

# MidCon for Beginners

A guide for people who are new to cons or new to **MidCon**

Welcome to **MidCon** for the first time. This is intended to be a brief guide to how games conventions work, and suggestions for getting the maximum value from the event. There is far more detailed information in the main **MidCon** booklet, which has information on buffet times, places to eat, the second-hand games stall, the Saturday night quiz, websites, local games clubs and so on. I'm assuming you've not wandered in while passing but have seen some publicity and know what games get played, how long we're here for etc., but you are wondering how to get into a game, and what else you need to do.

The objective of **MidCon** is simple: to give you a place to play a huge range of games with people from all over the country (and overseas), with facilities such as a games shop, a second-hand games stall (you can sell as well as buy), two bars and additional fripperies like food and bedrooms for the less committed players. The convention is run by unpaid, slightly harassed volunteers and not the hotel, so any problems other than with your room, drink or hotel food should be addressed to a Committee member (different coloured name badges, wearing sky-blue polo shirts). That said, we've already enjoyed seven virtually problem-free years here at the Hallmark, and think the staff and management are as helpful as they can be. And the good news is once you've paid your con fee and (if you're a resident) your room bill there's nothing further you need to pay for except food, drink and a big pile of the new stuff from the games shop (which offers a **MidCon** discount as well).

There are two main rooms in which to play games as well as the lounge behind the main bar and more rooms near the front of the hotel. There is also an overflow room in the Hallmark Inn, which is just across the road from the car-park exit of the Hallmark Hotel. Apart from the bar lounge we have exclusive use of all this space right through until Sunday evening. Extra gaming rooms may be added if required by a late rush.

The first thing that might strike you is the low level of organisation of the gaming. Rather than a formal tournament structure, the idea is to find a game, a place to play it, people to play against and then get on with it. Repeat as necessary. This is what you tend to hear referred to as "casual gaming" and it works well for us. The exception to the rule is the Diplomacy 'tournament', but no-one ever claimed to be a casual Diplomacy player.

We have recently started up a 'facility' – his name is Dave - to offer introductory games for newcomers to **MidCon** or to conventions in general; ask at the registration desk (where you picked this up from).

There are also a lot of people who come alone or in small groups who need to find opponents, and I'm afraid social interaction might be required to get a group together for a game. The usual tricks are to set up a game of something and hope passers-by ask to join, or

you could wander around looking for games being set up by gamers who are looking for passers-by to join. People wandering around looking for games to join often find similar groups, and discussions can proceed from there, and games about to start can often accommodate extra players. After all, who really wants to play 3-player Imperial from choice?

If you want to play something you haven't brought along, then you should be able to borrow a copy if you can find one. People will lend out their precious games to complete strangers all weekend unless they intend to play them soon, but please ask before helping yourself to the contents of a games bag. There's no restriction on what you play, but be reasonable with the noisier games (play them near Jeremy for added effect).

Gaming tends to get going straight after breakfast, with a big thinning out for evening meals from about 7.00 PM. Most residents return for more games after dinner and you can stay up as late as you could possibly want, playing away without mum telling you it's a school day tomorrow. Late night games are sometimes less sophisticated than the afternoon fare, but then again, so are most of the players by then.

People tend to leave their games in the games room overnight, and in 35+ years of going to conventions I can't recall any games going missing. There's also no problem leaving a quick game of Through The Ages half-finished for completion next day, just don't leave it set up un-played on a table for six hours during the day as tables can become somewhat scarce at times.

There is a lunchtime and evening buffet served in the main games room (The Garden Room) for £7 a go, and for the residents breakfast is included in the room charge. Although there's also a good restaurant in the hotel, most diners go out into the delights of Derby for evening meals, and there's a comprehensive listing and reviews section in the **MidCon** booklet. It's accepted form to go out with the people you've just spent hours playing games with if you want, and eating groups vary from couples to more than a dozen.

Drinking during games is not so much tolerated as encouraged (especially if you're on my Diplomacy board), as any cask ales left over in the games room bar are charged to the convention. A chance for a proper pint in a hotel that isn't a CAMRA mecca is a worthwhile feature, but please don't bring in alcohol that you have purchased off the premises.

If your problem is with the hotel please try reception first, then a **MidCon** committee member if you can't make any progress. We'll do everything we can to help, but we can't create empty bedrooms, provide meals at 3.30AM or source a spare copy of Outpost (original) to play. The gamers and committee are a friendly lot, so please ask questions if you need help, just not in the middle of someone's 3-way merger in a game of 1842.

Finally, if you find things unsatisfactory in any way, or can suggest improvements please tell us, as there are small problems we are often unaware of, and fresh perspectives often help.

Most of all – have fun!

**MidCon** Committee.