

RUNNING A MASQUERADE GREEN ROOM

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You've been asked to manage the green room for a masquerade. The green room is where the masquerade entrants gather and wait for their turns to appear on stage. As the room's manager, you will be in charge of a crew of volunteer staff filling the functions of Den Mom, Mother's Helper, Check-in Clerk, Repair Person, and perhaps other jobs. You may be sharing the room with the Official Photographer (including equipment and staff) and the Workmanship Judge(s) and Judge's Clerk.

Some Characteristics of a Green Room Manager

First, remember that, as Green Room Manager, you'll be on your feet for four to five hours. I don't sit for more than a few minutes; I'm circulating and checking that the dens are OK. Your shift begins at least 30 minutes before the room becomes available to the entrants – preferably 60 minutes --and you won't have any breaks until half-time, so be sure to eat (and go to the bathroom) first.

Second, keep your cool, especially early on during the chaos that takes place once the entrants begin to arrive. You will be bombarded from all directions with questions. Answer them. If possible, give helpful answers. (It may not be possible.)

Green Room Staff

Den Moms are costumers (of either gender) who volunteer to take charge of groups of entrants (a "Den") and make sure that they are ready to go on stage, get them to the stage, hold eyeglasses and other items not part of a costume, and escort them back to the green room, possible via the Fan Photography area. Costuming has taken the name from Scouting because of similarities that may exist between entrants and Cub Scouts. You probably should try for a ratio of one Den Mom to each five or six entrants, although a ratio of one to ten or 12 can be workable.

Mother's Helpers usually are less experienced persons who circulate to assist Den Moms needing more than one pair of hands. It would be good to have a Mother's Helper for every two or three Den Moms, although fewer may be OK.

The *Check-in Clerk*, as the title suggests, is responsible for checking entrants into the green room as they arrive, once you are ready to have them checked in. As it is not unusual for entrants to arrive early, you may not be ready to check them in yet.

The *Repair Person* is in charge of attempting to repair any damage to an entrant's costume before the entrant goes on stage. Depending on circumstances, the repair kit available may be quite comprehensive. It is important that the person in charge of repairs knows what he or she is doing and can use the repair kit items effectively.

Recruiting the Staff. Recruit a number of Den Moms and Mother's Helpers, a Check-in Clerk, and someone to run the repair table (in advance if possible). There may be a number of regular Den Moms who will sign up in advance at masquerade registration and on whom you can rely. That means you need to make sure there is a volunteers sign-up sheet at masquerade registration, beginning on the first day entrants can register for the Masquerade. In the initial chaos there, it can be overlooked. You also may want to actively recruit costumers to your staff. Among other ways to do so, take a turn sitting at the Masquerade registration table and signing up staff. Ask, "Are you entering the masquerade or working on it?"

While the event's Volunteers office may be able to provide "gofers," they may not have the background to serve as more than door guards. If you have enough staff with backgrounds in or related to costuming so that you don't need gophers, you probably will be better off.

Dress. You may want to advise staff not to wear costumes, since this is a working situation and so that it's easy for you to tell them from the entrants. Some events provide a distinctive item for Den Moms to wear, such as aprons (used at Archon), or tabards. You may want to dress in black in order to be able to move more freely backstage (if needed).

If possible, have your staff arrive at least 30 minutes before the green room opens to entrants (earlier if the room is available) so you can brief them and so that they can assist with the physical set-up of the chairs and tables.

Remember that, like you, all of your staff are volunteers. You can't say "thank you" too often. If the event is providing perks to volunteers, you may be asked to sign their work assignment time sheets, which normally ought to be for the full duration of their time in the Green Room (usually at least six hours).

The Running Order

The "running order" is the order in which the entrants will appear on stage. You need it to set up your dens. Annoy the Masquerade Director to get you at least two copies as early as possible, preferably well before you have to arrive in the Green Room. You use one copy, together with the number of den moms, to determine how many dens to use so that each den has a reasonably equal number of entrants and to decide which entries are in which den.

Try to have five or six entrants (not entries) per den; however, 12-person dens are perfectly OK. A large group may have a den to itself. Since the dens have to be set up in running order, you need that list before you can assign entries to dens. Make sure the list gives you the number of persons in each entry. If you have the list sufficiently in advance, you can determine how many entries will be in each den.

You may want to prepare 3x5 cards for each entry with the entry title, entry number, and den number to give the check-in clerk, together with a copy of the running order, and to direct the clerk to give each entry the proper card and tell them to give it to their den mom, show them roughly where the den is, and check off on the running order each entry that has checked in. (For some groups, one member may check in in advance, which usually is fine.)

You may want to give each Den Mom a sticky note listing the entry numbers in the den. If the running order is late, you will have to skip some of these steps.

For a small masquerade, you may not need separate dens. If there are only about a dozen entries, it may be possible to use one den, assign a couple of Den Moms to it, and have the entire group brought to the back-stage area when the show begins.

Setting Up the Green Room's Furniture

A Room Script. Depending on the venue, you may have to provide a "script" for the venue's staff to use for room set-up at whatever deadline the event specifies. This will require you to make some estimates of the probable number of entries and entrants, and the number of dens you will use.

Assuming, for example, that the masquerade will have 24 entries, averaging two persons each, you need 48 chairs just for the entrants. Assuming six entries per den, you will want four dens. This means you will need four chairs for the Den Moms and another four for miscellany. The number of chairs for the dens then would be 56. In addition, you need two chairs at check-in, two at the repair table, and at least two at workmanship judging (if it's in the Green Room), bringing the total to a minimum of 62. (This does not include a chair for you, by the way.)

In addition to that minimum of 62 chairs, you should ask for at least five tables. You need one at the room entrance, for check-in; one for the workmanship judge and the judge's clerk, under good light; one for the repair table, with electrical access (and good light if possible); one for entrants to place their personal stuff, and two for food and water. A portable coat rack for the entrants' use also would be desirable.

What you ask the venue to do with the chairs is up to you. Usually, you won't be in a position to know in advance how many dens you need or how many chairs per den, so you may just have the hotel set them up along the walls. Then, ask the Den Moms to move chairs to set up the dens. However, if you're in the enviable position of knowing in advance the number and size of your dens, you can specify their arrangement in the room script and let the venue's staff set them up for you.

Arranging the Dens. The first dens are closest to the door to the stage; the last ones are furthest away. In most masquerades the Young Fans (under age 13) appear on stage first, so they should be put in Den 1. You probably should ask your Den Moms whether anyone wants to volunteer to have charge of the kids. You ought to make it very clear to parents of the Young Fans that they are welcome to be in the green room with their kids. They may serve as assistant Den Moms and can be especially effective in keeping Young Fans under control.

How you have the seating in each den is up to you. Semi-circles of chairs is an arrangement frequently seen. It's relatively compact and allows the den mom to move from entrant to entrant as needed. In such an arrangement, keep enough space between chairs, as well as an open sector to let entrants and Den Moms to move freely. If possible, allow sufficient space between dens so entrants can move easily through the room – to Official Photo, the Repair Table, the Workmanship Judge, and the exit to the stage. Green Rooms at Arisia, Lunacon, and Philcon frequently are set up this way. Archon, which usually has a very large space for its Green Room, adds a circular table to each den.

If you'd like some other configuration, however, feel free. An older style is to simply line chairs up against the room's walls and mark the dens off with signs. This may be essential if the room is very small or narrow. At various times, Lunacon, Philcon, and ConJose green rooms have been organized in this way.

If you have one or more large group entries, consider giving them dens of their own, especially if they bring their own "roadies" (helpers). Occasionally, such large groups may want to set up in space just outside the green room, especially if they want to continue to practice. This probably will not be a problem, so long as you and the Den Mom know where they are and can retrieve them for official photography and workmanship judging, and when it's time to go on stage.

Official Photography. Usually, all entries are required to have official photos taken. It normally is most convenient to have the official photographer set up in (or immediately adjacent to) the Green Room. However, official photo will take up as much space as you let them get away with. You should work with the photographer to determine a reasonable amount of space for a backdrop and to

pose entries, with a clear path from the dens and space for entries to wait to be photographed.

Repair Kit and Table. The purpose of a repair person and repair kit is to assist entrants who suffer mishaps with their costumes before going on stage. While most repairs will be effected at the table, which is why good light and access to electricity is needed, if necessary to assist, the repair person may come to the entrant's den or present location – it's been known to happen while the entrant is on line to the stage. An extended description of the function of the repair table can be found on the web site of the New Jersey/New York Costumers' Guild (www.sickpups.org). Go to the Useful Stuff page and choose the repair table article.

Signs. You will need signs for the room, including one for check-in, one for each den, and one each for the repair table and the workmanship judge. You don't need anything fancy, just large type on plain paper that you can hang up with blue tape (not on the wallpaper, however).

Video Feed from the Stage to the Green Room. If possible, arrange for a video feed of the masquerade in the Green Room. In addition to letting entrants see at least part of the masquerade, the video feed can help you cue the dens to line up and go to the stage entrance. This permits entrants to relax for as long as possible before standing in line to go on stage. In the absence of a video feed, you may need to line up perhaps the first half of the dens at the beginning of the show and add more dens "blind" during the show. This means just another thing to keep your eye on in the green room.

Green Room Food. Make sure in advance that the event has arranged for food for the green room. This doesn't have to be elaborate and **MUST** not include stuff that will smear on costumes. It should provide quick carbs and protein (e.g., hard cheese, hard candy), as well as water. Examples of appropriate food include:

- M&Ms, individually wrapped hard candies, mini chocolate bars, gumdrops, spearmint leaves, nuts. Do not offer peanuts because persons may be allergic to their presence.
- Cookies, crackers, cubed (firm) cheese (with toothpicks), sliced salami, pepperoni.
- Potato chips (preferably baked, not fried), Fritos, plain popcorn, but not snacks that have that greasy orange "cheese" coating that rubs off and stains, such as Doritos or cheese curls. No dips!
- Fruit (grapes). Perhaps cubed melon or pineapple. Strawberries aren't good; they stain like crazy!

- Bottled beverages should not include those with bright artificial dyes (red/blue/purple) due to staining potential.
- Lots of ice water (several pitchers, minimum).

In addition, the food station will need cocktail napkins or small paper/plastic plates, bendy straws, and plastic glasses.

Remind the entrants to eat and that it's OK for them to faint once they've left the stage but that you don't want them to do so before or while on stage.

Let the Chaos Begin!

Entrants will begin to arrive as soon as the room is available (and in some cases even before then). If you're not ready, which is the usual case at events because you don't have the running order, have the check-in clerk tell them to come in and make themselves comfortable. When we're ready to check them in, we'll call them. This means that entrants may have to move from wherever they're seated to their correct dens. That's OK.

Briefing Your Staff. As early as you can — if possible, before many entrants arrive -- call the Den Moms and Mother's Helpers together to brief them, pointing out the locations of the official photographer, repair table, workmanship judge, and food; telling them where the bathrooms are; giving them a chance to walk the route from the green room to (and on) the stage; and letting them ask questions. They will take each den, in order, to the backstage area and leave them in charge of the stage ninjas (taking charge of eyeglasses, name badges, and so forth, as needed), then pick them up again and bring them back to the green room, via fan photography. Fan photo is optional for entrants; official photo is not.

Interacting with the Entrants and Others. If there is a loudspeaker in the room, use it to welcome entrants to the green room and make various announcements (like "it's 15 minutes to curtain time"). Even if you have a very strong voice, you may not be heard in a large or crowded Green Room without amplification.

You and the Den Moms need to recognize that entrants' demeanors may differ greatly before they go on stage. Some – including some very well known costumers – are extremely nervous and just want to be left alone. At the other extreme are entrants who blithely flit about the room visiting with other costumers in other dens. The Den Moms who have such entrants in their keeping may need to bring them back to the den, or at least be certain where they are. The majority of entrants probably will fall between these extremes, staying in their dens and preparing to go on stage.

Ninjas and other hangers-on to groups should be welcomed. Entries that come with their own ninjas reduce the demand on the Den Moms. You may also see other members of the event dropping by, “looking for _____.” However, you probably will want to discourage outright gawkers from coming in. A sign at the entrance, stating that the Green Room is for entrants and staff only, may help.

You may have to deal with press photographers in the Green Room. Tell them to ask permission to photo anyone before taking pictures and announce their presence to the room in general. Generally, entrants have an absolute right to say no.

The End?

Once you’ve gotten to half time (when all entrants have been on stage and the judges have left to deliberate), you can collapse. However, someone (usually you) still has to keep eyes on the room because entrants will have left valuables there, so your shift doesn’t really end until the last entrants have packed up and removed their stuff. Generally, that’s at least an hour after the awards are announced. After making a final pass through the room for things entrants left behind, tossing your signs, and picking up some debris, you can leave.

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This article reflects the author’s approach to running a green room. Other approaches, and variations on this one, are possible. For further exploration of managing a green room see, e.g., *The Masquerade Handbook*, by Janet Wilson Anderson and Cat Devereaux, Section 7 (Backstage), or ask other seasoned green room managers for their advice.

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