

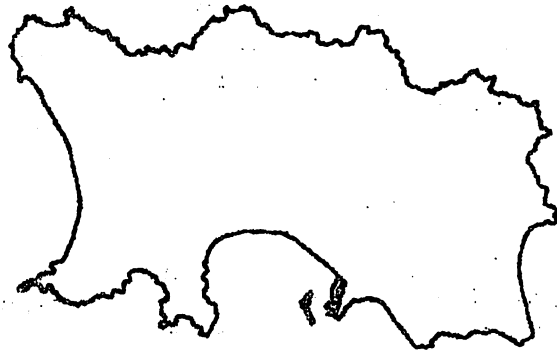
Helicon's

debating

Forum

Issue 2:

Beryl



Special Programme Issue (!)

HdF is published by the committee of Helicon '93, a bid for the 1993 Eastercon. This is the second issue, and is available for committee whim; or by subscription (£2.00 for issues 1-4) as well as usable blackmail threats. This issue dated November 1990 and available at Novacon 20.

HdF is intended to deal with the issues and decisions involved in bidding (and running) Eastercons, especially Helicon '93. It is intended to allow the committee and friends of Helicon to air their personal views and opinions as well as some of the more official decisions of Helicon '93. In addition, of course, we want to publish letters of comment from members and non-members alike.

It will appear (roughly) quarterly up to Easter 1991; any issues after that are in the lap of the Gods, or at least the Speculation bid session. The intended schedule is: 1 - Eastcon, 2 - Novacon, 3 - Reconnaissance, 4 - (post?) Speculation.



Please remember that these articles were written as internal committee working papers, and have not been re-edited much for publication. They are also (sometimes) the personal opinions of the authors, not of the committee as a whole. That said ...

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Editorial:

Tim Illingworth

Apologies to all those who have been waiting for this issue, which was originally intended for ConFiction. The delay was, as you probably thought, due to the effort involved in organising the Ops side of ConFiction. As a result, issue 4 has slipped back to Speculation at the earliest, and may be later. It will appear, even if we lose the bid - in that case, it could be very interesting to write!

The articles this time seem to be largely concerned with programming at the convention. This is, of course, one of the major things that the committee does for the convention - the only place where the committee and its views and prejudices can really be seen by the membership, and where the committee can affect the (aargh!) 'total convention experience'. The committee can influence other things, such as the hotel rates and bar prices, and do deals for cheap travel, but in the end it is in the hands of others to execute them. Only in the programme is the committee totally exposed, and as such it needs careful thought and a determination to do what you think right for the convention.

Besides, both the letters we got (from Robert Day and Jonathan Cowie) talked about it. Robert also talked about travel and the bid session, both subjects that I've held over until HdF 3. Ivan Towlson also wrote something in one of the BSFA magazines, but so far hasn't copied it to us so that we can comment.

APPEAL: We are interested in getting copies of slides of Contrivance to use in the bidding session. We were all busy running it, so we don't have enough. If you can help, please contact us at Drake Road. We will pay for copies of slides we want, but don't spend money without consulting us!

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John Richards is a member of the South Hants SF Group. A founder of Wincon and 30Con, he has worked on many conventions. Helicon is his first Eastercon committee. He also said that, whilst none of these articles represents an official committee position, this article isn't necessarily his own position. You have been warned ...

In at the Deep End - Fandom's Newcomers

John Richards

It seems to be a prevalent feeling that more should be done to encourage 'Neos'. We are told that it's necessary that people coming to conventions for the first time should be specially encouraged to 'get involved' by aiming items or, occasionally, whole programming streams at them. To my mind, this seems to be both patronising to the 'Neo' and detrimental to the quality of programming.

There is no doubt that it is true that it can be disconcerting to walk into an event and find large groups of people all talking to their friends. It can be equally discouraging walking into your local pub for the first time, but this does not, however, cause breweries to introduce special 'new drinkers' bars in pubs. Fans are told that they should be nice to 'Neos' in the same way that they are told that they have to eat their green vegetables. We are told that we are some sort of support group for the socially inadequate and have some kind of duty to proselytise. Well, I don't remember joining any kind of missionary society, nor have I ever taken any oath to do my duty for Ghod and literary taste. Like many other fans, I'm nice to certain people because they catch me at a time when I'm feeling like it (generally because I'm having a good time talking to my

friends) and at other times I can be a complete bastard. Despite the massive waves of self-satisfaction that periodically sweep through fandom (we read more books, we read faster, we have higher I.Q.'s and better singing voices than the common mass of humanity) we have to remember that fans are mere mortals and subject to just as many prejudices and foibles as every one else. If people want to spend their free time acting as social workers, they will join the Samaritans and not the local Science Fiction group.

So does the committee have a responsibility to make up for these foibles by protecting the poor, innocent, 'Neo' from the big bad fannish world by offering them a diluted version of the real thing and, if it does, how does it stop the big bad fannish world from intruding? One answer seems to be that we build a 'Neo' ghetto right next to the Fan room and the video room and the broom cupboard where the filkers have been put. Curiously, this idea seems to come most often from those who otherwise spend time complaining that fandom is split into too many cliques. If there are too many cliques (and I do think there are) then what is the point of building a new one?

Additionally, there is the problem of recognising a 'Neo' in the first place. Do we assign 'Neo' status to everyone whose name is not recognised by the committee? Do we put a special box on the membership form, next to the question about special dietary requirements? Do we assign gophers with special orders to keep out anyone they've seen before or do we simply issue yellow stars to be worn at all times?

Then there are people like Linda-Clair Toal, who must have had a first convention but was never a 'Neo', and others who have been coming to conventions for years but still are. Just because we want to 'get involved' doesn't mean that everyone else wants to and they shouldn't be made to feel inadequate or weird if they don't.

Even if we could round up the 'Neos' and arrange for them to be shipped to a homeland somewhere where they can indulge in their quaint 'Neo' activities in an equal - but separate - environment, what do we do then? When, during the course of a debate at WINCON, the representative of the National Viewers and Listeners Association turned to Michael de Larabetti and said "but surely you must make some concessions when you're writing for children." he simply responded; "Why?" Good children's books are simply good books and are enjoyable at whatever age you read them. Similarly, good programming for 'Neos' will be good programming for anyone, and there will be 'non-Neos' who will wish to attend. Are we to tell them that they cannot be involved in part of the convention simply because they have been an active part of the community? This seems very strange reasoning.

The only obvious alternative is to put on a programme to which no one else will want to go. Apart from being condescending in the extreme, this is hardly likely to encourage people to come back, thus defeating the original purpose.

In my opinion, the only sensible course remains the traditional one of leaving the 'Neos' to the tender mercies of the rest of us. Although not perfect, there are a large number of nice people out there who will make an effort to talk to people who look lost and lonely and when this is done out of genuine concern rather than some nebulous idea of duty then the gesture means a great deal more. Anyway, everybody has to learn how to leave the nest at some point or another, and putting off the evil day may be only a temporary kindness. We cannot treat people like children all their lives without running the serious risk of damaging their ability to take care of themselves at all. Whether we like it or not, fandom is not the right place for everyone and 'Neos' are no exception.

This article deals with the function space currently available at the Hotel de France and the possible room layouts for Helicon. For those not familiar with the layout, the Hotel de France is divided into two wings, one built in the 1860s, the other finished in 1988. More function space is provided in the Lido de France, an adjacent purpose-built conference site. A map is provided on page 7 - an official Hotel de France map copied from the Contrivance map! Apologies to Ivan Towilson for the mentions of Contrivance in this article, but it's rather difficult to avoid.

Summary of Function Rooms available

Old Wing	Size	Use at Contrivance	Use at Helicon?
Empire	550	Main Programme	Main Programme
Regency [Club]	120	Green Room	Programme
Minstrel	-	Bar	Bar
Sovereign	70	Real Ale Store	Programme
Billiard Room [Century]	-	Bar	Green Room
Golden Lounge	130	Fan Room	[Fan?] Programme
Imperial [Quiet] Lounge	40	Ops	Ops
BoardRoom 1	-	Newsletter	Store?
BoardRoom 2	-	Store	Store
Colony	130	Dealers	Programme
Annexe	-	-	Con Desks?
New Wing			
Starlight	500	Main Programme	Main Programme?
Basement Seminar Room	80	Programme	Programme?
Syndicate A	40	Art Show	?
Syndicate B	40	Art Show	?
Room 1000	-	Programme	?
Skyline	1000	-	Dealers/Art/Lounge/Bar?
Lido de France			
Main Auditorium	600	Main Programme	Main Programme
Cinema	300	Films	Films
Dance Studio [Sovereign]	-	Bar	?
Madison's Disco	-	Disco	Disco
Dive Bar	-	Green Room	?

Room sizes are in nominal theatre style. Names in [] are the names in use in 1989, where they differ.

Changes to the layout since 1989:

Old Wing:

The Century bar, the fan bar at Contrivance, is now a billiard room. The Club Room has been renamed the Regency, and a wall has replaced the flimsy dividing doors between it and the Empire. The Sovereign Room is new - it was used as the real ale store in 1989 whilst under construction. The recess opposite the Colony Room is now a lounge area (the Annexe).

New Wing:

The Skyline (not used in 1989 - there was a dog show in there) has been carpeted and fitted with an internal marquee. A balcony is also being built in there. Dividing walls have appeared in the Restaurant.

Lido de France:

The old Sovereign Room is now used as a dance studio, but the bar is still in place and can be used. There are plans to extend the Main Auditorium to the back of the building, possibly removing the Dive Bar and the projection room.

Possibilities for Usage

The main problem is that (as Roger said in the last issue) we need a much bigger room for the dealers. At Contrivance, they were squeezed into the Colony Room (130 seats) and were cramped. If a letter booking five tables hadn't been lost in the post, there would have been real problems. The Art Show, also badly squeezed in 1909, needs bigger space as well. But, there is nowhere obvious to put either of them. I see three possibilities: the Skyline, the Starlight and the Empire. All have problems.

If the dealers go into the Skyline, they will rattle badly - the place can seat 1000. Therefore, the Art Show (the other area with similar security needs) would join them. A 6' table in the book room requires a minimum of 5 square metres of space (with passage for dealers and customers) and more like 7 sm for any comfort. This allows 10' passages for the customers and 7' spaces between tables for the dealers. 50 tables would therefore require about 400 sm of the 1000 available. A reasonable sized art show would require 200-300 sm. This leaves 300-400 sm unused at present - though we have ideas. One, which I like, is to develop the area as a sitting-around and reading area, possibly with a bar, possibly with the con desks. This would require extra furnishings, which would cost quite a lot. The area would also have to close when the book room and art show close, for security purposes, and this could be a problem.

However, the real problem with the Skyline is that it will cost us if we use it. We don't yet have a number, but it will have at least three zeros. So we need to develop the other possibilities.

If we use the Starlight or the Empire for dealers or art show, we lose a main programme hall. With the Starlight, we also lose our preferred banquet hall, and the dealers are right out on a limb. (This doesn't happen if we use the Skyline, because the Starlight and the lounge area will draw people down there.) On the other hand, the Starlight is a weird shape and can't be blacked out, so it is probably the least useful of the main programme halls.

Taking the Empire for dealers gives problems with overnight films - the Starlight cannot be blacked out, which means that all films would have to be in the Cinema or the Lido Main Auditorium. However, it is next to three small programme rooms and a major bar, so people would be around there.

Usage of the other rooms seems reasonably straightforward. Now that the folding screens have been replaced by a wall, the Regency can be used for programme. The Sovereign, off the Minstrel bar, can similarly be used for programme. The 'Fan Area' could go either in here or in the Golden Lounge, as in 1989. This would give an added reason for using the billiard room as the Green Room - three of the small programme rooms would be close. Although the Starlight and the Basement complex are a long way away, this was workable at Contrivance with the Green Room in the Regency (then the Club Room).

The next set of rooms are no problem. One of the Boardrooms serves as stores, with the other and the Imperial Lounge for the committee. The Colony Room could be either programme or Art Show, depending on alternative

sites for the Art Show. The Annexe can be used for con desks - easily visible from the main corridor - if they are not in the Skyline.

The Basement complex presents some problems. Whilst the Seminar Room looks good for programme, the Syndicate Rooms are more of a problem. They are rather small (40 & 30 seats theatre respectively) and access to the smaller one is through the larger or through the Seminar room. To me, they look best for things where people tend to remain for a long time, such as a writer's workshop or board games. Suggestions, please, on a postcard ...

Beyond that, we have the Restaurant, the Atrium fast-food area and the Starlight and Skyline rooms, already discussed.

Over in the Lido, there are currently five rooms that we could use, though one of them may disappear by 1993. The Main Auditorium has to be used theatre style - it has fixed seating for 320 and additional space for another 300 so far - the rebuilding may extend this. It also has a deep fixed stage, facilities for forward and back projection etc.

The Cinema is a public cinema, and has a very helpful manager - he spent four hours assembling Blade Runner from the kit of parts supplied in 1989. 35mm films will be in here - possibly some 16mm if the terms are right.

The old Sovereign Room is now a dance studio, but the bar is still there and can be used. We intend to use it, and hope that it will be better patronised than in 1989 (where it was often the easiest place to get a drink). You would think that fans could read a notice in letters a foot high saying 'BAR', but apparently not.

The Dive bar at the back of the Lido Main Auditorium may disappear in the course of reconstruction. It is not obvious where a new Green Room can be found, but no doubt we will manage.

The last room in the Lido is Madison's Disco, which we will use for the disco on Sunday night after the banquet (on any other night it's open to the public). Any disco which has 250,000 worth of electronics and places to hold a conversation while the music is going is one that I can attend and enjoy, so I'm not going to miss the chance.

I have deliberately not mentioned a newsletter until now. Whilst I would like to have one, this will have to depend on the size of Helicon, the amount of money needed and available, and whether people can be found to run it. If we do have one, it would probably go in one of the boardrooms or down in the basement.

Summary

At Contrivance, we used:

3 Main Programme rooms (400+)
3 Small Programme rooms (20-150)
1 Cinema (300)
1 Book Room (130)
1 Art Show (70)
4 Bars

At Helicon, we could have:

3 Main Programme rooms (400+)
8 Small Programme Rooms (20-150)
1 Cinema (300)
1 Book Room/Art Show/Lounge (1000)
4 Bars

This means that the main gain from using the Skyline is felt in the small programme rooms - 3 are direct gains (Colony/Basement Syndicates A&B), and 2 are newly usable rooms (Regency/Sovereign). This will naturally influence the style of programming adopted.

The Masquerade - Organisation and Staging

Kathy Westhead, Rob Meades & Alice Kohler

The masquerade is one of the main spectaculars of an Eastercon, the programme item with about the largest audience, and one which takes a great deal of prior preparation from participants, technical crew and organisers.

Traditionally, Eastercon masquerades are held in a big flat hall with rows of seats round the outside for the audience and a "dance floor" for participants in the middle. (It is often used for the disco afterwards, with the same set-up.) This has sometimes led to slip-ups when the carpet that was there for the rehearsal is removed to reveal a shiny wooden floor for the actual parade!

We start by considering some of the things a masquerade needs, from the viewpoints of the groups involved and then look at one venue in which it could be staged at Helicon.

the participants need:

- * workshopping space for most of the day. The organisation of this is a different problem, which we may look at in HdF3.
- * changing space, with toilets and mirrors, for say a couple of hours before the parade, and an hour afterwards
- * a convenient route to the hall
- * wide gangways and lack of steps
- * plenty of room to parade in/ do dramatic presentations
- * good/ appropriate lighting eg spots rather than background
- * sound system - tapes for music, radio mikes for talking
- * advance information about the hall, stage, lighting etc
- * clear times when to be ready for rehearsal, photocall, and event
- * walk throughs both before and after changing
- * gaffer tape markings on the floor to show the walk through routes and positions of main spotlight and judges.

the MC/organisers need:

- * participants - enough but not too many!
- * a system for getting food and drink for participants and crew during rehearsal and changing time
- * "marshalling yards" (to put participants in order) for before and after
- * plenty of gophers

tech needs:

- * far more light and sound than we can afford
- * far more time to set up than we can possibly allow
- * plenty of gaffer tape
- * some spare tapes of appropriate music (for late entries who did not bring their own)

the judges need:

- * good view and sound
- * accurate running order and list of participants
- * briefing from organiser on what to look for
- * a place to retire to for their deliberations
- * categories of prizes and how many they are to award

the audience needs:

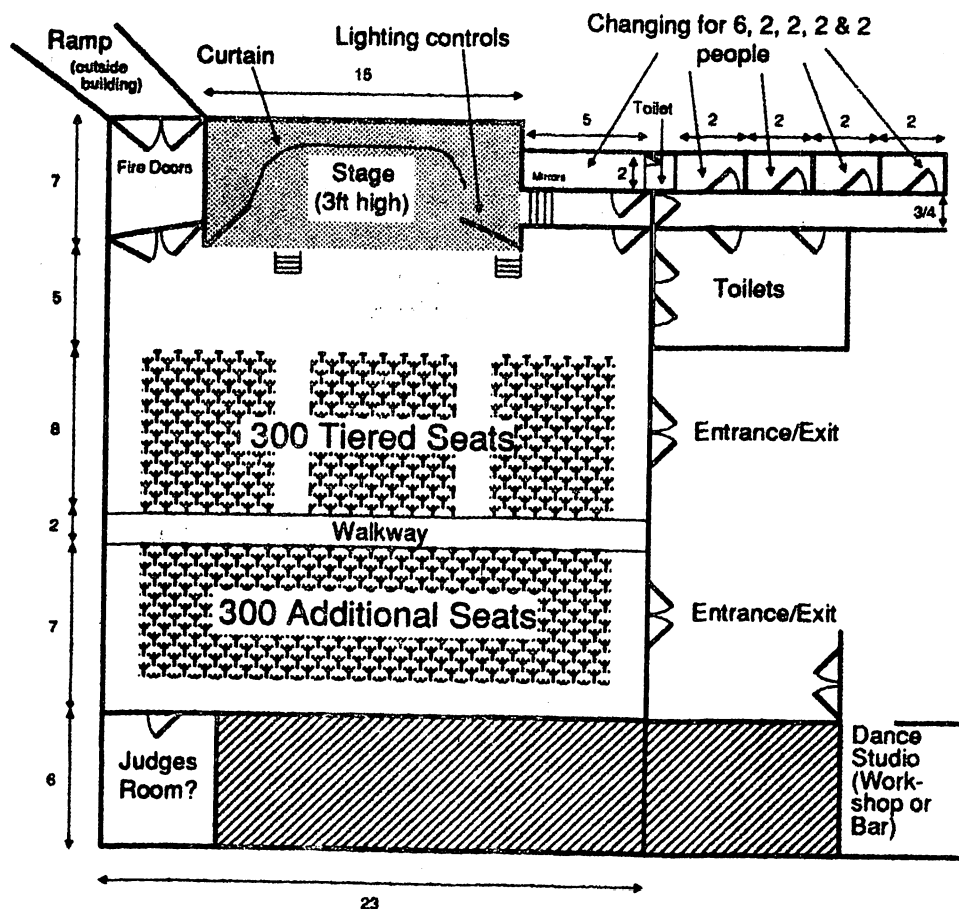
- * plenty of seating, with a good view and hearing from all areas
- * a prompt start
- * introductions for each costume
- * not a long interval for judging
- * decent interval entertainment
- * arrangements for photography including clear info of where and when there is a photocall

There are probably plenty of other points we've missed, but I think it is clear that no-one necessarily needs a large flat room and it may be much easier to stage your presentation on a stage so long as you know that in advance.

One of the rooms we could use at Helicon is the main auditorium in the Lido. We would like to consider, with the diagram below, how it matches up to the needs of the groups involved in the event.

Lido de France: Main Auditorium

All measurements are approximate in paces (Kathymetres)



The Good News

a purpose built room

about 600 seats
tiered seating = good view

a proper stage and curtains

possible painted backdrop etc, split level, for more dramatic presentations

changing rooms with mirrors and toilets

changing rooms right next to stage

workshop could be nearby (dance studio)

potential entrance both sides - fun for participants, more interesting for audience

direct entrance from outside - marshalling point if fine

lighting bars and ? sound system

hotel could change all this

So, it could be a very different kind of masquerade - it could even be at a different time of day - how does midday grab you? or 5pm? - but we need some feedback on these ideas, please, from costume fans, techies, photographers, audience and anyone else with a view. There are also many points above to do with the organisation rather than the staging and we would welcome comments and suggestions on these too.

The Bad News

its purpose was not running a masquerade

a defined number of seats -not room for 800 or 1000

smaller than usual "dance floor" area

lower level is lower(!) so less visible, with ramp or cuddly steps between

small, approx capacities 15, hard for groups to change and available only during set up

narrow corridors, steps and a door

but they're in the bar

horrible to organise

but not if wet!

no large area for marshalling and co-ordination, or photocall, except on stage

control box and lots of debris are near entrance point

hotel could change all this

Rob Meades, Kathy Westhead, Alice Kohler: 26 October, 1990

Who's On First? - Developing the Programme

Jonathan Cowie has been kind enough to copy us a letter that he wrote to ConRunner for our comments. He said:

I feel that Eastercon programmes still need plenty of work done on them - Contrivance was properly (as opposed to poorly which has, sadly, been more often the case) organised. The Contrivance hotel was perhaps the most welcoming Eastercon hotel since the mid-70s. Jersey was Fandom's (remember the poll) most exotic choice for its Eastercon. All this meant that Contrivance was bound to be a good convention.

In terms of programme: the committee failed to attract many pros to the convention and many regulars who add to the event were not there (eg: Holdstock, Bayley, Brunner, Greenland, Shaw, Priest, Tuttle, G Jones etc). Though the programme was probably a good Mexican programme, apart from the standard token items beyond the literary field (ie a Star Trek group and a Dr Who item), there was almost nothing on the media front (the SF film script item was the exception. Apart from one item on the greenhouse effect (brought forward an hour so I missed it) and the Jersey zoo presentation (unfortunately not put into an SF or futurological context which would have attracted more people), there was zilch for the science-loving fan. In short, a brilliant convention, I had a really great time, but it had little to do with the programme even though it was a multi-stream one.

Parting shot: given that Jersey is an island semi-autonomous state; given that it was invaded (a theme not uncommon in the genre); given that it was culturally dominated by money etc. (culture clashes are another SF theme): why was Jersey not utilised to a greater extent in the programme? Just a thought.

To start at the beginning: thank you for the kind comments about the organisation of Contrivance - it was a lot of work and it's nice to know that people appreciated the results.

On the programme: there was less science than we would have liked - two of our major speakers had to pull out at the last moment due to other commitments (they're in the programme in the souvenir book), so that side was much weaker than we wanted it to be. Lack of authors was a problem, but one that I hope we overcame and encouraged other fans to appear when they otherwise might not have. Bob Shaw should certainly be exempted from any 'criticism' for not being there - he was a GoH in Australia at the time (and quite apologetic about not being on Jersey).

On the media front, I think we have a different perception of 'media'. I would count the John Alexander talks (on SF films) in there, and also the complete comics theme. I would agree that there was little Star Trek/Dr Who/etc. items - we expected many of those interested to be at Elydore, and we had nobody known to us to build items around.

Not using Jersey was partly accidental - we started to develop a theme ('Islands in the Sky'), but couldn't match ideas to people - and partly deliberate (we rejected the 'invasion' theme as possibly offensive).

However, this time around, I want to do better. If Elydore has stopped, I hope that we will have the people to do more 'conventional media' - especially with STTNG now on TV. I hope to do more 'small' science-related items, as well as the large set-piece talks, so that we would be less affected by sudden withdrawals (which will happen, and not only in the science field).

In some other ways, the programming did not work as we had hoped. None of the items was a major failure (as far as we can find out). This I count as a failure - we weren't being experimental enough. At least one item a day should not work as planned (This doesn't mean that you should set up deliberate failures or not work at things). That is why I want to try the 'discussion circles' (chair circles with a pre-announced subject for discussion and a leader), maybe a foreign language programme stream (a different language each day?), and other ideas to get the fans involved in the convention.

We should certainly develop the idea of the themes that we used in 1989, and perhaps Publications will be able to publish them with the programme this time.

I certainly think that (given the propensity of fans to turn up early and leave late on Jersey) we should have some programming on Thursday. This should be light, and the official start of the con should not be until Friday morning, but it will allow us to get the con feeling going earlier. If bookings look heavy, we might increase the amount. We might also publish a draft programme in PR4 in February 1993, so that people have some idea what to expect when.

The extravaganzas should be extravagant (in ideas if not in money), and some of them will use the slide-changer now under development. The banquet and the disco will be memorable - given the facilities, there is no other option. If we can find some new styles of programme item (suggestions, please ...) then we'll try them out.

Ideally, all items should be run in rooms just too small for the actual audience - far preferable to having echoing caverns. And we might even be able to do something about the stage presentation, instead of having the usual hotel table and chairs.

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