



GUIDE FOR NEW MEGAGAMERS

First Contact

When you arrive at your first Megagame you may feel overwhelmed. There will be bustle, strange activity, and even stranger people (your fellow gamers!) and it may not make sense for a while. Relax. Don't Panic. It was that way for all of us when we started.

Many other everyday games you are familiar with have clear-cut objectives, like scoring more points than your opponent. Megagames tend to be more like 'real life' – you can decide for yourself to some extent what counts as 'winning' – it could be to 'outdo' your historical counterpart, or maybe just have fun working as part of a team to solve problems, or stitching up your enemies with a cunning plan. Many players also enjoy the feeling of being directly involved in momentous events, even if it's only a simulation.

If you want to have fun, then get involved! There will be challenges, many of them caused by other players, but you can make a difference. You'll find that, always, the more you put in the more you'll get out of the game. You may well feel like it's your first day at school or in a new job; nevertheless don't be afraid to ask questions. Remember we want you to have a good time, and come back next time, as well as recommending Megagames to your friends.

Before the Game Starts

It is very important to read all the briefing material you are sent, and make sure you understand it and can find your way round the sections. On the day you will almost certainly be given more material to absorb, such as a personal briefing or updates on the situation at the start of the game. You will probably enjoy yourself more if you can concentrate on the new material, and on discussing the problems of the game with your fellow team members, rather than reading the game handbooks for the first time.

Pre-Planning

Especially if you're playing with existing friends, it can be tempting to try to short-circuit the early stages of the game by setting up plans and cutting deals in advance. Our advice is that it is probably better not to do this. Experience has shown that it's usually more fun, and helps the game to flow more smoothly, if you leave important decisions until the day. Remember that whilst you have a lot of information in advance - you will not have all the information you need, as you won't have seen your personal brief yet, and will certainly need to see how other teams are starting out too and to talk to them.

On the day of the game

Most players dress casually. Some people like to dress according to their character but either way, it's totally your choice and you will not be out of place. Please do remember, however, that some costumes can give offence (thinking particularly here of Nazi regalia).

Lunch breaks are not in the programme – you eat as you play. Tea and coffee is normally provided, but make sure you bring something to eat as you burn the calories and will not want to leave during the game to buy something.

Don't forget to check you know the way there if you're unfamiliar with the area of the game, and allow plenty of time for travel – arriving late will certainly cause you to miss out on some of the important early stages of the game, as the day is on a strict timetable and the game won't wait for anyone.

On arrival

There is a signing-in procedure at the entrance. If you've been to a conference before you'll know the kind of thing. You'll usually be given a sticky badge with your name and role. If you arrive well before the start you will have time to learn your way around the venue, but the game will not start until the advertised time.

If this is your first time the game designer may have asked one of the Control team to make sure new players like you are settled in and comfortable. Remember, however, that person will have many other things to do, and once the game starts you cannot rely on Control to do everything for you. You will be directed or shown to your team area and have an opportunity to meet the other members of your team and other players. Don't be bashful; the players are generally a sociable group. In particular, other members of your team who have played Megagames before can often help you with points you're not sure about, or other useful help and advice.

There is often a settling in period before the game starts to discuss strategy, look over the maps and familiarise yourself with the game generally. Just before the game starts there is a plenary briefing by the game designer covering admin details and any last minute game points you all need to know about.

Once the game starts

After the general introduction, you're off! This is when reading the briefing material in advance will pay off. If you grasp the general principles of the game (which are usually of similar complexity to a board game) you will be free to get on with the problem solving and interacting with other players which for most is the point of Megagaming.

You may find it enjoyable to play a role, and put yourself 'in the shoes' of the character you are playing. The game can get very complex, try to remember that it's just as tough for everyone. The trick is often to sort out the important from the trivial, and stick your objectives. You do need to be active, and try to make things happen. It won't usually come to you on a plate. If you sit back, especially as a politician, you may get bored as other players start to ignore you. Get stuck in! This game is built around a structured game turn taking a definite number of minutes per turn. The game is therefore driven by the clock, and each new game turn starts at the specified time. As in real life it will not always be possible to do everything that you'd like to do in a single turn, and the game will not wait if you haven't managed to do all that you would like.

Megagames run continuously until they stop. You eat, drink and take breaks while the game continues. If you leave the venue for long during the game it will disrupt your game and probably your team-mates' game too.

Other players

Megagame Makers cannot guarantee other players will behave well, or fairly. You must accept that in the nature of many games, others will try to trick, con, deceive or destroy you. There is a war on, after all. But that is not to say that bullying, rudeness or cheating are allowed. If you think you are being treated unreasonably, tell the player concerned you think so.

Many times, we find that the 'rude' person is playing a role and isn't intending to upset you. In some cases the excitement of the game means that people get carried away. Very occasionally there are people who behave unacceptably. Megagame Makers do not tolerate 'out of character'

rudeness, aggression or cheating. Usually problems are easily resolved, either by a civilised conversation by a new role in a different part of the game. That said, most of our games are built around interaction

with other players, both within your own team, and with other teams. In some games, the members of a team will all be pulling together for common objectives, in others there might be internal conflict within the team. This can vary widely. So some 'in character' conflict is not only acceptable but encouraged. If you are in any doubt, or feel you may have offended someone or been offended, it is Ok to see them at the end of the day and 'de-role' – i.e. explain that when you called them a 'fascist bastard' you were in role and it was nothing personal.

More about the Control Team

These people are here to try to make the game run smoothly. In many games, they help to interpret the rules; they play the part of any 'non-played' person; they provide information about background events. They will do their best to help you have good time. But you must be aware of the following:

- Game Control are usually outnumbered five to one or more by the players. Their main duty is to keep the game moving. They cannot provide anyone with a continuous help service - they are just too busy.
- Confusion and difficult problems for players are often the essence of a game. Don't expect Game Control to solve your game problems for you. Work with what you have, and ask your team-mates first.

Debrief

At the end of the game there is always a debrief session. This varies in format, but usually one or more of the Control Team will try and give a report on what actually happened, and occasionally key players get a chance to report on how their plans worked out. At this debrief a critique questionnaire is circulated and everyone has a chance to give a structured response on how the day went for them. This is valuable feedback for both Megagame Makers and the game designer, and especially so from newcomers, who might not have the temerity to speak out and criticise the game on their first visit.

As in many other games and sports, going to a nearby pub and discussing the game is a traditional part of Megagaming. This is where you find out what really happened. You can meet your enemies and find out what they were up to. You can meet the players and discuss the game in detail, or games in general. With any luck, there are no hard feelings, no matter how the game unfolded!

In Summary

- read the briefing well before the game
- set yourself objectives (decide what you want from the game)
- ask questions early on if you're not sure
- get stuck in, be active!
- if you're totally confused, or severely fed up with another player, ask Game Control for help
- have fun, and have a memorable experience