

Fans hop aboard exclusive train to Comic-Con

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Nick Friedland of San Francisco waits for the departure of the Wikia Fan Express train to Comic-Con International: San Diego 2014 on Wednesday, July 23, 2014, at Union Station in Los Angeles. A lucky fellowship of "Lord of the Rings" fans are forgoing the preferred method of Middle-earth transportation - that'd be horseback - to journey to Comic-Con in a private train car that's been transformed into the Wikia Fan Express. The fan-centric social networking site and "Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor" publisher Warner Bros. Interactive have picked 40 fans to ride the one-of-a-kind carriage from La La Land to San Diego for the four-day pop-culture celebration, which kicks off Thursday, July 24, 2014, at the San Diego Convention Center. (Photo by Chris Pizzello/Invision/AP)

(AP)—For a lucky fellowship of fans, Comic-Con is beginning early on a private train car trekking to the pop-culture convention.

The fan-centric social networking site Wikia picked 30 users to board a private vintage carriage transformed into the Wikia Fan Express, a special expedition Wednesday from Los Angeles to San Diego that included an assortment of unique on-board entertainment, including special sneak peeks and Q&A sessions.

"Comic-Con is supposed to be all about the fans, so what cooler way to get some of our fans to the show than to take them on this really beautiful train car," said Wikia entertainment programming director Eric Moro while perched underneath the car's domed glass ceiling. "The fact that we're not only taking this really cool train to Comic-Con, but we've got all this great content to show them along the way is awesome."

The Wikia-sponsored railway journey, which served as the caboose to a standard Amtrak train, included a preview of the upcoming video game "Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor," a sneak peak at the fantasy-meets-reality TV series "The Quest" and a demonstration of Wikia's new interactive mapping feature, which allows users to collaboratively annotate maps of both real and fictional places like Middle-earth.



Comic-Con attendee Coral Eisenbruch of Los Angeles listens to a Q&A discussion on the upcoming game "Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor" aboard the Wikia Fan Express train to Comic-Con International: San Diego 2014 on Wednesday, July 23, 2014 at Union Station in Los Angeles. A lucky fellowship of "Lord of the Rings" fans are forgoing the preferred method of Middle-earth transportation - that'd be horseback - to journey to Comic-Con in a private train car that's been transformed into the Wikia Fan Express. The fan-centric social networking site and "Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor" publisher Warner Bros. Interactive have picked 40 fans to ride the one-of-a-kind carriage from La La Land to San Diego for the four-day pop-culture celebration, which kicks off Thursday, July 24, 2014, at the San Diego Convention Center. (Photo by Chris Pizzello/Invision/AP)

"This is the first time I've ever demoed a game on a train," said "Shadow of Mordor" design director Michael de Plater before showing off a level from the open-world combat game, which is set between "The Hobbit" and "The Lord of the Rings" tales. "I'm afraid this might turn into 'Snowpiercer.' It might be a blood bath. I will be Ed Harris."

While the private excursion hardly resembled the train-set sci-fi film, Wikia did deck out booths inside the domed Silver Splendor car, which was built in 1956, with maps of the villainous realm Mordor and flat-screen monitors to broadcast game and TV clips.

Moro and his team hand selected fans for the expedition from hundreds of Wikia users headed to Comic-Con. Rebecca "cyabude3" Lietz, who contributes to the site's "Shadow of Mordor" page, traveled from Germany for the special trip. It's her first-ever Comic-Con.

"It's really special," said Lietz. "People from all over the world come to Comic-Con to see things like DC, Marvel and Archie Comics, so for me to be here for the first time and go to San Diego this way, it's really great."



Carlos Moro of Miami, Fla., second from left, interacts with fellow passengers

as they wait for the departure of the Wikia Fan Express train to Comic-Con International: San Diego 2014 on Wednesday, July 23, 2014, at Union Station in Los Angeles. A lucky fellowship of "Lord of the Rings" fans are forgoing the preferred method of Middle-earth transportation - that'd be horseback - to journey to Comic-Con in a private train car that's been transformed into the Wikia Fan Express. The fan-centric social networking site and "Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor" publisher Warner Bros. Interactive have picked 40 fans to ride the one-of-a-kind carriage from La La Land to San Diego for the four-day pop-culture celebration, which kicks off Thursday, July 24, 2014, at the San Diego Convention Center. (Photo by Chris Pizzello/Invision/AP)

Comic-Con, the four-day extravaganza that celebrates film, TV, video games, comic books and costumes, launches at the San Diego Convention Center with a preview Wednesday night before going full steam ahead Thursday with more than 150,000 fans expected to attend the sold-out event.

Natalie "keyframegirl" Ebnet, who contributes to the Wikia page specifically about Comic-Con, is taking her 10th trip to the festival. She said she initially started posting about the expo because she couldn't find tips about attending with children, though Ebnet's offspring aren't along for the ride this time.

"I've ditched the kids for the past two years with the husband," said Ebnet. "I meet up with my girlfriends down there. It's our version of a spa weekend."

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