a particular scene (with the exception of the Third Act, in which the Patriarch frames a scene for each suitor). In each scene, the suitor will describe how he or she will attempt to earn the Esteem of the Patriarch or to win the Affection of one of his children. Whether the suitor gains Esteem or Affection (both are necessary in near equal amounts to achieve a good match) is determined by a die roll. The player portraying the Patriarch/children determines when the suitor has done enough to make the roll. A failed roll does not necessarily end a scene, as the suitor may choose to Forswear a promise to the Patriarch or demonstration of love to an intended in order to make a second roll (see below). Play ends, and the outcome of each marriage match is determined, when each suitor has narrated a scene during each Act and tallied up their Esteem and Affection scores for the game.

Setup & Character Creation-

The Patriarch and His Children

One potential avenue for this game is to explore the often mutually exclusive ideas of marriage as a practical alliance versus marriage as a celebration of romantic love, and how contending interpretations of marriage are skewed by age. This game presents a marvelous opportunity for role-reversal, allowing younger generations to take the part of parents with grown children, and for older generations to relive what it was like to be a young lover. Therefore, it is recommended that the youngest player at the table play the Patriarch (Signore Torregrossa) and his children, while the other players portray the suitors.

This player is responsible for role-playing both the Patriarch and his children, sometimes in the same scene. The Patriarch character needs promises of security for his children to entrust them to the suitors. Successful promises will increase the Patriarch's Esteem for a suitor. The children characters need demonstrations of

passion from suitors that hint at future happiness. Successful demonstrations will allow suitors to secure the affections of one of the patriarch's children. The Patriarch player determines when a suitor has role-played a promise or demonstration enough to allow for a die roll. If the suitor fails the roll, the Patriarch player narrates how the suitor has failed in his efforts. If the suitor was attempting to impress the Patriarch with promises regarding his wealth or political connections, the Patriarch describes circumstances which dramatically destroy the suitor's credibility. For example, the suitor may claim to be friends with a famous painter and then fail the roll to impress the Patriarch. The Patriarch can then relate how that painter appears at the villa the following day and does not know the suitor. Alternately, if the suitor was making a demonstration of love toward an intended spouse and fails the roll, the Patriarch player may narrate how the object of the suitor's affections reacts to his or her protestations of love with incredulity or anger.

It is assumed that the Patriarch will have one child for every suitor in the game. Alternately, the groups of players may opt for a highly competitive game in which the suitors vie for the hand of one child, a variation we'll call *Much Ado about the Shrew* (in this variation, the player with the highest combined Esteem + Affection wins the Shrew, but the match's outcome is determined as usual). The Patriarch player is responsible for naming each one of his children, picking a Nature for the Patriarch and each child (see below), listing a few role-playing tags for each one, and keeping track of the Patriarch's Esteem and each child's Affection for each suitor.

Please note that the Patriarch player still has an immense amount of latitude in playing the signore. The signore could be a very helpful character, trying to steer each suitor to what he thinks is a suitable match, or he could be extremely protective of his children and hostile toward the suitors, or he could be mercurial, picking favorites while rejecting others on a whim.

The Suitors & Their Exile

The rest of the players take the part of the suitors, young men (and possibly women), trying to find love and happiness in a culture in which the older generation views marriage primarily as a business arrangement. Each player may flesh out their suitor in whatever way they wish, by picking an appropriate name, developing a personal and family history, and selecting role-playing tags as they see fit. These details may be made at character creation or during play. However, there are a few determinations that must be made before play begins.

First, the suitor should pick one of the four Natures (sanguine, choleric, melancholic, or phlegmatic) listed in the section below. While the Patriarch player will keep the Natures of the Patriarch and his children secret, the suitors should make their Natures public knowledge so that the Patriarch player can check for compatibility during Promise and Demonstration rolls. In addition to affecting these rolls, a suitor's Nature works as a general guide to role-playing that character.

Second, each suitor has four points to divide between a score in Standing and Passion. At least one point must be put in each, so the suitor's beginning score for each will be between one and three. A suitor's Standing score is the base number of dice that character employs (added to any number of dice from the suitor's Esteem pool) when making a Promise roll, while Passion indicates the base number of dice used (added, if desirable, to any number of dice from the suitor's Affection pool) when making a Demonstration roll. Therefore, a suitor with a Standing 3 and Passion 1 would roll three dice (+ any Esteem) while making a Promise, and one die (+ any Affection) when making a Demonstration. While failure means that any Esteem or Affection dice risked on a roll are lost, a suitor will never lose dice from Standing or Passion.

Third, each suitor should determine why their family has sent him or her to the villa, essentially exiling them from home, and told him or her not to return without a spouse. The suitor might be an unrepentant dreamer, a womanizer, a ne'er do well, or a wit and confirmed bachelor. The reason for the suitor's exile provides a dramatic hook for the other suitors (e.g. "I heard you couldn't be trusted around another man's daughter, Signore Petruccio") and for the Patriarch player when narrating a failed roll (e.g. "Yes, yes,

Signore Niccolo, I'm told your family is very wealthy, but that you've been cut off from the family fortune due to your incessant gambling. Did I hear wrong?"

The Four Natures:

Every character portrayed by a player must have a Nature. Natures are compared when a player makes a Promise or Demonstration roll. Compatible Natures, when both the suitor and the Patriarch or intended has the same Nature, penalize the Patriarch player by one die (making it easier for a suitor to succeed), while incompatible Natures (Sanguine vs. Melancholy, Choleric vs. Phlegmatic) give the Patriarch player one additional die to contest a suitor's roll. Suitors must make their Nature public, at least to the Patriarch player. The Patriarch player keeps the Nature of his characters a secret.

The Sanguine Temperament

The sanguine temperament is associated with an excess of blood, the liver, and the element of air. The sanguine tend to appear flushed and full-bodied. Their demeanor is always romantic, affable, generous, positive, and irresponsible (e.g. Romeo and Juliet).

The Choleric Temperament

The choleric temperament is associated with an excess of yellow bile, the spleen, and the element of fire. The choleric tend to appear red-haired and slight in figure. Their demeanor is always violent, aggressive, and ambitious (e.g. Petruchio and Katherina).

The Melancholic Temperament

The melancholic temperament is associated with an excess of black bile, the gall bladder, and the element of earth. The melancholic tend to appear pale and thin. Their demeanor is always introspective, sentimental, and excessive (e.g. Prince Hamlet and Ophelia).



The Phlegmatic Temperament

The phlegmatic temperament is associated with an excess of phlegm, the lungs, and the element of water. The phlegmatic tend to appear corpulent and clumsy. Their demeanor is always reluctant, suspicious, and disengaged (one could argue that Benedick and Beatrice are phlegmatic lovers because they are timid about marriage).

Standing & Passion

Each suitor has two scores at the beginning of the game, Standing and Passion.

Standing is a measure of the suitor's (and more importantly, his family's) status in the social order. A low score in Standing (a one) represents a family fallen on hard times, an average score (a two) a respectable family with moderate wealth, and a high score (a three) indicates a family with a noble pedigree, great wealth, or both. Standing represents the base number of dice a suitor can employ when making a Promise roll without risking a loss in Esteem.

Passion is a measure of a suitor's personal drive, initiative, feeling, or wit. Beyond physical beauty, it is what people find attractive in a lover. A low score in Passion (a one) reveals a suitor incapable of expressing his or her desires, an average score (a two) signifies a man or woman who can rise to the occasion when the spirit

moves them, while a high score (a three) augurs a suitor of great seductive prowess. Passion is the base number of dice a suitor can call upon when making a Demonstration roll without risking a loss in Affection.

Esteem & Affection

If Standing and Passion are the tools with which a suitor plays the game of love, Esteem and Affection are means by which he or she keeps score. Both represent a die pool that a suitor acquires through winning Promise and Demonstration rolls. Once he or she has won a roll or two, Esteem or Affection dice may be wagered and rolled in addition to Standing or Passion when a suitor attempts more difficult Promise and Demonstration rolls.



Esteem is a measure of the Patriarch's admiration for the suitor, based upon the suitor's ability to boast of his family connections and show off his wealth through Promise rolls.

Affection is a measure of an intended's attachment to a suitor, based upon a suitor's ability to impress the intended of the suitor's love and faithfulness through Demonstration rolls.

At the end of the game, the difference between a suitor's Esteem and Affection dice determines the fate of their match. In games with more suitors than there are intended (as in *Much Ado about the Shrew*), the suitor with the highest combined Esteem and Affection gets first pick of the intended, followed by the suitor with the next highest combination, and so on in descending order.

The Structure of the Game-

Players are encouraged to experiment with the duration of play, but the standard game utilizes the five-act structure found in Shakespearean plays such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*. In addition, each Act contains special rules that simulate the rising action, crisis, and falling action of these plays, which groups may choose to utilize or disregard as they see fit.

The Five Acts:

Arrivals and Introductions

The various suitors arrive at the Patriarch's villa, and are introduced to his extended family. Each suitor frames a scene describing the circumstances of his or her initial entrance, and makes his or her first overture, either to the Patriarch or to one of the intended. Play proceeds from the youngest player (not character) to the oldest player.

The Masque

On the first night after the arrival of the suitors, the Patriarch hosts a feast and masquerade ball. Suitors may move about incognito, and there are plenty of secluded areas in the garden where they can approach an intended or intrigue with their host.

For this Act only, suitors gain +1 dice when rolling all demonstrations of Passion.

Temptations and Reversals

Once each suitor has had a chance to succeed (or fail) with an intended and has made an ally (or enemy) of the Patriarch, there is a climatic reversal in their fortunes. The suitor who has pathetically failed in his or her wooing during the first half of the play enjoys a rash of good fortune, while the suitor whom dame fortune has smiled upon until now finds that she has suddenly turned from him. Rather than frame their own scenes, the suitors have scenes framed for them by the Patriarch, each of which introduces some twist, reversal, or challenge to their plot.

For this Act only, the Patriarch frames a scene for each suitor. In addition, the player with the highest cumulative Esteem + Affection is penalized 2 dice for every roll, while the player with the lowest cumulative Esteem + Affection is awarded 2 bonus dice for every roll.

Parting Is Such Sweet Sorrow

Some immanent event threatens to part the lovers for good, but fate seems determined to bring them back together, for good or ill. Just before the suitors depart to return home, letters of credit arrive, a former nursemaid reveals that the suitor is heir to a great fortune, or a villain confesses his machinations.

For this Act only, suitors gain +1 dice when rolling all promises associated with Standing.

Weddings and Funerals

The suitors prepare for their nuptials, and are allowed one last roll to patch up their relationship with the Patriarch or to come to an understanding with their intended. After each suitor plays out his or her scene, the players compare their final Esteem pool with their Affection pool and consult the chart below to determine the outcome of their match. Even though the outcome is determined, players are encouraged to narrate a conclusion to their tale.

All's Well That Ends Well: The Match

<i>Difference, Esteem vs. Affection</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Positive Esteem, Zero Affection</i>	<i>A Cuckold</i>	<i>The suitor makes a potent political and financial match, but is trapped in a loveless marriage. His or her significant other is infamous for infidelity.</i>
<i>Esteem +3 or more over Affection</i>	<i>Unhappy Match</i>	<i>Although the marriage proves lucrative the new husband and wife are, at best, business partners and, at worst, two enemies arrayed against each other, suffering frequent war and intermittent peace.</i>
<i>Esteem & Affection within +/- 2</i>	<i>Wedded Bliss</i>	<i>The two lovers complement each other personally and support each other in their worldly careers.</i>
<i>Affection +3 or more over Esteem</i>	<i>Elopement and Permanent Exile</i>	<i>Spurning the wishes of their families, the couple flees to another country where they live happily in poverty.</i>
<i>Positive Affection, Zero Esteem</i>	<i>A Double Suicide</i>	<i>Despite a herculean effort, the fabled passion of the lovers is too rare for this harsh world, and they make a pact to end it all rather than survive apart.</i>

Playing the Game-

Play within each scene follows a particular order, which is broken down below for convenience.

Framing Scenes

From youngest to oldest, each player frames a scene for his or her suitor which introduces a location, a cast of supporting characters (the framing player may invite other players to portray these extras: most often servants and buffoons), and a challenge he or she is attempting to overcome. This challenge will involve either a Promise directed at the Patriarch, or a demonstration directed at one of the intended.

Promises and Demonstrations

Each Promise and Demonstration has a Risk level associated with it. The Risk level determines how many dice the Patriarch rolls against a suitor during that challenge. In order to attempt a roll, the suitor must also wager and roll a number of Esteem or Affection dice equal to the Risk level. Consult the chart below to determine the number of dice risked.

Promise (roll Standing + risked Esteem)	Risk	Demonstration (roll Passion + risked Affection)	Risk
Boast of personal character, skill, or learning.	0/1*	Offer a courtesy, flatter, or engage in banter.	0/1*
Boast of personal wealth or connections.	1-2	Offer a minor, sentimental gift.	1-2
Boast of business acumen.	3	Offer to give something precious.	3
Boast of political connections.	4	Vanquish a rival through skill or wit.	4
Describe advantages of alliance.	5	Confess undying fidelity.	5

*The Patriarch player always rolls at least one die against a suitor. Suitors always gain at least one point of Esteem or Affection from a successful roll, even if they wager nothing.



Making the Suit Roll

Once the Patriarch player asks the suitor to roll, the suitor identifies the Risk level of the action, wagers a number of Esteem (for Promises) or Affection (for Demonstrations) dice equal to the Risk level, adds these wagered Esteem dice to Standing or Affection dice to Passion, and then rolls.

Comparing Natures for Compatibility and Narrating Outcomes

The Patriarch player will roll a number of dice equal to the Risk level of the action. The Patriarch player compares the suitor's Nature to that of either the Patriarch character (for a Promise) or an intended character (for a Demonstration). If the Natures are the same, the Patriarch player rolls one less die than normal. If the Natures are opposed, the Patriarch player rolls one additional die. Remember, the Patriarch player always rolls at least one die.

Any number higher than average on a die is considered a success and the player with the most successes wins the roll. If the players are using d6s, any dice showing 4 or more is a success. If the Patriarch player and the suitor tie, the Patriarch wins. If the suitor wins the roll, he or she narrates the successful outcome of the scene. If the Patriarch player wins the roll, he narrates the suitor's failure.

Forswearing Your House, Forswearing Your Heart

If a suitor fails a roll, he or she has the option of framing an immediate follow-up scene and roll by Forswearing. If the suitor Forswears a Promise, he or she crosses it off and may not attempt it again in the

game, but may making a follow-up Demonstration roll. If the suitor Forswears a Demonstration, he or she loses the ability to attempt that action again, but may make an immediate follow-up Promise.

Gaining Esteem and Gaining Affection

If the suitor succeeds at a Promise roll, he or she gains Esteem equal to the Risk level. If the suitor succeeds at a Demonstration roll, he or she gains Affectionate equal to the Risk level. If the roll fails, the suitor loses any Esteem or Affection that he or she wagered. On a successful roll, the suitor always gains at least one point of Esteem or Affection, even if he or she wagered nothing.



Patriarch Sheet

Father's Name (Nature)

Children (Nature): Current Affection

Suitors (Nature): Current Esteem



The Five Acts

Arrivals and Introductions

The Masque

For this Act only, suitors gain +1 dice when rolling all demonstrations of Passion.

Temptations and Reversals

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For this Act only, suitors gain +1 dice when rolling all promises associated with Standing.

Weddings and Funerals

The Four Natures

The Sanguine Temperament

Romantic, affable, generous, positive, and irresponsible. -1 dice vs. Sanguine, +1 die vs. Melancholic.

The Choleric Temperament

Violent, aggressive, and ambitious. -1 dice vs. Choleric, +1 die vs. Phlegmatic.

The Melancholic Temperament

Introspective, sentimental, and excessive. -1 dice vs. Melancholic, +1 die vs. Sanguine.

The Phlegmatic Temperament

Reluctant, suspicious, and disengaged. -1 dice vs. Phlegmatic, +1 die vs. Choleric.

Suitor Sheet

Name:

Nature:

Standing:

Passion:

Framing a Scene:

1. Describe the setting and characters involved, and assign supporting parts to other players.
2. Announce whether the Challenge will be a Promise or a Demonstration.
3. Narrate the suitor's actions until the Patriarch calls for a roll.
4. Gather Standing dice (for a Promise) or Passion dice (for a Demonstration). Determine the number of Esteem dice (for a Promise) or Affection dice (for a Demonstration) that must be wagered, and add that to the suitor's pool.
5. Roll against the Patriarch's player. Every die that results in the top 50% is a success (4+ on a d6, 5+ on a d8, etc). Compared successes on the roll to the Patriarch's roll. The player with the most successes wins the challenge.
6. If the suitor's roll was unsuccessful, subtract the number of Esteem or Affection wagered. If the suitor's roll was successful, double the number of Esteem or Affection wagered.



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