

Chief Script Writer's Report to FASS Committee

November 14, 2005

Progress as of November 12

In early October we finished revisions focussed on plot consistency. For the remainder of October, we identified sections of the script we felt were unnecessary. Approximately 10% of the script was cut. This has had three main benefits: first, it makes the script shorter; second, it allows writers to focus their energy on revising the more important parts of the script; and third, it increases the entertainment value by decreasing the waiting time between the more interesting parts of the script. Though we have stopped actively looking for large-scale cuts, we expect that length reductions will continue throughout the rest of the revision process as we prune individual unnecessary lines.

We have now entered the final stages of the revision process. Presently, we are analyzing characters to ensure that all roles have a “payoff” that makes them rewarding to play, and also to ensure that large roles are not over-worked and that rehearsals will not be unreasonably hard to schedule. On the musical side, we are currently working with the interim music director to ensure that the songs we have chosen are reasonable in terms of demands on singers and the band.

Plans for the Near Future

On November 20 we will start the final polishing phase. After having addressed major structural issues like consistency, length and character payoff / workload, we will turn our attention to performing line-by-line editing, specifically targeting ease of reading, suitability of word choice, and general funniness.

Tentative times for all future writing meetings have been posted at <http://theorem.ca/~cslloss/fass>, along with the current draft of the script. Assuming all goes according to plan, we expect to have the script completed by December 11, though we will likely give it one last readthrough prior to the final submission deadline.

Progress towards Goals

- **Restrict overall length to between two and three hours long.** As of the November 7 count, the play stands at 1237 lines. We expect this to shorten slightly as we cut lines from over-worked characters and eliminate unnecessary lines during the final polishing. We have not been able to discover a correlation between line counts and performance time in past scripts – for example, in 2005 we averaged 200 minutes on a 1391-line script, but in 2000 we averaged 190 minutes on a 1679-line script. For comparison purposes, the shortest of the past six years was 2002, which averaged 159 minutes on a 1143-line script. (Note: all times include intermission.) In order to get a more accurate estimate of our performance time, concurrent with the final polishing meetings, we will perform and time each scene.
- **Increase “payoff” of small roles, reduce workload of major roles.** We currently have a total of 124 characters and “character fragments” (a character fragment is a collection of lines

that have not yet been assigned to a specific character). By combining character fragments with existing characters, we will likely reduce the number of characters to 100. In this case, the average number of lines spoken by a character would be 12. Currently, 24 characters have more than the average number of lines – as a measure of how well lines are distributed, our goal is to increase this number by reassigning lines of overworked characters to underworked characters – this is one of the main goals of our present character analysis. The top five characters have 88, 69, 61, 56 and 44 lines, and have all been targeted for reductions. Another measure of workload is the number of scenes a character appears in. Currently, there are only 22 characters appearing in 3 or more scenes. An issue of concern is that twelve characters appear in five or six scenes; all have been targeted for reductions in scene appearances during our character analysis. One piece of good news is that all dancing parts, and almost all singing parts have been assigned to non-major characters, which should make it easier to schedule.

- **Reduce tech requirements of vignettes.** We have written our vignettes, and none of them require elaborate set-pieces.

Respectfully submitted,

Craig Sloss
Chief Script Writer