

The Queen's Lane Advertiser

(Incorporating Convention News)

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Edited by Jeremy Tullett

A magazine containing news about various games conventions taking place in the UK

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- MidCon 2017 Lost and Found, including a pair of glasses ...

Forthcoming Conventions

SoRCon 11 Holiday Inn, Basildon 23-25 February 2018 Doors open 10am Friday sorcon.co.uk	Swan Con 2018 The Swan, Knutsford, Cheshire 15-18 March 2018 geggus(at)sky.com	Raiders of the Game Cupboard XLII Waterside Community Centre Heath Road Burton-upon-Trent DE15 9LF 24 March 2018 www.raidersofthegamecupboard.co.uk
Baycon 2018 Exeter Court Hotel Kennford Devon 4-8 April 2018	ColCon Marks Tey Hotel, Marks Tey 13-15 April 2018 colcongames(at)gmail.com	UK Games Expo NEC Hilton Metropole, Birmingham 1-3 June 2018 www.ukgamesexpo.co.uk
Raiders of the Game Cupboard XLIII Waterside Community Centre Heath Road Burton-upon-Trent DE15 9LF 23 June 2018 www.raidersofthegamecupboard.co.uk	ManorCon XXXVI Stamford Court, University of Leicester 20-23 July 2018 info(at)manorcon.org.uk www.manorcon.org.uk	The Great Indoors Parkside Suite Market Street Bromsgrove B61 8DA 28-29 July 2018
Handycon 4 Holiday Inn High Wycombe M40 Jcn 4 10-12 August 2018 handycon.co.uk	Boardgames Holiday Le Pas Opton, France 10-17 September 2018 Springharvestholidays.com/boardgame-week	Raiders of the Game Cupboard XLIV Waterside Community Centre Heath Road Burton-upon-Trent DE15 9LF 22 September 2018 www.raidersofthegamecupboard.co.uk

There appear now to be two OxCons, one for boardgames, and one for comics. For the record, the 2018 boardgames version took place at the end of this (2018) January. There doesn't seem to be anyone telling David or me about it these days, although it does have a Facebook page.

ColCon (details above) doesn't have a website yet, but advise me that they will have: Bring and Buy, games library, trader/shop, quiet rooms, Real Ale, boardgame competitions, playtest zone, Thursday night games in the bar, and Cosplay displays and events.

MidCon 2018 Report (Jeremy Tullett)

The total number of registrations hit a new peak at 270, although there was no point at which all 270 people were simultaneously present, which is just as well.

Surprisingly, this did not result in the overcrowding that we witnessed in 2016, and it is clear that the Hallmark Inn dining room is providing a useful overflow space, with some people actively preferring to be there.

There were, as always, a few problems with bedroom bookings, despite, as always, me checking the rooming list before hand, although I am unable to confirm bookings made directly with the hotel by gamers, as I rarely know about them before the event.

A recent IT upgrade had clearly created some difficulties in the back office, which may not have helped. However, the important thing was that everyone who had requested a room got one, all be it possibly not at their preferred location.

Lots of positive feedback, with few concerns expressed. We do take note of the negatives, though, and attempt to find ways to improve. However, all of our customers do need to bear in mind that the committee is run by volunteers, and we cannot be everywhere, all of the time. If you do have a problem, do tell us at the time, when we may be able to fix it (e.g. John had the bar reopened when it closed prematurely on Saturday evening), and not after the event. You may be able to improve the experience for everyone.

There did seem to be a feeling that things were not managed by the hotel quite as slickly as in previous years, and I was myself overcharged at the main bar (two Ports for £18 was pretty obviously wrong), but had to go to some trouble to get the problem solved. Not a great idea to wind up the convention chairman.

We do also understand that people who have never been to a convention before can struggle with the free-form format of the event, and we do go to some trouble to explain how it works at the registration desk, and have a committee member (Dave Clasby) specifically charged with assisting anyone who wants to sample typical convention games in a low pressure environment, by organising some introductory games himself. Perhaps we don't make this clear enough.

We continue to explore ways of allowing people to call-out for more players for a game, or, alternatively for a game to play. We thought about a Twitter feed a couple of years back, but the app of choice moves on, and WhatsApp now looks like the way to go. The problem is that it doesn't really matter what app we pick if there is not a critical mass the attendees who have it, or can use it.

We also have to decide whether go for a system where we register you (e.g. WhatsApp), or you register with us (e.g. Twitter). I am not a social media user myself, but I can appreciate that not everyone necessarily has a Smartphone with them, never mind the right app, so I don't think there's an easy solution, short of putting a sandwich board on David Norman, and having him walk around calling out "Five more wanted for Railway Rivals".

Anyone with an informed view on this is invited to get in touch.

I also aim to make it easier to accept credit / debit card payments across the registration desk. We could probably have done it a couple of years back, as anyone with the PayPal app can do it already, and we can also use the laptop at the registration desk to enter details manually, although this is not very convenient for payee or payer. There is a new device out which appears to be a cheap version of a commercial card reader, which I am looking into.

Boardgames conventions may carry a certain retro charm, but I don't see why a modest investment should not enable us to bring aspects of managing the event into the 21st century.

We look forward to seeing you all again in 2018. Advance details are on the back page.

MidCon Report – A Personal Perspective from Toby Harris

Midcon 1986 was my first; turned up in leather jacket with badly gashed & bloodied finger (covered in tampon-looking bandage). As a teenager I had no money for a room so slept under a table. Meeting "bagpipe-boy" John Colledge for the first time put us both in hysterics at the sight of the other. Nothing changes!

But something did change about MidCon. This year (driving 90-mins each way there & back in a single day with [daughter] Mia) I was sober throughout. Saw it for what it was, and in a very different light.

Unlike mum, Mia adores games. Mia is a genuine gamer. It is truly in her blood and she has a far greater depth of strategy than me. She loves to win, loves the strategy of getting there and has great ability to do so. So whilst I will never knowingly let her beat me, in a very short space of time this will no longer be my choice. She is a stronger games player than me by quite some margin. I hope she stays with this hobby - she loves the mathematics (efficiencies etc) of the various general games concepts. So we came to MidCon to try some new games, and we both got a really great experience.

At home we play some of "the latest stuff" monthly at my house with ex-Manorcon names you may recall; Steve Grainger and Chris Latimer. But Mia shares mum Sital's disdain for the fat / sweaty / unwashed / uncouth. Sital has a Masters in Nutritional, specializing in diabetes and the aged. Sital last attended an event at Manorcon (WDC) 2004 - she said afterwards that she had to leave because of the smell of sweat and rotten cardigans. So I am constantly fighting against the truth that the gaming hobby is stuffed full of people who "dress down", "don't bother to wash", "can be rule-mongers". [*Surely not? Ed.*]

Mia doesn't want this - she wants strong players to beat her if they play well. She will learn from those clever ones. But she also wants people to be fun, play reasonably swiftly, not be smelly and if they would kindly keep their arse-cracks within their jeans too then that would be appreciated.

You will appreciate I had to weave Mia's pathway very carefully through this minefield of characters, whilst asking her not to judge every book by its cover. For example, I had to explain how Simon Hornby (after his genuinely pleasantly received on my part "Hi Tobes!" greeting) is a lovely guy. Ok, perhaps not huggable. But I do hug Bruno every time I see him, and he's even bigger than Simon. And the truth is that Mia misjudged him, as did Vick (infamously!) for his ALOS card game.

As our day started I was so pleased to see (and play a couple of games with) John Webley early on. I got the one comment from Mia which I thought would help swing the day's pendulum: "Dad, this guy is cleverer than you isn't he?"

Yes indeed he is. It's not even close. "not even a little bit" close. John Webley is one incredibly clever guy. It enabled Mia to look at the brain rather than brawn, clothing, cool haircut or any other "Krypton" factor element.

John was the perfect guy to start the day with actually. Not the best dressed or coolest looking. But very clever, straight-talking and decent. And Mia won her first game: Flying Carpet. She was strategically sound.

Unbeknown to Mia, John is a rugby fan who had seen a couple of FB clips of her against the lads a few years ago. I so wish she still played rugby against those lads!

We moved on. Earlier in the greetings we met the Pete Mason / Nigel Pepper / Kath Collman clan. I get Kath's confusion; she remembers my <latecomer, I might add> elder brother Adam from the

early 1990's. Kath, I will never forget you, and so glad you keep coming to MidCon. Pete & Nigel too. Would have loved to play a game with you guys today but the timings never worked. Miss your (our in fact - we all love him) pal Paul Cook too.

Bit of "sausage special" lunch at the bar (Mia is a carnivore in both her appetite and gaming), joined for ten mins by Zippy Wightman. Mia agreed - it's the way Mark covers his smile with his hand, not sure whether Zippy or George, but definitely sure it's one of them. Mia talked about Mark on the way home - he does a great impression. I told her that I don't think he's even aware he does one - it comes so naturally!

We played "King" Jeremy for a couple of games and I felt rotten about stabbing him at Settlers. It was a game-winning move (block road / build town), but I still feel bad even now¹. Mia was impressed with Shaun Derrick's smiles – as I was in 1988 at WDC1. He remains the charmer. So glad to get Mia in a game with both Jeremy & Shaun. She did ok. Ish. We all learn.

Played so many new games and bought many new ones too. "Kingdomino" has to be the new flavour of the month.

Final game with Richard Beattie, Paul Oakes & Gareth (?). Paul was where I wanted to be - a few beers in. Awesome company these guys. Really enjoyed it.

MidCon Report – MidCon Quiz Results (David Norman)

The rounds were:

- Round 1. Number of members in the team - 30 points for teams of 4, 20 for teams of 5.
- Round 2. The America's - 20 flags, country outlines, photos and questions - name the country from the Americas for each one.
- Round 3. Doubles. Each question is in two parts, find the answer which fits both. E.g. What colour is on the flag of the Republic of Ireland, and the flag of Iceland?
- Round 4. Sequences. Each question is four items to put into order.
- Round 5. Lyrics - 20 lyrics taken from well-known songs - name the song title.
- Round 6. Heads or Tails. Each question has two options, guess wrong and you're out. Last person standing wins 5 points for their team, out on the final question 2 points, beat last year's winner 1 point (but as last year's winner wasn't present, this wasn't available). Max Hayes won the 5 points for his team, so will be the player to beat next year.
- Round 7. 5-4-3-2-1. Five questions with multiple answers, give 5 answers to the first, 4 to the second, etc.
- Round 8. Connections. 9 questions to answer, then question 10 is what connects the 9 answers. This year they were all Shipping Forecast areas.

Place	Team	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5	Round 6	Round 7	Round 8	Total
1	SorCon	30	18	10	7	11		11	10	97
2=	The Great Big Fact Hunt	30	15	10	3	12		12	7	89
2=	Bernard	30	15	9	3	8		14	10	89
4=	Stephen Hawkins School of Dance	30	12	7	3	12	5	10	2	81
4=	Tiny Team	30	7	9	5	8	2	11	9	81
6	Kath & Her Hareem	30	10	9	5	5		13	8	80
7=	Caledonia LED	30	11	9	5	1		11	10	77
7=	Rebellion	30	6	8	3	14		8	8	77
9	Doug Massie Memorial Quiz Team	20	6	10	1	15		12	9	73
10	Critical Role	20	7	9	2	9		10	4	61
11=	Splodge 2.0	20	8	7	3	9		7	4	58
11=	Gary	20	7	8	4	11		4	4	58

¹ I played a bad first move – it is years since I've opened that box – and Toby's stab just put the cap on it. If anyone believes that Toby really feels bad about the 'stab', they haven't played Diplomacy against him enough times ... Ed.

Congratulations to the winning team, David Smith, Chris Dearlove, Lee Edwards & Mark Jones, who successfully used their team name and their victory speech to plug SorCon (see front cover for details!).

MidCon Report – General Feedback

Most of our feedback comes in verbally at the end of the convention, but we do get some emails, and we do look at social media as well. Here are some (edited) comments that we have received, or seen.

Ken Simpson:

Thank you and al your committee members and helpers. An enjoyable Con even though I was struggling to get rid of a cold.

[...] adding a map of the Inn to the convention booklet would give greater awareness of the availability. It should also include a clear statement of what hours this is available, and what bar facilities will be in operation over there.

[We have an extended discussion every year about what information is appropriate to include, as we don't wish to create lots of booklets and cards that just end up in the recycling bin.]

“Aaron” (Facebook entry):

+ *Good location - the short walk to intu Derby was great.*

+ *Good venue(s)*

+ *We met some very lovely friendly people*

+ *The majority of staff were very friendly and showed a genuine interest in boardgames.*

- *The staff in the Inn during the day were not very welcoming*

- *Food and drink were at London prices!*

- *[...] In the Hotel, we found finding space often difficult/impossible with people "reserving" tables (or beach toweling as the convention called it). There were multiple occasions and although the committee members we spoke to said "we don't allow beach toweling" and had said they were ensuring it wasn't taking place, yet again and again tables were reserved by nearby gamers at other tables for 'friends' or tables sat unoccupied with crates and crates of games around them for quite some time.*

- *The atmosphere felt at times a little unwelcoming and very much like an 'old hands' con, [...]*

- *No games library, [...]*

- *On Sunday, we spoke with 2 other gaming couples who [...] felt overall that it was a 'who knows who con'.*

I believe that a committee member has already replied directly to Aaron.

We are aware that it is difficult for newcomers to break into what looks like an established club, and we do try to direct people who have never been to any convention before to a table where we can organise games for them. On at least one occasion I did actually ask a couple (who had spent most of the weekend on their own) if they wished to join in elsewhere, but they said that they were happy as they were.

In general, players are only too keen to have others join them, although we understand that it isn't always easy to ask, and that some people are not as welcoming as they might (or should) be.

We are thinking of ways to make it possible to advertise games seeking players, but the main hitch is that, whatever technology we adopt, most people have to have (or be willing to install) it.

The hotel has been chastised about the barman's attitude.

We do say that people should always approach committee members for help and assistance, and we had very few complaints brought to us during the weekend. I didn't see any overt 'beach-towelling' in the Garden Room (where I was most of the weekend), but we do try to police it.

Ben Bateson (who had the misfortune to have his car broken in to):

The smash-n-grab was one of those things. One of the most positive things was the way the manager, Simon, dealt with the whole experience - finding the culprits quickly on CCTV and getting it prepared for police. I live in hope that the bag will be found, but I'm resting my hopes on Derbyshire Police actually doing it.

Otherwise, then, it seems the Midland were undergoing something of a cost-cutting exercise, [...] the 'skip having your room cleaned and get a free drink' offer, which there is no problem with at all, but dressing it up as an 'environmentally conscious' thing was a bit cynical.

Breakfast on Friday & Saturday was not good. The plates weren't warmed [...] Some plates also weren't clean, which is a worry. Things were a bit better on Sunday [...].

The regular bar prices seem to be up to £5 a pint now, [...] Waits at the general bar were often very slow because there was only ever one overworked guy on duty².

The beer bar in the garden room was terrible [Poorly stored, and served, says Ben].

Dinner and lunch buffets were OK. Didn't do the bring and buy. Quiz was a high standard as usual.

[Bar prices are what they are; MidCon is 40 years old, and people have been complaining about the prices of beer in the various hotels it has used for about 40 years as well. The beer comes out of polypins, and doubtless the Hallmark could look after it better, but, as I remind the committee *ad nauseam*, this is a games convention, not a real ale festival. For comparison, the wine there is also expensive for the quality of the offering.

There did seem to be fewer staff at breakfast than might have been advisable. I gather staff outnumbered guests on the Monday morning, so it isn't that they are not available.]

² Not entirely true. Ed.

MANORCON XXXVI

Stamford Court, University of Leicester. 2pm Friday 20th July – 2pm Monday 23rd July 2018

Following on from last year's successful convention, ManorCon will once again be held at the University of Leicester. The gaming halls will remain at Stamford Court with accommodation nearby.

Please note, ManorCon does not start until 2pm on Friday. In recent years, people have been arriving earlier and earlier, to the extent that it has started to interfere with the convention preparation on Friday morning. The University needs to adapt the venue to our set up and thus it is unlikely that there will be space available for anyone arriving before 2pm.

As ever, single accommodation is available at the convention. All rooms are en-suite rooms. These will cost £38 per night, and £8 per night extra if you don't book in advance. As always, you are therefore recommended to book early to guarantee a room.

For those people who want twin accommodation, we recommend The Regency Hotel, which is just under a mile from the convention. The contact details are: The Regency Hotel, 360 London Road, Stonygate, LE2 2PL; 0116 270 9634. If you want to take this option, we recommend booking early, as it has been known to fill up on ManorCon weekend. Their website is www.the-regency-hotel.com.

ManorCon will be pretty much the same as the successful formula we've had in previous years. Running from Friday lunchtime to Monday lunchtime, it will have all the regular tournaments, plus one or two possible new ones, depending on the success (or otherwise) of the latest new game releases. It will once again feature the Second Hand Game Sale on Friday and Saturday, the Pop Quiz on Saturday evening, and the Treasure Hunt on Sunday afternoon, as well as more games than you can shake a stick at.

Tournaments will include 18XX and Midnight Party. If there is a tournament that you would like us to run, please contact a member of the committee and we'll try to fit it in. There will also be plenty of non-tournament games on offer far too numerous to mention!

There is, of course, a bar, and we are working to make sure that the Real Ale is up to standard.

Included with this issue of QLA, you should find a booking form. You can also download the booking form (and find lots of other ManorCon information) on the ManorCon website, www.manorcon.org.uk. Please note the booking deadline - 16th June 2018. If you need any further information, please feel free to contact us:

- Steve Jones, 59 Sudeley Walk, Putnoe, Bedford, MK41 8JH, UK (+44 (0)1234 405878)
- email us at info@manorcon.org.uk
- or check out our website at www.manorcon.org.uk

MidCon 2018 Advance News (Jeremy Tullett)

The Convention

MidCon XXXX (there is some debate about the number, but the most vociferous source tells me that this will be the 40th instance of the convention) is, subject to contract, going to take place in the comfortable Hallmark Hotel in Derby from Friday morning 2nd November (9am) to Sunday evening 4th November (6pm).

Convention Registration

Registration is not open yet. There has been an indication that the booking of rooms may be available through the hotel website, but we await further news on this.

I also aim, one way or another, to be in a position to accept credit / debit cards at the registration desk.

Seven Needed for a Game of Diplomacy

I had a request from a group of people who were at WorldDipCon to run a game of Diplomacy in 2017, and it was very successful. Unfortunately, as we only had about 10 players interested, we were only able to run board on each of Saturday and Sunday. If you are interested in playing in 2018, do let me know when you register, so we can plan room space appropriately.

MidCon 2017 Lost and Found

- One case of poker chips (owner believed to have been identified)
- One pair of silver-grey Foster Grant glasses +2.0
- Assorted counters and cards
- One copy of General (owner also believed to have been identified)
- One copy of Dixit, already claimed by the owner

We can post items to their owners (at their cost), or hang on to them until Manorcon, or MidCon.

The Final Word

This issue of The Queen's Lane Advertiser was brought to you by:

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