

The Bullywug Princess

by Nick Wedig

A secret role
storytelling
game for
5-8 players

Premise

Once upon a time, a Monarch built their castle near a swamp. In the swamp lived the bullywugs, a froglike people known for being disappointing in every way. Every human would say that bullywugs were stupid, ugly, cruel, unimaginative, ineffectual, greedy, lazy, nasty, brutish and short. Bullywugs have their own opinion on these matters, but the humans don't really care what a bunch of swamp-dwelling frog people think.

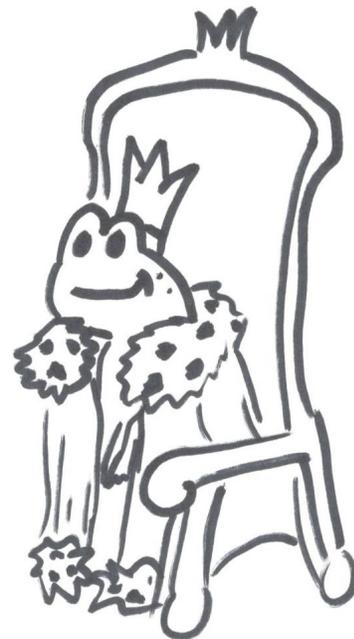
One day, an evil Witch attempted to transmogrify the Monarch into one of the loathsome bullywugs. The spell went awry, and hit the wrong target, thereby turning the Monarch's child, the Princess, into a frogperson instead.

Fortunately, the Monarch possessed a magical potion, which was said to transform any froglike creature into a human being. Unfortunately, no one could be certain which bullywug was really the Princess. Several bullywugs claimed to be the transformed Princess, and there was no apparent way to tell which was which.

And so the Monarch set forth a decree: In accordance with strict ancient laws, there would be a series of five challenges, one each day of the spring festival. Each contest would be constructed to focus on the tasks the Princess was most skilled at. The winner of the challenges would receive the potion and be transformed into a human being.

Further complicating matters, the Witch transformed themselves into a bullywug as well, to sabotage the contest from the inside. If the Witch won the contest, the Princess might never be human again. Worse, the Witch could use black magic to kill one bullywug of their choice, so if they discovered which one was the Princess, the Princess might not live to end the contest!

The Bullywug Princess is an RPG for 5-8 players. It should only take 2-4 hours to play through a complete fairy tale. You'll need one or two decks of regular playing cards and 12-15 tokens of some sort (pennies work great).



Setup

Combine together two decks of regular playing cards. Remove all Jokers except one.

Prepare the role cards. Separate out one King of Hearts, one King of Diamonds and one Joker from the deck. Place those together in a pile of role cards. Then add enough random Spades cards to the role cards that there are as many role cards as you have players.

Shuffle these together and give one to each player.

OPTIONAL RULE: If someone wants to play the Monarch, they can ask for that role and receive the King of Hearts before the other cards are handed out randomly.

The player with the King of Hearts card should reveal that card. They will play the Monarch and administer the challenges.

All the other players must keep their role cards secret until the Epilogue section. Your role card identifies who you really are, although as far as anyone else can tell you're just another bullywug.

Shuffle the rest of the deck into a draw deck. Each character that is apparently a bullywug should draw a card from the deck. The numerical value of the card will tell them what their bullywug's appearance is and give a suggested name. If they are actually a bullywug, then the suit will tell them their motivation for entering the contest. (The Princess and the Witch can ignore this motivation.)

The Monarch, the Princess and the Witch should answer for themselves the question associated with their role on the chart. The Princess and the Witch should keep that answer secret for now. The Monarch should answer the question for everyone to hear.

Roles

The Monarch *The King of Hearts*

Must keep 3 Hearts

What skill(s) was the Princess famous for?

The Princess *The Queen of Diamonds*

Must keep 3 Hearts or Diamonds

What did you always hate about being a princess?

The Witch *The black Joker*

Must keep 3 Spades

Why do you hate the Monarch and the Princess?

Bullywugs *Spades*

Must keep 3 Spades or Clubs

A Stripe	White stripe down the back
2 Blinky	Bright red eyes
3 Gribbit	Toes bitten off by a crocodile
4 Grudupp	Extremely skinny
5 Bighead	Unusually large and clumsy
6 Bufo	Covered in small dark spots
7 Bullwa	Black skin, orange stripes
8 Rubbub	Spotchy yellow skin
9 Warty McWartface	Covered in warts
10 Roark	Translucent skin
J Pond Chicken	Easily startled, frightened by any surprises
Q Goodadoon	When stressed out or angry, I can't talk, only croak.
K Michigan	Wears fancy human clothes scavenged from the garbage

Bullywug Motivations

Hearts

Wants to show the humans how unfairly they treat the bullywugs

Clubs

Wants to make fools of the stupid humans

Spades

Hoping to rob the human castle of its nice stuff

Diamonds

Wants to enjoy the comforts of the human castle instead of the stupid swamp

Name your PC

The Monarch might want to create a good fantasy name for themselves. Definitely they should decide on an important sounding title (King, Queen, Archduke, Empress of the North, etc.)

The Monarch should also decide the name for the Princess, since that's how being a parent works. Bullywugs can make up their own names. There are suggestions for each bullywug, but you could select something different if you want.

The Witch should decide on a name for herself, but keep it secret from everyone until they reveal their identity at the end of the game.

Draft cards

Deal 6 cards to each player. Each player will select one card to keep, then pass the other cards on to the player on their left. Then, from the 5 cards they were passed, they will select another to keep, and repeat until they must keep the last card.

Each role has a rule for cards that they must keep, if able. If you have 3 of that kind of card in hand, then you no longer are forced to draft that card (though you may not have much choice in drafting after that point anyway). So if the Witch receives a hand with three Hearts, two Diamonds and a Spade in it, they must keep the Spade, even if they would prefer the Hearts cards. If, later on, they have three Spades in hand and receive a mix of Spades and Hearts, they can choose to keep the Hearts.



Challenges

The body of the game consists of a series of challenges and interludes. In each challenge, the bullywugs will compete to show they are the best at performing this task. The bullywug who wins the most challenges will receive the magic potion and become human.

At the start of each day, the Monarch announces what each challenge is. A challenge could be almost anything a fantasy princess would be expected to be able to do. This could be sewing a beautiful dress, spinning straw into gold, defeating a terrible monster, sorting mountains of grain, dancing more beautifully than any other, swimming across the ocean, composing songs about how great the Monarch is, hunting the uncatchable golden unicorn, or solving an ancient mystery.

The Monarch divides the bullywugs into pairs who will work together. If you have an odd number of bullywugs, the Monarch can decide to have the extra bullywug compete alone, or instead decide to form a group of three.

The final challenge is special. Before the final challenge, the Monarch must award two tokens to the character of their choice. This final challenge is the only time where every bullywug competes on their own, rather than as a group. In addition, the final challenge is worth two points instead of one.

Once the teams are assembled, every bullywug chooses one card from their hand to play, face down. Take the two cards from each pair, mix them around so it isn't clear whose is whose. Randomly select one of the two cards and discard it face down into a face down discard pile. (For teams of three, discard two and keep one. If a bullywug is working alone, they keep the card they play.)

As you choose your card, describe briefly how your bullywug attempts to work toward the challenge, and how they collaborate with the other bullywugs (or how they sabotage the bullywugs they're working with.)

Once all cards are chosen, each team will briefly describe how they did in the challenge. Ask yourself “Did we fulfill the challenge the Monarch laid out?” and the suit of the card will answer it for you:

Hearts are “Yes, and...” with a bonus beneficial detail you invent.

Diamonds are “Yes, but...” with a cost, complication or imperfection to your job.

Clubs are “No, but...” with an unexpected side benefit to your failure.

Spades are “No, and...” with something going worse for you as a result of your failure.

Take turns briefly describing how successful your team’s attempt at the challenge was. Start with the team whose card had the lowest rank, then go in increasing order up through teams that played King cards. Aces are low, Kings are high.

Collaborate with your partner(s) to invent the additional positive or negative details of your performance. If you can’t agree, you can each add one detail, positive or negative depending on your card.

The highest ranked red card is the winner of the challenge. If no Diamonds or Hearts were played, the highest ranked black card wins. Once again, Aces are low, Kings are high. In case of a tie, the Monarch chooses who wins the challenge.



Interludes

There is one challenge per day. That leaves significant time between challenges for characters to lounge around the castle, question each other to find the real Princess, scheme to sabotage the challenge, spy on the Monarch in the bath, and otherwise get into problems of their own creation. Anything that happens between challenges is an interlude scene. You will have an interlude scene after each challenge (except the last one).

After the challenge is complete, the bullywugs who played the lowest ranked black card frame interlude scenes. (If everyone played red, then the lowest ranked red card frames an interlude scene. If there’s a tie, both characters get an interlude.) Because most challenges work in pairs, usually there will be two interludes between each challenge.

They describe when and where the scene takes place, and what is happening at the very beginning of the scene. They can choose another character or characters to be in the scene.

After you interact with the other character(s) in the scene for a time, the person who framed the scene can ask another character a question. This is something their character learned, or might have learned, over the course of the interaction. They might have their character ask it explicitly, or they might learn that information some other way during the scene without actually asking explicitly.

Important rule: You cannot directly ask about someone's role, or the cards they have in hand.

When you are asked the question in an interlude scene, you can choose to answer it honestly and openly (for all players to hear, even if their characters don’t know the answer yet), or you can evade the question. If you answer the question honestly, draw a card and add it to your hand. If you dissemble or refuse to answer or otherwise are untruthful, you don’t draw. But hey, you get to keep your secret, and that’s valuable too.

Whether you answer the question or not, you get

to answer the questioner a question back. Just like before, they can choose to answer truthfully to get a card, or they can dodge the question and get nothing. Once these questions are answered, the interlude scene ends.

Usually, you won't have any challenges in interlude scenes. If there is a chase or a fight or some other conflict in an interlude, resolve it through narration and negotiation if at all possible. If you must have a mechanical resolution, you can play a challenge, but only between people involved the scene.

Highest red card wins, and they describe the final outcome of the conflict. But when the challenge is complete, have every participant draw a new card to replace the card that they played.

(What if someone want to do something sneaky on their own for their interlude scene? Then they play it like an interlude scene interacting with the Monarch. The Monarch's player narrates the details of the castle and its servants, so the framing player asks the Monarch questions about the castle, and then answers questions that the castle's denizens might learn about them. You can even play a challenge against the Monarch to do something that should be difficult, but isn't directly opposed by any character involved in the story.)

Keep interlude scenes brief, since most of the players aren't involved. Other players not in the scene can ask questions about what is happening in the scene, but they cannot add detail directly. Players not in the scene can also be recruited to roleplay secondary characters not involved in the challenge.

Ever After

Once the fifth challenge is complete, the person with the most tokens wins the contest. They receive the potion. If they want, they can drink the potion and become human. Or maybe they want to steal the potion and put it to some other use (especially if they are the Witch or certain bullywugs).

Once the potion is awarded, the Witch reveals their role card. They may now name one other apparent bullywug to kill with black magic. Their hope is to kill the Princess, rather than an innocent bullywug. Whichever bullywug they choose describes their horrible death. The Witch only has the opportunity to kill a single bullywug, because once they are revealed, they must flee the palace quickly. Sure, they're a Witch, but the Monarch has dozens of guards with axes and spears, and you don't want to put yourself in too much danger.

After the Witch casts a spell, everyone reveals their role cards, and we learn who the Witch killed and who got the potion to become human. Then we can determine what the epilogue is for each character. Does the Witch conquer the kingdom? Does a bullywug wind up inheriting the kingdom, while the Princess decides they are happier living in the swamp? Who will live happily ever after?

Everyone should have at least one card left in hand after the challenges. Going in order by numerical value, first everyone with an Ace left reveals and describes a terrible epilogue for their character. Then the 2s go and describe a slightly less bad ending, and the next number goes and describes a slightly better ending, until finally the Kings describe an amazingly good life for their character after this story is done. Suit doesn't matter for your epilogue, just the numerical value.

Once you're done playing, tell me how it went:

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