

# The Season: Game master's Guide

The scenario must be played with an even number of players. 14-20 players is preferable, but if needed 12-26 is also possible.

The players are divided into 3-5 families:

12-14 players = 3 families

16-18 players = 4 families

20-26 players = 5 families.

If 3 or 4 families are used, use Strensham and Woodal, plus one or two of Abbingdon, Frankley or Membury

## Printing instruction:

Character types, Scandals The Season 2025: print x 1 and cut into pieces

Families Information The Season 2025: print x 1

The Season 2025 print out for families: print x 1

Guide for Game The Season 2025: print x 1 for each GM

## Physical props - must have

- Name badges/ stickers
- Material/ribbons - for sashes and necklaces. One colour per family - best if brightly coloured and different. To accommodate five players in each family, bring at least 7,5m ribbon of each colour.
- Black tape for black marks
- White tape for engagements
- Sharpie to write matching numbers on engagement tape
- Computer for projecting slideshow
- Projector for slides
- Printed copy of Guide for Game The Season 2025 for each GM
- Printed copies of handouts: Families information The Season 2025 + Character Types, Scandals The Season 2025
- Stopwatch/phone to time breaks/water cooler moments etc
- Plain paper for letters (at least 52 sheets)
- Pens - one for each player (up to 26)
- Scissors x1
- Character name stickers (players to write own name)(26)
- Bell for interrupting dances
- Speaker for music - needs to be loud!
- Phone/computer for music  
[https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5sHSkSLua02aonbg5bxXpe?si=J\\_\\_mg3vvQLOfdJmgAXCjUg](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5sHSkSLua02aonbg5bxXpe?si=J__mg3vvQLOfdJmgAXCjUg)

Ball	Dance	Type of dance	Song	Artist	Album	Time
1	1	Hole in the wall	Hole in the wall	Musica calamus	Medieval Dances, Vol. 1	3:00
1	2	Chain dance	Långdans efter Gustav Strutz	Väsen	Väsen	3:54
1	3	free dance	Cheap Thrills	Vitamin String Quartet	VSQ Performs the hits of 2016, Vol. 2	3:27
2	1	Hole in the wall	Hole in the wall (From Abdelazer)	Bjarte Eike, Barokksolistene	The Alehouse Sessions	2:46
2	2	Waltz	Serenade for Strings In C Major	Vienna Chamber Orchestra	Great Waltzes	3:59
3	1	Hole in the wall	Hole in the wall	Musica calamus	Medieval Dances, Vol. 1	3:00
3	2	Free dance	Castle on the Hill	2CELLOS	Dedicated (Extended Edition)	4:30
3	3	Waltz	Valse des mirages	Valentin Barray	Mirages	3:45
		Wedding march	Wedding March	The Violin Sisters	Wedding Music for Violin and Piano	

These times are for planning - do not tell the players - or give them less time

	Scene time	Total time
<b>First ball</b>		
Entrance	5	5
Hole in the wall - leaders ask	5	10
Water cooler break	3	13
Chain dance - followers ask	6	19
Water cooler break	3	22
Free dance - no couples	4	26
<b>Letters</b>		
May I write to you? - followers ask	5	31
Writing letters	15	46
Reading letters	5	51
<b>Second ball</b>		
Introduction	3	54
Hole in the Wall - leaders ask	5	59
Water cooler break	3	62
Waltz - followers ask	6	68
<b>Visits</b>		
Introduction to visits	5	73
Family gathering	5	78
Leaders go to first visit	7	85
Family gathering	3	88
Leaders go to second visit	7	95
Family gathering	3	98
<b>Third ball</b>		
Introduction	3	101
Hole in the Wall - followers ask	5	106
Water cooler break	3	109
Free dance - no couples	5	114
Water cooler break	3	117
Waltz - leaders ask	6	123
<b>End</b>		
Engagements	10	133
Announcement of who will get to marry	5	138
Wedding March and farewell	10	148

## Workshop/introduction:

- **Thank players for coming. 5 mins**

- Timings -
    - Practise dancing
    - Briefing
    - Character workshopping
    - Break
    - Play (2 hrs 30 minutes)
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- **Brief explanation of the world**

- This is a archaic pseudohistorical world in the milieu of Jane Austen and Bridgerton. Everyone knows their place and the social structure is very hierarchical. You are playing members of the “Society.” These are a small number of the premier families of the land. The families you are playing are at the lower end of ‘Society’ and desperately trying to keep their position there - think more Jane Austen than Bridgerton. In this social group, reputation is everything. Your reputation is also affected by the behaviour of your family.
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- The larp plays through the events of “The Season.” All of you are Coming of Age this season. This is your one chance to achieve a suitable match and remain within society. Not all players will be allowed to marry, only those with good enough reputation.
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- You will be grouped into families and everyone in that family is eligible and related - you’ll get to decide later if you are siblings, cousins or more distant relations.
  - You may not marry within your family
  - All players are Coming of Age, but your older relatives are also present in each scene. You will need to pretend that they are there, silent and acting in the background. Whenever we as game masters act, for example if someone misbehaves, we are the in game representation of the judgement of those adults, defending the rules of society.
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- The genders within this society are defined as **leaders** and **followers**, which are also your dancing personas.
  - Leaders are addressed as “Mr Lastname” by other families
  - Followers are addressed as “Miss Lastname” by other families
  - First names are used by the family and between fiancées
- The conventional relationship is a marriage between a leader and a follower.

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- If you do not get married this season, then you will not enter society. The Leaders will join the military, the followers will go into domestic service eg as companions or governesses. There is the possibility of marriage and partnership later, but you will be outside the ranks of “Society.”
  - There are rules and consequences, but the point of the game is not to win or to focus on the threats. The consequences are there to mimic the reality of the society.
  - ***The goal of “The Season” is to get married. However, not all characters will be able to get married. This does not mean that you have ‘lost.’ There is no winning or losing and a tragic love story may be your win.***
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## The Rules of the game - 15 minutes!

### General rules:

- Opposite genders do not speak to each other
  - Except during dances
  - if introduced by a family member
  - during an arranged visit
  - if you are engaged
- Opposite genders do not touch
  - Except as instructed as part of a dance
  - if you are engaged
- Always act politely and with dignity
  - no shouting, no lewd remarks or gestures
- Flirting must be done discreetly

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### - Scandals

- Each family has scandalous secrets. Some of these will come out during the game.
  - When a scandal is revealed, both the family with the secret, and another family will receive a note with information about the scandal, at a time when the families are gathered at home.
  - You decide for yourselves how you want to play this. If the secret is about your family, did everyone in the family know, or is this news to some you? If you get information on another family’s scandal, did you actually receive a note about it and if so from whom? Or was it whispered in someone’s ear?
  - Improvise in the moment but make sure that everyone in the family gets to read the note, so that you all have the correct information. Misunderstandings about the scandals will make the play unnecessarily complicated.
  - If a scandal is revealed about your family it is true
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- **Black Marks**

- Black marks are a visible reminder of your social misdemeanours or scandals.
  - If you behave inappropriately e.g.
    - Touching someone in a way or at a time not denoted by the dance
    - Approaching the other gender's water cooler unchaperoned or sending an unagreed letter
    - Writing or saying something inappropriate
    - Repeatedly dancing with the same person at the same ball
    - Breaking off an engagement
    - If your proposal is rejected
    - Anything else the judges disapprove of
  - You will get a black mark
  - This is a black tape mark worn on your family ribbon
  - If you claim someone has behaved inappropriate and this is felt justified, then they get a black mark
  - If you cry foul repeatedly you may not get a black mark, but it will affect how people in the room see you
  - Other characters can defend you if you are challenged, but this will not turn into a long debate
  - The judges decision is final (and may feel unwarranted - this is a feature not a bug!)
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- If you have black marks, people with fewer black marks than you will be off limits for all interaction except for proposal.
  - This means that you cannot ask them to dance with you and cannot be introduced to them. You also cannot ask to write to or visit them
  - They can ask to dance with you and be introduced to you.
  - There are fewer marriage opportunities than there are couples. The number of black marks per couple will be added together. The couples with the largest number of black marks will not be allowed to marry.
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- Following the rules are important, but it is equally important to be able to break them - discreetly and at the right time
  - To risk breaking a rule to show your interest is considered a sign of passion
  - a person who isn't prepared to take that risk is considered a bore, or a gold digger
  - true love is considered to be worth the risk of not marrying at all
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- **Areas**

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- **Dance floor**
  - To ask someone for a dance - approach them when directed and ask
    - ***“May I have this dance?”***
    - You can reply yes or no and explain why.
    - If you have agreed to dance, then take your partner’s hand and walk out onto the dance floor
  - You do not need to dance, but if you do not dance, you remain at your own water cooler and cannot speak to anyone of the opposite gender.
  - There will be two ‘excuse me’ dances where you can cut in when the bell rings.
  - We will have some dances where the leaders ask followers to dance and some where followers ask leaders. Free dances allow you to take the floor with no partner. We will announce who is asking before each dance.
  - ***Practise asking other characters to dance***
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- During balls there is a water cooler area for leaders and a separate area for followers. This is where you return to between dances. You may only visit the other area if chaperoned or proposing.
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- - **Being introduced**
    - during water cooler breaks if introduced and accompanied by a family member or friend.
    - As a follower, your follower friend could introduce you to their leader sibling or your leader sibling could introduce you to their leader friend.
    - The family member/friend comes with you to the water cooler area of the other gender, and stays during the short conversation, so the conversation is chaperoned.
    - You may only talk for a minute or you risk a black mark.
    - So you must cross the floor in pairs, or risk being penalised.
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#### Family home

- In interludes between balls each family will return to their own houses (a different area)
  - There will be other family members and staff in the house, but those are not part of the game and you will need to imagine that they are there, silent in the background - making sure you are following the rules of society
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#### At home: Letters

- During the game, there will be one interlude when you get to send letters.
- Each follower gets to ask up to two people if they may exchange letters.
- Followers may only ask characters with the same number or more black marks as they have
- Each person may accept any number of requests, but can only write 2 letters. Not writing to someone you have promised a letter to may cause a scandal.

At home: Visits

- During the next interlude, leaders may go on visits to followers in their homes
- Each leader will get to ask one or two people if they may visit them.
- Only followers with the same or fewer black marks can be asked
- Followers may accept as many requests as they like
- Leaders must go on the promised visits
- You may not go on unplanned visits
- There will be two rounds visits, with a family gathering at home in between
- If you ask only one person, you may visit them twice, or stay at home to chaperone your relatives for one of the rounds

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Marriage

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- **Proposals**
  - Only leaders can propose and only on their own behalf
  - They may propose to followers with any number of black marks
  - You may only propose at any time except during a dance
- Due to time constraints this is performed in a very scripted way. You ask ***"Full name, will you marry me?"*** whilst going down on one knee and holding out a hand.  
The reply is yes and you take their hand, or no (perhaps with a reason) and walk away.  
If your proposal is rejected, you get a black mark.
- If you are engaged, we add a white tape mark to your ribbon. We will also write a number to help us keep check on who is engaged to whom.
- You cannot be engaged to more than 1 person at a time.

***Please practise proposing now***

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- **Breaking off an engagement**
  - Breaking off an engagement can take place any time except during a dance
  - At other times, anyone can break up an engagement at any time, by asking a game master to stop the proceedings.
  - The couple stand in the middle of the floor with their family behind them and the person breaking up proclaims it, "Full name, I wish to break off our engagement because..."
  - The character being rejected has the right to give a short reply
  - The couple and their families react to the break up for a short time (2-3 minutes) until the game masters ring the bell.
  - Both parties get a black mark each for being in a break up.
  - Then everyone in Society chooses sides and goes stand behind the person they believe is the injured/righteous party. The family may switch sides if they wish. If more than  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the voters choose the same side, the other party will get an extra black mark for being considered at fault.

***Call out 2 people to break off an engagement now***



- **Weddings**

- Remember there is a limit on the number of weddings in a season. The number of black marks per couple will be added up. The couple(s) with the most black marks will not be permitted to get married.
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- **Structure of the larp**

- The larp takes place over a season. This consists of
    - 3 balls. There are two or three dances in each ball, with watercooler moments between.
    - An interlude between the first and second ball where you can write short letters to other characters.
    - An interlude between the second and third balls where you can arrange to visit other characters.
    - A final scene once we know who has become engaged to whom
  - Leaders and followers are only allowed to speak to each other during dances and brief, planned social situations.
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- **Don't get lost in the rules**

- We understand that this is a lot of rules
  - They are done to create a game world and mimic a social structure, but we do not want you to think about them too hard
  - Don't get lost in the numbers - this a larp, not a number puzzle or a board game.
  - Play your character and relax.
  - We will explain what you need to do at each stage and tell you when you have committed a misdemeanour
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- **Practise dances - 10 minutes**

- We will use 4 dances repeatedly during the larp. Your dancing does not need to be good. Your character's dancing does not need to be good.
  - Hole in the Wall - no touching when they come together  
*go to next slide for visuals!*
  - Chain Dance - only holding hands with those next to you in the chain
  - Waltz - waltz position - bell rings three times, you have to change partners each time
  - Free Dance - do whatever you want
  - You can talk to anyone on the dance floor, not just your partner, although that might be considered rude.
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*Practise Hole in the Wall*

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- Sort players into families 20 minutes

- Ask people to move into followers or leaders at different end of the room. Persuade people to move, so that these groups are as even as possible.
  - Hand out the character types randomly to all players
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- Repeat instructions for leaders/followers:

- Leaders:

- “Mr Lastname”
- Go to military if not married
- Can propose
- Ask to dance:
  - First dance at the first ball
  - First dance at the second ball
  - Third/last dance at the third ball
- Can ask one or two to visit (second interlude)

- Followers:

- “Miss Lastname”
- Go into service if not married
- Ask to dance:
  - Second dance at the first ball
  - Second/last dance at the second ball
  - Third/last dance at the third ball
- Can ask one or two to exchange letters (first interlude)

- Everyone:

- First name between family members and fiancées
- Introduce a friend to a relative
- Can break up an engagement

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- Number each player 1,2,3,4 1,2,3,4 etc so there are approximately even numbers in each family and each family contains both followers and leaders
  - Move the players into their family groups in their designated areas.
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- Give out

- Read out the “Everyone knows” section about each family on the Families information-pages, handing each family the page about their family plus one page with bar charts about all families.
- Also hand out The Season 2025 print out for families to each family.
- Family ribbons of a particular colour. Leaders wear theirs as a sash, followers as a necklace

- Tell the players to choose a first name for themselves that starts with the same letter as their last name (for example Anna Abbingdon), and write them on the stickers, putting them visibly on their body.
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- The families get a few minutes to work out their dynamics and then play a short scene which introduces them to each other.
    - This scene is each family receiving invitations to the balls of the season (7 minutes to play)
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- Split the players back up into their genders.
    - The leaders are at their club.
    - The followers are in a tea house.
    - You will have known most (perhaps not all) of these characters for years - at school, at social events etc.
    - This meeting takes place a few days before the balls of the season start. Gossip, decide who is your friend, or perhaps a rival
    - (7 minutes to play)
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- **Break**
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The first ball:

1. Introduction by game master: set the scene and explain the rules for the first ball
    - a. Tell the players to gather in the family areas and to prepare to enter the ball room
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Entrance:

2. Introduce members of the family as they enter the room from their family corner/area. Call out the families in alphabetical order:
    - a. The Abbingdon family - pious, frugal and charitable
    - b. The Frankley family - trade, travel and exotic
    - c. The Membury family - military and a humble background
    - d. The Strensham Family - industrialists, progressive and nouveau riche
    - e. The Woodal Family - old money, old ways and duty
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### **3. First dance: Hole in the wall. Leaders ask**

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4. Leaders and followers gather at the water coolers.
  5. **Second dance: Chain dance. Followers ask**
  6. Leaders and followers gather at the water coolers.
  7. **Third dance: free dance - no one asks. No touching**
  8. Asking for permission to write.
    - Each follower gets to ask up to two people if they may exchange letters.
    - Followers may only ask characters with the same number or more black marks as they have
    - Each person may accept any number of requests, but can only write 2 letters. Not writing to someone you have promised a letter to may cause a scandal.
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The first intermission:

9. Return to family areas.
  10. Instructions from game master - both the initiator and the recipient write a letter to each other
  11. Draft a letter, which the games master will collect
  12. Game masters count the letters for each family and note which family has received the most letters (top), and which has received the least letters (bottom). Take the two copies of one of the scandals about the top family and hand one copy to the top family and one to the bottom family.
  13. The letter is handed to the character you have written to.
    - The recipient will have a short time to read it, at their family home
    - If someone has seen the letter and announces publicly that it contained something inappropriate, then the sender will receive a black mark.
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The second ball:

14. Introduction from game master: set the scene and explain rules for the ball
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**15. Fourth dance: Hole in the wall - leaders ask**

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16. Water cooler break

**17. Fifth dance: Waltz - followers ask**

- After a certain amount of time (GM rings the bell), you can steal another's partner
18. Asking for permission to visit.
    - Each leader gets to ask up to two people if they may visit them.
    - Leaders may only ask characters with the same number or more black marks as they have
    - Followers may accept as many requests as they like
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The second intermission:

19. Instructions from game master - there are 2 visiting periods.

- Sit down with family
- Leaders go out to visit x 2
- Followers stay at home and receive visitors
- After the visits, the families will gather and strategise for the final ball

20. Visits.

- Each family gathers at their home and the leaders who arranged to do so go out to visit.
- There are 2 visiting periods. Leaders return home between each.
- Leaders must visit the families they asked to visit. If they only asked one follower then they can visit them twice or stay at home to oversee who visits their family
- If the person they wanted to visit was not at home, they go back home and wait for the next round.
- The Game masters will ring a bell when time is up.
- Only 2 visits may take place.
- If two leaders visit a follower at the same time, they are all there simultaneously and social awkwardness ensues.
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21. Game masters count how many visitors each family receives and note which family has received the most visitors (top), and which has received the least visitors (bottom). Take the two copies of one of the scandals about the top family and hand one copy to the top family and one to the bottom family.

22. Family gathering: deciding how to strategise for the final ball
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The third ball:

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**23. Sixth dance: Hole in the wall - followers ask**

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24. Water cooler break

**25. Seventh dance: Free dance**

26. Water cooler break

**27. Eight dance: Waltz - leaders ask**

28. Final opportunity to get engaged - only leaders can propose

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The Finale

29. Ask the players to form a line, the couples with the least black marks at the front, those with the most black marks at the back.

30. GMs announce who will get married - those with fewest black marks.

- a. 12-16 players: 4 players do not get married
- b. 18-22 players: 6 players do not get married
- c. 24-26 players: 8 players do not get married
- d. If there are several couples with the same number of black marks at the cut off, count the combined number of black marks of their entire families and sort:

31. Procession to a wedding march. Those who will not marry form arches for the marrying couples to walk through and then go off to war or into service (or back home if they are heads of family)

32. Final scenes - goodbyes and resolution if an engagement does not lead to a wedding