

Celebration of Mind

**In honor of Martin Gardner's birthday,
October 21, 2012**

During the final weekend of the Maryland Renaissance Festival, October 20-21, 2012, at Ye olde Gamery, Kadon's pavilion at the Festival, we dedicated the entire day as a Celebration of Mind in honor of Martin Gardner (October 21, 1914-May 22, 2010), whose writings on recreational mathematics directly inspired Kadon's founding, work and mission. We've called our creations "celebrations of the mind" for decades.

Visitors kept streaming in and out of the building for 9 hours, making it a day-long celebration, not just a formal meeting for a limited number of attendees. The theme could be summarized as "Polyform Puzzles—the combinatorics of world and mind."

Ye olde Gamery, turreted pavilion



Photo: Dick Jones

We had lots of profound conversations about recreational mathematics, how our work is based on the legacy of Martin Gardner, and the importance of math and puzzles in awakening and building the mind's capacity for problem-solving and critical thinking. These are valuable skills to nurture in education, and they open a window for understanding how puzzles are really paradigms of all there is—matter and energy, the laws of physics, systems and evolution, even the logic structure of the mind. These are very intense topics and close to proprietress Kate Jones's heart, and they provided a unique and mind-stretching experience for our hundreds of visitors, who got to sit and play and think—a true celebration of each mind.

Here are some photos that capture the scene. This was our 29th season in the Festival, which runs for nine weekends every year. We designed and built the 24-foot gallery, which is decorated in an exotic, Renaissance style—including the crew in period costumes. Wall shelves display Kadon’s recreational mathematics “playable art” while the long counter has games and puzzles for visitors to enjoy hands-on, with plenty of seating. Call it a pub for the mind.

Panoramic interior of Ye Olde Gamery, Kadon’s Renaissance arcade



Photo: Art Blumberg — Crew, left to right: Eileen Shaivitz, Seth Bonder, Kate Jones, Richard Grainger



Behind counter:
Kate Jones in Renaissance shirt and laced bodice; Seth Bonder explaining a puzzle to visitors. On wall at left, the red gameboard for Martin Gardner’s *Lewis Carroll’s Chess Wordgame* in its place of honor. In red shirt, Meshele Merchant, one of the Gamery’s crew and Kadon’s resident artist.

Photo: George Sherry

The Gamery operates as an Arcade, with a \$1 playing fee per puzzle or game. Very clever solvers may win a prize, and the fee is refunded with a purchase. In the photo above, the large white mug next to Kate is inscribed, “Put the big ones in first,” an amusing hint for puzzlers. For each puzzle on the table, several challenges are offered, depending on the skill of the solver. Some contenders, especially teenagers, will stay for hours. For many visitors, the Gamery is yearly their highest-priority destination.

When an especially nice solution is found, people like to take pictures of them with their cellphone cameras, and sometimes we take them for our own records. Here's an unusually nice solution of Rombix Jr., with rotational symmetry and color separation. Huzzahs and applause to the successful solver.



Photo: Art Blumberg

How it all started

The tale of how Kadon came to be is by now fairly well known: Martin Gardner's article in the May 1957 issue of *Scientific American* introduced to the world the subject of pentominoes, based on Solomon Golomb's study and naming of them as contained in his book, *Polyominoes*.

Reading Martin's article, Arthur C. Clarke became a "pentomino addict" and wrote them into his science fiction thriller, *Imperial Earth*.

Reading Clarke's story in 1976, Kate Jones got hooked on them, too, and eventually produced them, with all her original research, under the brand name, Quintillions®, which then became the flagship of Kadon Enterprises, Inc., the company founded in 1979 for the purpose of marketing mathematical recreations.



Here is Richard Grainger, Kadon's earliest helper and the Gamery's resident game master, in his wizardly guise, with Quintillions on a special table under the turret, a stage of his own. He offers visitors the challenge to play a Quintillions game, Squint®, where pieces touch only at corners. Last player able to make a move wins. This game was invented by Kate.

Challengers who succeed win a special token to spend elsewhere in the Gamery. Very few tokens are ever redeemed; folks keep them as trophies of their victory.

In all these 29 years, Richard has played tens of thousands of rounds of Squint and wins about 85% of the time. He's one of the stars of our show. Just think... all this thanks to Martin Gardner's article from 55 years ago!



Photos: Art Blumberg

What has one idea wrought? From the combinatorics of polyominoes, over 200 other polyform sets were born, with hexagons, triangles, octagons, circles, rhombs, Penrose tiles, and many more. New grids arose, lending their floorplan to puzzle sets forming stars, cubes, other optical illusions, and novel tessellations. It's like M.C. Escher's figures coming to life and dancing. Simply beautiful, as are the kaleidomatrix wood gameboards.

Visitors entering the Gamery are always smiling. The colorful shapes captivate, and curiosity about how they work gets people to the counters. Most people are eager to learn how to play a game they've never seen, or to work a new puzzle.

Outside the entrance, under a large market umbrella, sits a famous Renaissance game: the Royal Game of the Goose and Labyrinth. Kadon makes it in a lavishly elegant two-sided wood board with wood frame. Even the King and his court occasionally stop by and engage in highly theatrical game play, hosted here by the lady Meshele (*on right*).

***Thank you, Martin Gardner,
and happy birthday!***



Photo: Art Blumberg