

Obsession

A game for 2-4 players by Dan Hallagan. Condensed rules for edition 2.2E by Eric Postpischil, <https://edp.org>. *Obsession* includes rich thematic material, but most is omitted here.

Introduction

Renovate your country estate in Derbyshire and improve your family's failing reputation in Victorian Britain.

Reputation is counted on each player's board with a central main counter and an incremental marker orbiting it. The reputation for scoring, player rank, or prestige thresholds is solely the main level. The increment is irrelevant. Reputation is gained or lost in small increments written herein as •y.

- When the marker completes a rotation from •5 to •1, increment the central counter to the next value.
 - In standard play, increment from 6 to Max. In extended play, increment from 8 to Max.
 - When at Max and the outer marker would pass •5, leave it at •5; no more is gained (but may be lost).
- Reverse the process when losing reputation. (Never go below main level 1, increment •1.)

Gentry cards represent player families and non-family guests.

Top left: Family: crest and initial. Guest: prestige number and 1 fleur-de-lis (casual guest) or 2 (prestige guest).

- The 2 Fairchild guest cards have a crest in a purple frame. Start guests also have a crown below a fleur-de-lis.

Top right: Game-end victory points (VP).

Bottom left: Servants required.

Bottom right: Favors provided. The center text may also describe favors.

(There are 15 start guests, 35 casual guests, and 25 prestige guests. Unused start guests become casual guests.)

Improvement tiles are rooms or spaces on the estate.

Top left: Title in black, hosted activity, if any, in white underneath.

Top right: May have a cost modifier, a building (start tile), a black rose, or a white flower (hybrid tile).

- If one side of a tile has a black rose, the other side is the front. The tile flips once when first used.
- If there is a white flower, the side with the underline is the front. This hybrid tile flips each time it is used.
 - The background of the servant icon (see Center below) on a hybrid tile shows the color of its reverse side.
- For tiles without a rose or flower, the two sides are identical.

Center: Either some benefit (most Service tiles) or guests and servants required (left) and favors granted (right).

Bottom left: Prestige number (white in wreath).

Bottom center: Category (column in tableau). Monuments do not show category in text; match by background color.

Bottom right: VP (counted in courtships and scored at game-end) and tile sorting number (small black, up and left).

Setup

Put the Alderley Hall board on the table 16-round side up for standard play, 20-round side for extended play, and:

- Put the white pawn on the first space of the round track.
- Shuffle the 30 victory point cards and the 10 theme cards. Stack them facedown on their board spaces.
- Put 1 reminder token per player on the board (out of the way of other components).
- Put the 2 Fairchild guest cards by the board.

Choose the first player and give them the purple first-player pawn.

Choose a family for each player and give them a set of 4 reference cards and the components of their family:

- 1 player board with the family name. Optionally also an organizer strip, in lieu of using their board's organizer.
- 5 start improvement tiles (*Private Study*, *Butler's Room*, *Main Gazebo*, *Front Parlour*, *Bowling Green*). Align them under the board or strip.
- 4 or 5 reputation counters (1/2, 3/4, 5/6, and Max, and 7/8 for extended play). Display the "1" on the center of the reputation wheel (top-right of player board). Put rest aside.
- 1 reputation wheel marker (black hexagonal prism). Put on •1 (for Cavendish family, •4) of reputation wheel.
- 5 start servants (■ Butler, ■ Housekeeper, ■ Valet, ■ Lady's Maid, and | ■ Footman). For York family, add 2 | ■ Footmen. Put servants in Available Service.
- 4 family member cards (husband, wife, son, daughter). For Asquith family, also dowager countess Maud.
- For Ponsonby family, £300.

Shuffle the 15 start guests. Deal 2 to each player. Each player's family and start guests form their initial active hand.

- **Variant: For 2/3/4 players, draw 6/8/10 cards. Each player drafts 1 in reverse player order (counterclockwise) and then again in forward order (clockwise).**

Put the Derbyshire board on the table and:

- Shuffle the unused start guests with the 35 casual guests and stack facedown on the 1 fleur-de-lis Guests space.
- Shuffle the 25 prestige guests and stack facedown on the 2 fleur-de-lis Guests space.
- Shuffle the 30 objective cards. Deal each player 5 (4 for extended play). Put rest facedown in their space.

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- On the Servants For Hire space, put, per player, 1 Valet, 1 Lady's Maid, and 2 Footmen.
- Put 2 Underbutlers nearby. (They are hired only when buying *Butler's Pantry*.)
- Put the silver (£100) and gold (£500) coins in the £ area. (Money is not token limited.)

Put all tiles except Monument tiles and unused start tiles in the cloth bag.

For 2/3 players, add *Sculpture Garden* and 2/3 other Monument tiles to bag. For 4, add 5 Monument tiles to bag.

- Players may choose the additional Monument tiles. (*Suites* are not Monuments during setup.)
- If desired, exclude the powerful *Sculpture Garden* or substitute *Garden Maze*.

Deal tiles to fill the Builders' Market on the Derbyshire board with allowed tiles, front side up:

- Stack duplicate tiles, filling one space per set of identical tiles.
- Allow tiles with prestige 1, 2, or 3 and *Brushing Room*, *Barn*, *Butler's Pantry*, and *Servants' Quarters*.
- Exclude tiles with prestige 4, 5, or 6 and *Servants' Hall* and all Monuments.

When the market is full, return excluded tiles to the bag and sort market by the sorting numbers, ascending to right.

If all players agree the market is bizarre (such as 5 prestige-3 tiles), refresh it as in a special action, below, once only.

Play

Play four seasons as guided by the white pawn on the round track to its end at Final Courtship. In each season:

- Play the ordinary (non-courtship) rounds in each season (purple spaces).
- Process the courtship round (green space), ending the season.

Ordinary (Non-Courtship) Round

In the first round of each season, reveal a theme card (which shows one of the five tile categories).

- Keep the revealed theme cards visible throughout the game, distinguishing the most recent one.

In a National Holiday round, reputation does not limit players in their choices of activities and guests.

Once around in **clockwise** order from the start player, each player must host one activity in a standard turn or pass.

Special Actions

Anytime during your turn, you may gain £100 at a cost of •2 reputation. This may be repeated indefinitely.

Anytime during your turn, you may refresh 1 servant at a cost of •3 reputation. This may be repeated indefinitely.

Anytime during your turn, you may refresh the Builders' Market at a cost of •4 reputation, once per turn.

- Set aside all tiles in the market (not the reserves). Draw tiles to fill the market spaces, front side up, stacking duplicates and putting appropriate tiles in their reserves. Sort by tile sorting numbers. Put set-aside tiles into bag.
- Refresh the market only for your opportunity to buy a card, not to eliminate options for another player. (Objective criteria for this cannot be fully codified since the refresh might not provide you a good card, but it is a rule.)

A special action that would decrease reputation level below 1 is not allowed.

Standard Turn

Move servants in Servants' Quarters to Available Service. Move servants in Expended Service to Servants' Quarters.

In a Village Fair round, if you have flipped *Private Study*, receive •2 reputation and £300.

In an Objective Card round, draw 2 objective cards.

Gain •1 reputation for each Monument on display in your tableau.

If you own *Servants' Hall*, you may deploy a servant to the hall and choose another player to gossip about.

- The targeted player loses •1 reputation. You gain •1. Move the servant to Expended Service.

To perform a standard turn, you must host an activity, invite guests, and provide service as specified below.

Host Activity: Move 1 tile with an activity (white text near top left) from your tableau to your Activity space.

- Your reputation level must equal or exceed the prestige of the tile (bottom left).

Invite Guests: Play gentry cards from your active hand of the types the tile shows (all indicated must be played).

- Your reputation level must equal or exceed the prestige of each guest (top left), excepting family and Fairchilds.

Provide Service: Move servants indicated on the tile and the cards from Available Service to the tile and the cards.

- Cards with ☉ on a gray meeple icon do not require servants.
- If you have the *Servants' Quarters* tile, one servant may come from Servants' Quarters.
- Exception: For *Lionheart Suite*, draw 1 prestige guest from the supply to stay in *Lionheart Suite* and provide doubled favors. Do not put servants on this card; the Butler on *Lionheart Suite* serves them.
- When no Lady's Maid is available, a Housekeeper may substitute.
- For a Butler, Valet, or Footman, an Underbutler may substitute.
- When no Valet is available and you have *Brushing Room*, a Footman may substitute.

Enjoy Favors: Take the favors resulting from your activity. These are mandatory except for dismissing a guest.

Money: Gain the money indicated. Some guests cost money ("paupers").

- If the net is negative, you must pay to host the activity. You may use special actions to raise funds.

Reputation: Gain •1 reputation for each lion rampant (standing on one hind foot with its forefeet in the air) icon.

- Your young lady gains reputation in an activity with a prestige male guest (including Charles Fairchild).

- Some guests impose a reputation penalty. You may invite such guests even if it would reduce your reputation level below 1. Your reputation is then reduced to the minimum, main level 1, increment •1.

Guests: Draw a casual or prestige guest for each 1-fleur-de-lis icon or 2-fleur-de-lis icon, respectively.

- Your elder lady may draw 2 casual guests and put 1 of them under its deck or may dismiss 1 guest as below.
- Show your newly acquired guest(s) to the other players, then put them into your active hand.

Dismiss Guests: A fleur-de-lis with a trash icon indicates an option to dismiss a guest (this favor is optional):

- Any guest may be dismissed, from wherever in your cards they are. Family may not be dismissed.
- Dismissal occurs when clearing your player board, after all other favors are taken.
- You may gain multiple dismissal favors on a turn.
- Put each dismissed guest at the bottom of its supply deck.

VP Card: Draw a VP card. (Hold it for its game-end points or play it anytime for its benefit.)

Gossip: An “attack” allows you to decrease the reputation of a player you choose. Some cost you reputation too.

Hire: With *Butler’s Room*, you may take 2 of the ■ Valets, ■ Lady’s Maids, or | |Footmen from Servants for Hire.

- With *Butler’s Room* flipped, you may instead take 1 of those types from anywhere on another player’s board.
- Newly hired servants start in Expended Service.

Buy from the Builders’ Market:

You may buy 1 tile from the Builders’ Market or a reserve for its market price plus any modifier on it (top right).

- In a Builders’ Holiday round, you may buy as many as you can afford.
- You may not purchase two of the same tile.
- Put the tile in its proper column in your tableau, front side up.
- If you buy a Monument or *Servants’ Hall*, take a reminder token and put it on your board if you do not have one.
 - The token reminds you to take the reputation or gossip bonus for these tiles when starting future turns.
- Upon buying *Butler’s Pantry*, gain an ■ Underbutler and put it in Expended Service.

After finishing all purchases, slide tiles in the market to the left and draw replacements, placed front side up.

- Stack duplicates. Put each tile eligible for an open reserve in its reserve. Draw until the market is full.
- Sort the new tiles (only the new tiles) in the market by their tile sorting numbers.

Clear Player Board:

Move servants from the activity tile and the guest cards to Expended Service.

Return the tile to your tableau. If it is a black rose tile, put it rose side up. If it has a white flower, flip it.

- White-flower tiles are hybrids; they change category each time they are used. Keep each in its current column.
- Put the gentry who attended the event in your discard pile, face-up.

Passing Turn

Move all your servants to Available Service.

In a Village Fair round, if you have flipped *Private Study*, receive •2 reputation and £300.

In an Objective Card round, draw 2 objective cards.

Take your discarded guests into your active hand.

Gain •1 reputation for each Monument on display in your tableau.

If you own *Servants’ Hall*, you may deploy a servant to the hall and choose another player to gossip about.

- The targeted player loses •1 reputation, and you gain •1. Move the servant to Expended Service.

Either gain £200 or refresh the Builders’ Market (as in a special action but at no cost).

You may buy from the Builders’ Market or a reserve as in a standard turn, including observing a Builders’ Holiday.

Courtship Round

A player with a Fairchild card from a previous courtship returns it to the table.

In seasons 1-3, players with the highest total VP in tiles of the current (most recent) theme category win.

- A sole winner adds their choice of Fairchild card to their active hand (for play in the coming season).
 - If there is a tie, nobody takes a Fairchild card.
- Each winner draws 1 VP card. (Hold it for its game-end points or play it anytime for its benefit.)

In the final courtship, VP are added for tiles in each of the 4 theme categories. Repeat VP of repeated themes.

- A sole winner takes a Fairchild card (for its 8 VP).
 - If tied, the tied player with the highest reputation takes a Fairchild. If still tied, nobody takes a Fairchild.
- Each winner draws 1 VP card. (Hold it for its game-end points or play it immediately for its benefit.)

Each player discards 1 objective card. Shuffle the discards and add them to the bottom of their supply deck.

After each of the first 3 courtships, pass the first-player pawn **counterclockwise**.

After the first courtship, open the Service Tile Reserve by moving all Service tiles in the Builders’ Market to it.

After the second courtship, open the PR1 Tile Reserve by moving all prestige-1 tiles in the Builders’ Market to it.

After opening a reserve, refill the Builders’ Market as at the end of Buy from the Builders’ Market above.

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Game-End / Final Scoring

Move the white pawn to the wedding bells icon (center) and sum the scores:

- VP on tiles (white numbers in wreaths at bottom right).
- VP on gentry cards (top right).
- VP for each completed objective card.
- VP for reputation per the table to the right.
- 2 VP for each servant, regardless of type.
- 1 VP for each £200, rounded down.
- VP on held victory point cards.

Reputation Level	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Max
Standard Play	1	3	6	10	15	21			28
Extended Play	1	3	6	10	15	21	28	36	45

A tie is won by the holder of a Fairchild card. A further tie is won by reputation. A further tie is shared.

Notes

Players may examine their discard piles.

Money borrowed in special actions is not repaid in the game.

Start guests (15 cards) have prestige 1 and 0 VP.

Other casual guests (35 cards) have prestige 1-2 and from -4 to 2 VP: 1 -4, 5 -3, 5 -2, 5 -1, 8 0, 9 1, 2 2.

Prestige guests (25 cards) have prestige 3-6 and 2-6 VP: 9 2, 6 4, 5 4, 3 5, 2 6.

Duchess Lilo, the developer's cat with prestige 8, is not intended for game play. If you do add it to the prestige deck:

- Duchess Lilo is only playable by chance draw into *Lionheart Suite*, which does not require guest service.
 - The Upstairs Downstairs expansion might make it possible to play Duchess Lilo in rare circumstances.
- Possessing Duchess Lilo awards 9 VP at game-end and counts toward the objective card that awards 1 VP per 3 guests and the card that awards 1 VP per prestige guest.

Objective cards are summarized on page 16 of the glossary.

Victory point cards are summarized on page 27 of the glossary.

When flipped, *French Garden* allows dismissing any number of guests.

Servants' Hall may be used each turn; it is not moved to your Activity Space.

Variants

Start Guest Card Draft: See blue text in Setup.

Jane Austen: Reveal each theme card in the courtship instead of at the beginning of the season.

Emily Brontë: Refresh the Builders' Market (not the reserves) after each of the first three courtships.

Queen Victoria: Remove the leftmost tile (or stack) in the Builders' Market after each round.

- As usual, shift and refill the market, then add the removed tile(s) to the bag.

Charles Dickens: At each season start, select a random ordinary round in which to reveal the theme card.

Intensive Service: Include *Butler's Pantry*, *Barn*, and *Brushing Room* in the initial Builders' Market.

- For experienced players: Include any 3 or all 4 of *Butler's Pantry*, *Barn*, *Brushing Room*, and *Servants' Quarters*.