Three Musketeers and a Rock Band

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THREE MUSKETEERS AND A ROCK BAND

by

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A THESIS

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THREE MUSKETEERS AND A ROCK BAND

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This thesis is the culmination of my scenic design work for Ken Ludwig’s *The Three Musketeers* in the Howell Theater at the Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in the spring semester of 2012. Within this paper I will look at the conceptualization process, historical research, execution of the set design, the realized final product, and the critique process. The rough sketches, research images, computer draftings, finalized renderings, and production photos are featured within the thesis.
Dedication

A loving thanks to my family who have supported my journey.

A high five to all the designers, director, stage manager, crews, and anyone who helped on this epic show, especially my assistant scene designer Christine Donaghy.

JCSTF students…hang in there.

Look, Jacob! We did it!!!!
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Introduction

I have loved the tale of *The Three Musketeers* since I was a little girl, so when I heard the University of Nebraska-Lincoln had selected Ken Ludwig’s adaptation in April of 2011, I applied to be the set designer. There was originally some concern that designing, painting, and writing my thesis all in the same semester would be overwhelming, but I dedicated myself knowing my passion for the work would get me through it. I wanted *The Three Musketeers* to be my thesis set design, and my advisor and the director approved it. It is the show I have always wanted to work on. *The Three Musketeers* was my last design at the Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film, and it was a great accomplishment in my life.
Chapter 1: Breakdown of the Script

I began working on the research and breakdown long before the start of the 15-week production schedule. I was allowed to work on my design during my Scene Design III class in the Spring of 2011, taught by my teacher and advisor Sandy Veneziano. I knew that *The Three Musketeers* was going to be produced on our main stage theater, The Howell. Having done my undergraduate education at UNL, I was familiar with the space. The Howell is a proscenium theater with a ten-foot apron, a split fly system of handrails and an electronically run system called The Vortec. The proscenium is notoriously wide and squat. Sightlines have always been a problem for designers using the space, as well as the high steep balcony. I was excited for the challenge and I wanted to see what the seldom-used fly systems could do.

After reading Ken Ludwig’s version of *The Three Musketeers*, which differs from the original author Alexander Dumas’, I realized the grand scope of the play. Two acts at more than ten scenes per act proved to be a great challenge. As my mind wrapped around the fast-changing scenery, I realized the show could either tend toward the minimalist or the grand. No unit set could ever translate to the audience the action that took place across Western Europe. It was then I knew the fly system would be critical, because it could bring pieces of scenery on and off vertically. The script is full of fight scenes, violence, and quick scene changes. The play seemed colorful and cartoonish to me and those elements allowed me to skew reality without taking the audience out of the performance.

I was talking to my advisor about the many locations in the play. I wondered what style I would go for in depicting the individual places. As a designer, I have my
own drawing style and artistic flow. Much like the show, it is also a cartoonish and playful style. I described the theater in the 17th century looking much like pop-up book. Around that time the art of perspective was the new innovation. The stages were enormous with the scenery appearing like real city streets. Those designers played with perspective, lighting, and three-dimensional paint styles, to enhance dramatic sets. When the pulley systems in theaters really started taking off, it gave designers the ability to quickly change the look of the set. This helped create more spectacle for the theatre. *The Three Musketeers* was certainly a spectacle-heavy show, and so I began to think of the set as a pop-up book.

I spent a great deal of time researching 17th century France. The period is full of images of landscapes, cathedrals, and farmhouses. I imagined hard-flat legs that flank stage right and left, with elaborate painted gilding and architectural detail. I have always loved leaf-cut borders and bringing the natural world into design. Like a pop-up book, things closest to you would be larger and recede as the set goes to the back of the stage giving the impression of depth and perspective. Pop-up books are filled with flat surfaces that are drawn or painted to look three-dimensional. This adds the illusion of realism and pushes spaces relative to one another. I knew if I used the fly system skillfully and had hard-covered flats painted Trompe L’oeil, (French for “to fool the eye”) I could create the same effect on stage. All of these initial thoughts came before I spoke with the director, Dr. Ian M. Borden. My first goal was to please the director, while keeping with the integrity of my design style and choices.

My first meeting with Borden was a quick discussion on his rough concept and any questions I had. He was directing *Twelfth Night* at the time for our final production
of the school year, so *The Three Musketeers* was not his focus. It gave me time to
discover the essence of the show from my perspective. We discussed all 25 acts of
fighting and violence in the script and chose to stick as close to the time period of 1625
France as possible. Borden didn’t want to lose the audience with lengthy scene changes,
so we both agreed that a fragmented basic form of each environment would be enough of
a representation. Borden’s specialty is fight choreography and he told me, “Whatever
you put on stage, I will climb on it.” His ideal set would have different levels, raked
walls, and quick movement to optimize the actors fighting dynamic. The safety factor
became an instant priority.

There have been many different adaptations of plays, musicals, television series,
and films based on the story *The Three Musketeers*. My sentimental favorite has always
been Disney’s 1993 version with Chris O’Donnell, Charlie Sheen, Oliver Platt, and
Kiefer Sutherland. Borden wanted me to look more to the 1973 film version directed by
Richard Lester. The most recent adaptation of the movie (2011) has high-tech computer
graphics, special effects, and was shot in 3D. It is drastically different than the older
films Borden and I were fond of. It is important to point this out because this most recent
version of *The Three Musketeers* hit theatres a few months before our play, and we knew
it would be the most current reference for our audience. If we wanted our production not
to feel flat in comparison, then we needed to convince our audience that real 3D action
was better. Subsequently, Borden wanted zip lines from the balcony to the stage floor
over the audience’s heads, and rope swings on high curtains. He also wanted me to
figure out how to incorporate the elevator and traps doors, and possibly the ability to
repel from the high grid, far above the stage. Previous attempts at stunts like this at The
Howell have seen varying levels of success. My job as a designer was to look at this as an opportunity and come back with solutions.

I went back to the script, to see where the action took place and analyze the needs of the show. There are 28 scene changes and one long montage in the beginning of Act II. Several of the scenes change location mid-dialogue. Different special effects would be needed including gun powder, bottle smashing, jumping from windows, stabbings, and a horse named Buttercup, among numerous others. With an ever-changing set, going from interiors to exteriors, forests to palaces, the transitions were going to be a challenge. Borden’s main request was that the action never stop and each scene flow swiftly into the next. To satisfy the director’s timing needs, I felt that a turntable or periactoid\(^1\) could be helpful in these transitions.

The Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film already owned two large turntables, one at 12’ diameter and one at 24’ diameter. The 12’ turntable would be too small for the transformations that needed to happen quickly on stage, but the 24’ turntable would consume a majority of the stage. There wasn’t the budget to make our own turntable and still have other scenery, so I chose the 24’ turntable. When I broke down the locations into basic acting spaces, I found four types: an interior of a palace or stone building, an exterior of a palace or stone building, a tavern or farmhouse, and a neutral space. The goal was now to create four environments on one very large rotating set piece.

\(^1\) A periactoid is a device used for displaying and rapidly changing scenes, usually split into three sections. Originally a Greek invention, its popularity grew during the beginning of Renaissance Theater.
I met with Borden once more on April 20, 2011 before school let out for the summer. We discussed what I had found out about repelling and initial research images. Borden had a few notes on the fight choreography and changes he wanted to make to the author’s stage notes. He wanted to add an extra fight in the last scene between D’artagnan and his enemy Rochefort. We also discussed his vision of the Masquerade Ball. He wanted ten to twelve actors and 8 actresses on stage at the same time. This is a large number of actors inhabiting a potentially intimate playing space. During the ball scene different characters are announced. Borden was hoping for a grand entrance, potentially with a winding staircase or terrace. During the chess scenes when the King is playing in the garden, Borden wanted over-sized chess pieces to add humor and a sense of privilege. He didn’t want any run crew or stagehands moving anything on stage. I showed him pictures of jungle gyms, French landscapes, and old theatrical pop-up books. At the end of the meeting he asked me to show him a basic white model or sketch of where I was headed, and gave me a few key words to mull over. They were “skeletal,” “fragmented,” “puzzle piece,” “multifunctional,” and “unit core.” This is what I thought about over the next few months.
Chapter 2: The Rock Band

The summer gave me time to think about the set, but I had trouble finding a direction. I had a general shape and tone in mind, but nothing remotely concrete. That is when I received a game-changing email from Borden on July 19th, 2011.

“Hey Brandi, my mind has been percolating and I think I would like to literally rock the show out – think about where a 4-piece rock band could be on the stage. I would love it if they were on a ledge up high. And yes, I am serious. --Ian.”

I had always wanted to work with Borden, knowing he was a more experimental director, but a rock band on stage was not something I had ever pictured for this show. I liked the idea. It was a bold move and definitely experimental, so I started to think about the reality of a band on stage.

The turntable already dominated everything up stage of the proscenium, so a second level could not be placed behind or beside it. To build anything that hung above the turntable would need significant structural support below it, but any support would need castors at the bottom to allow the unit to spin. Then the scenery on the turntable would have to clear the beams 360 degrees, limiting the set close to the center. I couldn’t imagine it would be enough room to convey three to four different acting spaces. Plus, the castors would wear away the paint on the top of the turntable leaving ring marks. Damaged paint treatment is one thing I will avoid at any cost, knowing the time and effort given to scenic painting. The band themselves were also going to take up a large amount of square footage. If you consider the four band members, guitars, bass guitar, full drum kit, keyboard, instrument and music stands, amps, speakers, and cords, it is a big piece of stage space. I was concerned with where they would go between songs.
Whether they stayed or left when not playing, they would be a distraction to the audience. I didn’t want anything to pull the viewers from the magic of moment.

I suddenly found myself looking for a new direction for the set. I was stumped on how I could combine the turntable and a rock band. I needed to erase my former ideas of the set and begin anew. I went back to square one. I had started formulating shapes and levels, all fuzzy, but things had started to simmer. Now I didn’t know where to go. I struggled with a clear vision through the rest of the summer. School began again in late August, and now I had the opportunity to talk to my team of fellow designers. Many of the chosen designers and key people were graduate students in their first or second year. I was the only third year graduate student working on the show, and the only thesis design. My design team consisted of Costume Designer Bethany Skinner, Lighting Designer Clayton Van Winkle, and Sound Designer Richard McDermott. I would work very closely with them as well as the Stage Manager Sara Beaman, Technical Director Erica King, Props Mistress Lauren Blunk, and Paint Charge Morgan Cooper. A successful show requires great communication and collaboration. Every person involved in the technical side of a theatrical production has an influence on whether a show succeeds. I wanted to start getting a feel for how the others felt about the script, and how the rock band would affect each department. We didn’t know if the rock band would be possible, but we had to take it into account.
Chapter 3: Beginning Pre Production

The fall semester began, and I went back into my role as the House Scenic Painter for the JCSTF and homework responsibilities. Borden immediately wanted to have a quick catch up meeting, since Twelfth Night was long done and his attention had now turned to The Three Musketeers. On August 30, 2011 Borden, his assistant director Joshua Waterstone, and I met in his office. I was very interested to find out whether the rock band would truly be possible or if Borden had lost interest in it. Borden was more enthusiastic about the rock band than I had imagined. He described a 1980’s heavy metal style, specifically AC/DC. He added a cell phone announcement and opening montage to Act I, where he would start the rock band. I thought it was a good addition, so the audience knew right away this show was not traditional. One reference Borden gave was the film Knight’s Tale, made in 2001. This film’s scenery is firmly set in the 1350’s, but most of the other elements are contemporarily influenced. The soundtrack uses classic rock to pump up the energy, and this is what Borden was going for.

Our next meeting on September 6, 2011 gave me a bit more information on where our production was headed. Borden decided that the band should not get up or move around in between their songs because they would be too much of a distraction. I was concerned about this because whether or not they leave, the band would draw attention from the audience. I didn’t think we could ask the band members to freeze for long periods of time. If I were an audience member my eyes would constantly glance at them anyway, just to see what they were doing. I wondered if scrim could be a solution. Scrim is a mesh material that when front lit with no light coming from behind appears opaque. When you light from behind and bring down the front light it becomes
transparent. I had never used scrim in this manner, and needed to experiment with the material before I could consider using it.

During our meeting I was given the budget of $3,800. This is a good amount of money, but I knew the direction the set was going in would be expensive. The production meetings would start in October. The first 5 weeks of the process are devoted to creative research. I was already past that point and felt it would be better if I had a basic white model for the preliminary design. I knew I wanted varying acting levels. I wanted organic platforms and towers people access, not only for the stage combat but also to accommodate the number of actors on stage at any given time. With height comes railing codes so actors don’t get hurt. There is some controversy on rail height restrictions. I have seen other designers have to change their designs to meet the standard and some not be affected at all. I asked the school Shop Foreman, Bryan Ruhs, if he could find out the exact information on how high a platform needs to be before adding railings.

On October 3, 2011, I sat down with the script again and read it with the turntable in mind. I started drawing basic miniature ground plans of the scenery and worked out the configuration of the walls on top of the turntable. I wrote notes on the side of each ground plan regarding major action or specific needs required by the text. I indicated which direction the turntable would rotate and the location. It was a challenge to configure the walls in such a way as to achieve the different areas without each looking identical. With a three-sided peractoid configuration, I didn’t know whether I could convince the audience they were being transported to the various locations. I needed an interior of a tavern or farmhouse, which was one of the more repeated looks in the script,
but had nowhere to put it. I decided on adding a moving wall in the exterior section of the turntable. I could paint a worn Tudor-style interior on the wall and on the opposite side have the exterior paint treatment, so when the wall is closed only the exterior is seen. When the wall is open you see the tavern, provided that where the open wall meets the adjacent wall, the paint treatments can blend cohesively. I titled each area as Interior, Exterior, Tavern, and The Lux. I relied on the lighting team to help enhance the uniqueness of each place of action.
Chapter 4: The Two Towers

I had my turntable walls sorted and realized I still did not have a location for the rock band. I was stumped and couldn’t visualize my options until one day my advisor came to me and asked how the design was coming along. I expressed my problem with the rock band’s placement and asked her if she had any ideas. I took a piece of paper and drew the outline of the theater and the turntable, showing how limited the space was. She looked at the mock ground plan and drew two areas on each side of the turntable, and asked me why I couldn’t split the band up. I hadn’t thought of separating the band, thinking that they would work best being able to see and hear one another. Technically, the band members could play from opposite sides of the stage if they had the right equipment and cues. I didn’t want the level of the band platforms to be level with the turntable, or open, because it lacked variety. This is when the two towers became a part of my vision.

Every designer works and creates in different ways. Some need to build rough models first to play and configure the scenery. Others look at previous productions by other designers. I envision the set from the first read through of a play. If I look at other designers’ adaptations I can’t get those visions out of my mind. I can change and manipulate a design image in my head, but have a hard time seeing something other than my initial thoughts.

It was time to really start shaping the vision I had and begin making it reality. I work best with a front view rendering. From there I can figure out dimensions and scale when I draft a ground plan, which leads to the model. I grabbed my drawing supplies, sat in the Howell Theater and got to work.
At this point, _Lady Windemere’s Fan_ was being built and painted for the November opening, but hadn’t been loaded into the space yet. I began drawing the turntable in a loose perspective, and the two towers SR and SL of it. I wanted to have the towers be more functional than just housing the band. I added a second level to the towers for acting space. This led me to draw a rope bridge connecting the towers. I found the look of the swooped rope bridge visually appealing when considering the turntable tower I had placed near center. It was a higher playing space for actors to move from one side of the stage to other without going around the scenery on the turntable and being lost from the audience’s view. I drew just the center turntable tower and realized if I placed it strategically and at the perfect height, an actor may be able to get from the tower to the rope bridge and back. This created more options for Borden’s stunt choreography. I showed Borden and he wanted to see more. He gave the okay to continue on this design path.

I drew another front view rendering, with a few changes in order to see a variety of looks in the same configuration. I added a rock wall platform in the down stage left splay and a wooden platform with a ladder in the opposite splay. This would also allow access to a zip line placed in the splays. Borden and I had discussed using free set pieces for stunt action, placed around the set that could be taken away or added for different scenes. This included a cart, where the wheels act as a center fulcrum, thereby giving the actor(s) on top of it the opportunity to use the cart as a seesaw. Also barrels, haystacks, crates, tables, and other set dressing could be used in the fight scenes. I included a few of these things in the rendering. It was fall break, so I emailed the new drawing to Borden. He wrote notes on the pdf version and emailed it back to me and the other designers. I
wasn’t ready for the other designers to see my initial ideas, but it was good for them to
get a general idea of where I was going. Borden wanted to change the stage left tower to
be shorter with an open top. He requested something down stage right on the apron that
the actors could go to and play on another level. He thought the barrel I drew was a
cannon, which brought questions about pyrotechnics. I let the technical director work out
the special effects budget.
Chapter 5: Collaboration

Lighting Designer Clayton Van Winkle and I took time off from working on Lady Windemere’s Fan to meet and discuss our thoughts on the design for The Three Musketeers. He was very collaborative and considered the set to be a priority. I knew the set was incomplete without lights defining the different acting spaces. Lighting was also very important in showing the time of day and passage of time. We both agreed that to pull off such an elaborate play, the lighting crew and the scenic crew needed to communicate on every level. I described the direction I was taking with the set, and he agreed that the turntable would be most effective. He seemed happy about the choice of walls on it and the rope bridge.

He had his own thoughts and requests after reading the script and visualizing the set. He wanted to have a white cyc with a ground row of lights behind the turntable, believing he would only need approximately 2’-0.” Van Winkle also wanted a clear batten he could turn into a fourth electric to cover more of the stage with light. He wanted to keep all electrics one fly line away from flying scenery, meaning several “no use” fly lines. We both agreed we liked the idea of using torches and practical lights on set, possibly placed by the bridge and the turntable walls. The rock band element brought a completely different challenge to lighting. Rock concert lighting is very different than theater lighting. There are more moving lights, haze, saturated colors, and cues are made to music rather than dialogue. Van Winkle’s plan was to have realistic environmental theatrical lighting. When the rock band kicked up he would add rock band lighting, especially in the montages. He asked if I minded instruments being seen by the audience at times, possibly lowering an electric fly line that had silver metal par cans (model 56).
These instruments were common in 1980s rock concerts. I thought it would be a fun element and help inform the audience when reality was being skewed.

Our conversation ended with the agreement that any decision we made or meeting we had with Borden would be communicated, as well as keeping in contact with Costume Designer Bethany Skinner. She had already shown research images during the creative 5-week production meetings. The costumes were essentially historically accurate to that time period. With such a large cast, each wearing one or more outfits, Skinner knew she would have to pull from our costume stock. Just like the fabric stores available in and around Lincoln, NE, we had a limited costume stock. Van Winkle and I waited to decide on the color of the paint and gels until Skinner had considered her options. All three designers knew that our color choices would affect one another’s designs. The color choices would either clash or complement.

The director and I had a brief get-together two days before our first production meeting where I needed to present my rough design. We caught up and reviewed what we had discussed thus far. I showed him my very rough white model, so he could see it before we showed it to the rest of the team. He suggested that I take pictures of each scene, so he could review them and decide if blocking would work. Borden would not approve any ground plan or design until he was able to work out the blocking on the proposed design. He seemed excited about where the set was going, which eased my mind. During that time, I was pulling all-nighters painting for the fall main stage production and was extremely tired. I had booked my schedule too tight with projects including two student films and a small micro-budget feature film I’d worked on during the summer. Luckily I had no class schedule that semester.
Chapter 6: Presenting the Idea

At the 6-week production meeting all designers were to have their design concepts finalized. On November 9, 2011 at 12:30 pm, we met with the design team, advisors, stage manager, director, and Vincent T. Learned (the potential bandleader). I brought my rough white model thinking I would do a brief presentation, but it ended up not being necessary. Borden had taken the photos I’d sent him of each scene on the white model, and put them in a PowerPoint presentation with his notes and questions. It was extremely helpful to everyone. We went through each scene and discussed his questions. Some of the scenes didn’t have all the elements he wanted. He asked what some of the simplified set represented or where special gags could be played out. The majority of the scene-by-scene breakdown worked for him. He believed the direction we were taking would give him the playing spaces he desired and options for the stunt and fight choreography.

After the meeting, Van Winkle took Borden and I into the studio theater of the Temple building to look at a potential lighting special. The school had just received twin-spin units that allow moving textures. Most lighting units have the option to add one gobo.² A twin-spin takes one stationary gobo and spins another gobo in front of it, creating a moving light beam texture on a surface. In this case, he wanted to use the twin spins to add a flame-like effect with light over the torches. He created a mock torch out of a flashlight and wrapped twigs around the top over orange and red cut gels. Focusing the twin-spin at the wall cut to his preferences, he lit on top of his basic torch. The effect worked surprisingly well. If used correctly, this effect could represent flames

² A gobo is a small metal disk with open shapes cut into them, making the light beam take the desired shape or texture.
without distracting the audience. Now it was up to the props mistress and me to decide on the design and placement of the torches. The director wanted to see the design and effect together before he’d approve it. Borden also wanted to see Van Winkle and me experiment with live flame. I was hesitant because I knew the show was already complicated. Adding another potential risk could overly burden the crew.

During this point in the process, different people from around the school began giving their advice and opinions, many of them negative. I began to feel bogged down creatively, and concerned that I might need to downsize my design. I was afraid that the shop would build the set and we’d come to find that all the moving elements would not work together. I needed to add a more defined street scene and flying cutouts. Because we were already using almost every fly line, it meant we would need to put hard cutout flats directly next to the electric lines. This could cause damage to both lines if the two collide during transitions. At one point, I thought I might be able to use two turntables, the 12’ and the 24.’ But the stage was much too small to handle both turntables. I hoped by the next production meeting I would feel more confident about the design.
Chapter 7: Budget Cuts

The second main stage production of the semester was opening. Lady Windermere’s Fan had a difficult production process, due to communication problems between the Scenic and Lighting Designers. At its conception, the designs were behind schedule, making the other departments behind as well. For my show, the faculty and advisors were watching me, making sure I had things in on time. It added pressure for my process to represent an accurate step-by-step formula of a scenic design. They believed the students had been skipping important steps, which may have hindered communication. I worked very hard to meet expectations and schedule my time accordingly.

Adding to my concerns, an incident occurred during Lady Windermere’s Fan. I am not sure of all the details of the event, but what I do know is that it cost the school a lot of money. During the show, the hazer was positioned in the wrong spot. When the scenery began to fly out, and other scenery in, the hazer was knocked into the black scrim curtain down stage. The impact damaged the cutout flat that came down on it and the hazer ripped two holes into the material. Scrim drops are very expensive, and the school had borrowed this scrim from the Lincoln Community Playhouse with no insurance. The school had no choice but to purchase the scrim drop for an estimated $3000.00, but it was unknown what area could afford it. The show had also gone far beyond its budget. Props alone went $1,200.00 over, and the first show of the year went $1,000.00 over. I began to worry that it would affect The Three Musketeers budgets.

A few students, my advisor, and the shop foreman assured me that the second semester shows would not be punished for an accidental damage cost. A patch was sewn
into the black scrim for the next run of the show. The school got ahold of another black scrim, but it turned out to be navy blue, and was too large to fly out. Alterations were made so that the show could continue on, but I was nervous. My design required two black scrims, one of which needed to be able to fly out. It was looking like I would have to alter my plans for the preshow and montage scenes. Around the time Lady Windermere’s Fan went into strike, faculty and staff had a closed meeting to discuss where the money would be taken from to pay the LCP. I was in the Howell’s balcony to see if I could figure out the sight line challenges with the Assistant Lighting Designer Travis Tripplet. Sandy Veneziano and Bryan Ruhs came onto the stage and called me. The conclusion from that meeting was that $350.00 would be taken from both second semester’s main stage prop budgets.

This was a significant amount considering the size of my design. The props department only had $700.00 to begin with. There were swords, guns, banners, set dressing, and on stage props to be acquired. I immediately went to find my technical director, Erica King. I expressed my fear that props could not afford to lose any money at all. I wanted the scenic budget to get cut before we cut props. King agreed with me, and said no matter how the money fell, the scenic budget would handle the many banners. King and I went to investigate the options for the show budget. The heads of JCSTF mandated that props had to cover at least a portion of the loss. King and I concluded that scenic would cut $250.00, and props $100.00.
Chapter 8: Taking Shape

In a journal entry on November 17, 2011, I noted that Borden had added a few more acting moments and cut a few bits. The torches and explosives were both deemed too expensive for our budget. Van Winkle and I both thought foot lights could be aesthetically pleasing and aid front light by casting light on the actor’s faces underneath their hats. Skinner also appreciated this. Men of the 17th century wore hats, often with embellishments such as feathers. She gave Van Winkle and me copies of her costume renderings and she attached the main fabric swatches she had chosen. This allowed Van Winkle and me to begin color discussions, paint samples, and light lab experiments. Some of the costumes would be pulled from stock, so we wouldn’t know the hues of those garments until later in the process. Two swatches in particular were important to my color choices. I intended to match the Cardinal’s robe color with his banners, and the same with the musketeers and their banners. These design choices were subtle, but I knew a well-executed show is determined by the details.

When I showed the team of designers and advisors my first rough ground plan I felt confident and proud that I had a line set schedule, which is the organizing of the fly lines. I encountered opinions and critiques that made me anxious. I realize that compromises need to be made during collaboration, but I was unwilling to let my style or designer ethics be swayed by the commentary of others unless it is for the betterment of the show. Some adjustments were made to the set during this meeting. There was a problem with the fire curtain. A scenic element cannot be under the fire curtain, which is at the front of the proscenium, unless it has the ability to be quickly cleared from its path. My design had the turntable placed past the proscenium and onto the apron with ramps
on either side of it, leading to the flush platform. It was suggested that I move the
turntable and surrounding platform down stage 3’-0”, creating a flat sealed landing for
the fire curtain to lower upon if needed. This was good because Van Winkle had just
recently asked if we could fit in another black scrim to hang in front of the ground row of
lights. This meant the platform and turntable would need to move up to make room for
that fly line to come down. Another fly line was reserved and due to the platform moving
down stage, it again limited what set piece could fly in and clear the walls on top of the
turntable. I reorganized the line set schedules so that many of the banners would fly in up
stage, making room for the hard covered flats down stage. Almost every fly line was
now assigned.

The band had finally been confirmed, but after speaking with Learned and
McDerrmott it still did not have enough room. The idea of splitting up the band was
turned down earlier because of cuing problems. I had placed them all in one tower with
two levels as a solution. The guitarist and bassist would be on top and the drummer
below. I feared the band tower would become even more minimalistic, throwing off the
aesthetic of the background. I changed the shape of the tower and extended the 2nd level
platform even farther into the stage right wing space, giving them enough room. I knew
this would limit the audiences’ view of the band, but it seemed every inch of Howell was
necessary. The drummer would be the hardest to see from the audience. Borden had
asked for a stair unit to be placed on the rock band tower ending next to the turntable.
These stairs would reside in front of the drummer. I decided then that I would design
those stairs to have no facing and as little structural support underneath as we could,
while still being safe. This would allow a view through to the drummer when desired.
The Technical Director at JCSTF, Edward Stauffer, approached me after the meeting. He told me that I should cut the rope bridge, because he feared no one would be able to see it from the balcony. I am flexible when it comes to tweaking my design for the sake of someone else’s needs, but I also know when to fight for the integrity of the design. By cutting the rope bridge, it would eliminate a quick path through the constantly shifting set. It was also aesthetically important to the full composition of the set. The towers create a positive and negative space on the sides of the stage. The center tower on the turntable commanded focus center stage. The rope bridge would help guide the audience’s eye side to side in a visually appealing manner. This is what I wanted. There was already so much movement on stage, I wanted to at least try and alleviate eyestrain. If I expect people to watch one set for 2 ½ hours, I want to keep them gently transfixed. At the end of our talk Stauffer told me it was up to the director.

I felt confident as I walked to up to Borden in the hallway on November 21, 2011, that he would agree that the rope bridge should and would stay. I explained to him Stauffer’s concerns but told him it was his decision. To my surprise, Borden found it unacceptable for any seat in the house to be unable to see every inch on stage. I knew the balcony had its limitations, like the proscenium cutting off the sightline of the top rows. I will admit that I did not design this set with the balcony in mind. Normally the balcony has few people in it, so I didn’t think I needed to worry about the highest rows. Borden corrected me. The show would be so anticipated that we would have a sold out house every night. I had no argument for that. Borden explained that he was thinking “No,” but could be convinced otherwise if I could come back with a better plan. Right before he walked away he looked at the most recent sketch I had drawn in my journal. The
bridge went straight across to the two towers. He took my pencil and drew a few lines on the sketch that created a multi-level bridge with the highest point in the center. This would lower the towers on either side, which was good considering the tower platforms were at 10’-0,” making them too tall for the balcony to see. I quickly went to work altering the sketch.

I decided to drop one platform to 6’-0,” and the other a bit lower so that there was an asymmetrical stagger to one side. I could add more rocks to the SL tower so actors could escape off the bridge and next to the turntable. The walls on the center of the turntable could no longer have rectangular walls extending from the center tower. To clear the now narrowing understructure of the bridge, the walls would have to stagger away from center. Now only the top center section of the bridge would have some sightline issues for the balcony. I knew I needed to make more of the set visible to the balcony before Borden would agree to the bridge. I wasn’t sure how the bridge would be structurally supported underneath and I didn’t know how many line sets for the flying scenery would be affected by pushing the set forward. It was time to start working out the details of the design. On this stage, with this show, it would come down to a matter of inches.
Chapter 9: Drafting and Model Making

I had the opportunity to bring on an Assistant Scenic Designer, and gladly took it. Christine Donaghy was a fellow graduate student with a focus on Technical Direction. She was able to give information on what would need more structural support and what she believed the budget constraints were. She also helped with how to draft out the measurements of difficult scenic elements. Donaghy only knew the drafting program AutoCad and I only knew Vectorworks. The two programs were similar but unable to import and export drawings between one another. She quickly learned the basics of Vectorworks, giving us the ability to work on several draftings at a time. We had strict organization and labeling in order to keep track of every file. She designed a few elements of the set as well, taking some of the workload from me. I would not have been able to achieve the finished product without the support and long hours that my assistant put in.

On November 23, 2011, the computer I had been using in the CAD room of the JCSTF deleted my files from its desktop. Only when the computers are shut down and rebooted do they erase non-fundamental files. I knew this, but had chosen to save to the desktop anyway, and I learned the hard way. From then on I would save to my 2GB flash drive. I needed to have a complete ground plan, sections, and a white model completed in 4 days. Donaghy and I got working on re-drafting the ground plan, adding the changes discussed from the production meetings. The sections were not technically due at this time, but I knew that they would be a great resource for the lighting designer, Clay Van Winkle. To make an accurate design, Van Winkle would need to know about the constantly moving set, every trim height of the flying pieces, and the center tower’s
trajectory. If we completed these draftings, then we would use them to create the white model.

My assistant and I finished the ground plan and the SR section. I purchased the supplies needed for the model. There was a premade Howell Theater model in 1/4” scale in the design room. Donaghy created our Howell model based off the size of the premade example. She made the model of the theater with 1/4” black foam core and we used white foam core, card stock, and tracing paper to create the model of the set. It didn’t take more than a few hours, but then came the line set schedule. It was difficult to accurately show each banner, border, cutouts, scrim, and cyc in one small model. I represented the cyc and one border in the back of the model and tried to make 1/4” cutouts connected to small wood dowels by thread. In the end the thread got tangled and didn’t relay the information to the director as I had hoped.

Borden asked for the model and front view elevations early, so that he could check blocking and how the set would transition. He would not approve the design until then and the model was due for the next production meeting. On November 29, 2011, my assistant and I presented the model to the director. We went through the introduction, montages, and all 28-scene changes. The director seemed pleased, but did have a few minor adjustments. He cut the beehive bit with the king during the Act II opening montage. Borden wanted to lower the banners and arches more so that they could be seen more clearly. In Act I, Scene 7, he cut the bar and asked for only a bench and table. He didn’t find anything wrong with the foundation and look of the model.

It was good he reviewed the model, because through that conversation I realized I hadn’t fully worked out every movement of the set. Several times during the play, the
actors continue their dialogue while the locations change. For instance in Act II, the three musketeers go from one tavern to a tavern across the country in an instant. I designed the Farmhouse flat to come in during scenes like this, but it didn’t need it. Borden questioned if the audience would know they were in a new location even if the flat did come down. I decided the best solution would be a big sign that would change and inform the audience where they were, and letting the turntable make a full 360 degree revolve. Talking with the director also gave me the idea to incorporate a chessboard pattern on the apron, where the king plays chess with oversized game pieces. Borden agreed to the design, but left me with one more question. During the siege scene in Act II, Aramis is shot and left behind. How does his body get off stage? I considered this and adjusted my masking flats behind the bridge to accommodate actors’ entrances and exits.

I was beginning to realize that with the bridge in its new configuration and turntable walls adjusted, actors were becoming visible entering and exiting up stage. The director had specifically stated that he wanted no run crew or actors to be seen during transitions. I reviewed my model and ground plan and found no answer. I had placed the turntable walls 2’-0” away from the edge of the turntable so that the two towers hung over. I would ask King to construct it so no supports would have to touch the turntable. This brought the two towers more center stage, which would increase the audience’s sightlines. The walls had to clear the towers and the bridge stairs going down. I designed the walls to be broken or crumbled to help the fragmentation. The cuts stagger downward from the center tower to the platformrevolve. This design revealed more up
stage than originally planned. Huge elements of the design would have to be cut to cover
the upstage fully, mainly the bridge.

A redesign was starting to look inevitable, but there was no time to create a new
design. I couldn’t imagine the set any other way at this point in the process. I decided to
continue on with the current design. I knew eventually Borden would notice or ask about
the upstage sightlines. As a designer, I want to make the director happy and give him the
environment to help his actors. I also knew that not everything a director asks for is
possible or goes along with the overall design. To never see any run crew is difficult
when considering these transitions. The more well funded theaters have fly systems,
tracks in the stage, and motorized set pieces that move magically around. I was
considering sticking freshman run-crew members in the towers or elevator to manually
operate the turntable and change set dressing, as our budget didn’t allow us the luxury of
automatic operation. It was a situation where I would have to say “No” to the director.
Sometimes designers need to make hard choices, but I felt it was important to stick with
my gut instincts and stand by my decision.

I presented the model the next day at the production meeting and it was a
contentious one. When it was scenic’s turn to present, I stood and turned the model
towards the rest of the team. Instantly, everyone in the room got up and walked over to
it, already sharing their opinions. I could only make out the phrase, “can’t do it, not
structurally sound.” It seemed that the bridge would become the biggest challenge. I
needed to convince everyone that it could happen, we could afford it, and we would have
enough time and people. I raised my voice to say, “Can I at least explain the set, before
you all turn it down.” I explained the set and all the transitions, but there was still doubt
coming from the design and tech faculty. This is when my assistant Christine Donaghy spoke up.

She was a TD and we had already discussed the support problems with the bridge. The bridge had to be low enough for the balcony to see actors on it, and high enough for the turntable walls to clear it, which included a wall with a full sized door. The frame of the bridge and stairs had to be thin and strong. We had already discussed rigging the bridge to the high-grid and box steel framing with the Technical Director, which allows the bridge to hover over the turntable with no supports. Donaghy explained this to the team better than I could, but still the TD advisor and Veneziano believed the bridge would not work. I became disheartened. While this kind of rigging and welding is seldom done at the JCSTF, it did not render it impossible. I stood by the design and expressed confidence it could be done, though I had no proof. Donaghy continued to defend and give options of how to construct the bridge. No one could reasonably deny what she was saying could work with our budget. Our shop foreman and a few students could weld and handle the rigging.

I was getting reluctance from King, who had already confirmed with me she could handle the design. She pointed out that the students who work in the shop, our main crew, came in when they chose. There was no guarantee that enough students would come in or that set pieces would end up being cut in the end. I would not downsize the design on the chance that not enough workers would come to shop during build. This is something no one can predict and I knew I would be disappointed if I designed for less labor and then ended up having a full shop. I compromised with the TD and advisors that I would make a priority list. Most important scenic pieces would be built first and so on
down the list to things that could be cut. I made the list, but I felt every piece was important to the whole. I promised myself that I would do whatever it took to get everything built and painted in time. I knew I could not control the build, the students, or the faculty, but I moved forward with a positive mindset and dedication to the show. If you design it, they will come.
Chapter 10: No Break, All Budget

In the production schedule, which is made by the TD faculty member Ed Stauffer, it stated design elevations were due the week of December 4, 2011. The TD’s estimated budget due date wasn’t until January 8th, 2012, after the school’s winter break. The director and production team had just confirmed the design the week before our last production meeting before break. I did not believe it was a sufficient amount of time to complete all the elevations of the expansive set. The last mainstage show had difficulties getting the elevations in on time and subsequently gave Donaghy only one week to work out estimated budgets before build started. After she budgeted, she found the design was over the show’s allotted amount of money. Build was about to begin in shop and the design wasn’t finalized. This caused every department anxiety and stress. The Set Designer, his assistant, and the TD scrambled to find cheaper ways of building and changing the design during the first week of their build. It was a situation that no one on The Three Musketeers wanted to repeat.

Donaghy knew all too well the strain of a cramped production schedule. On this show she had two roles, Assistant Scenic Designer and Assistant Technical Director. She shared her concerns with me about the schedule and I agreed. I asked her if she was okay with working during winter break. She would if it helped the process in the end. We devised a plan to work with King on the elevations and budget, so by the time we all returned everything would be refined. To convince the advisors that this plan would be successful, I knew it was important to communicate with my team and my advisor. I discussed the idea with King, and she too agreed to work over winter break. The break schedule would start with Donaghy and me completing an estimated elevations packet the
next Friday. Then King would have a week to make up an estimated budget packet, and
send it to us the next Friday. We would resolve any budget problems, edit the elevations,
and answer any questions she had. It would continue back and forth between us every
Friday until the first production meeting of the spring semester. Her task was to talk to
her advisor Stauffer, and my task was to talk to Veneziano, Borden, Van Winkle, and
Ahna Packard, adjunct faculty member. Packard would be checking and giving tips on
drafting the elevations. Everyone seemed to be in agreement, even though they were
concerned about us losing the break we all desperately needed.

I explained the plan in the production meeting before break, on December 7th,
2011, and handed out the schedule we made for ourselves so that they could follow our
progress. Even though I didn’t have the elevations done, I did not come empty handed to
the meeting. I made 8”x11” scene breakdowns for the director, stage manager, and
lighting designer. The breakdown consisted of each ground plan, cutout, banner, set
dressing position, and notes for all 28 transitions. Van Winkle received the updated
sections, both SL and SR, so he could begin his light plot. Later that day I went with the
Props Mistress, undergraduate Lauren Blunk, to the attic and furniture storage to tag set
dressing. The more stock elements we used, the more money we saved. The props
budget was looking tight, since a few of the weapons would have to come from out of
state. She was able to update her props and set decoration list, and knew what we would
pull, purchase, or build.

The rest of the meeting dealt with small details in each department. Skinner was
still trying to work out the masquerade ball with the director. They were working on the
color schemes for the good and bad characters. They were thinking warm tones and gold
for the good guys, cool tones and silver for the bad guys. The ball scene was crucial to the play. Not only did it have almost every actor and actress on stage at once, but it also reveals the stolen diamonds with an epic entrance by D’artagnan on the zip-line. Since Skinner and Borden were meeting one-on-one to discuss color of the costumes in the beginning, Van Winkle and I scheduled a color meeting with Skinner to catch up before everyone left for the holidays.

Donaghy and I had already started the elevations, but still had a lot of work to do. When we completed a full elevation we sent a PDF to Packard to edit. She would email us back the PDF elevation with corrections and notes. It was helpful to have her knowledge of drafting for theatre, as well as answering frantic phone calls from us when Vectorworks wasn’t working. On December 9th, 2011, the day before the estimated packet was due, we entered the CAD lab at the JCSTF to continue drafting. We would not quit drafting for the next 20 hours. The elevations included: ground plan, SL section, SR section, ground plan with dimensions (without turntable), turntable dimensions, turntable walls, turntable tower, rock band tower, masking flats, zip-line tower, large turntable stairs, bridge, small platform, slide, gazebo with platform and steps, cutouts, banners, fly line trim heights in sections, and muslin layout. Each elevation needed a title block, front view, side view, top view, dimensions, notes, sections and detail views when needed. We finished around 9:30am the next day with the whole estimated packet printed out for King.

To amuse ourselves, and to let our team know that the production process can still have a sense of humor, we titled each set piece with funny Scottish names. The rock band tower, turntable walls, and gazebo kept their simple titles. The other names
included: Happy Time Tower, Shady McStairs Alot, Stubby McNubbins, Lonely McSmall-and-Sad, Slidey McSlidesterson, Zippy McTall Guy, and Shorty McSquat-and-Fat. To really drive home my opinion about the bridge, its title was: This-Is-Not-Going-To-Change-McSo-Don’t-Even-Think-About-It. During the development of a show, stress levels can become high. People get angry, sad, mentally and physically exhausted, and can let those emotions out on other members of the design team or crews. Egos can be hurt and laughter can be scarce. Though these titles are silly, they actually helped calm heated discussions and made people laugh. Life is challenging enough. As a collaborator, I want those I communicate with to enjoy how and what we create together.

A week later we received an email from the TD telling us we were approximately $1,000.00 over budget. She came in on December 16, 2011, and went through notes. We were stunned that the set cost so much and quickly tried to find ways to lower the estimate. Donaghy and I went through the scene shops to find stock masking flats, stair units, and scraps to that we could use. We found three masking flats that could be faced with 1/4” luan on the reverse side, and two small step units we could incorporate into the set. We communicated with the shop foreman Ruhs to see if he had heard of any lumber sales. He had, and we encouraged him to call the technical director where she should purchase her shop order. Donaghy and I redrafted a few of the set pieces to account for what we salvaged. King made a few suggestions too, as well as corrections for the drafting. We answered any questions she had and filled in information we had accidentally missed. Then we handed off the packet once again for King to create an estimated budget.
That same day I also took time to prepare for the color meeting I was going to have soon with Skinner and Van Winkle. I grabbed three different paint swatch books and one wood stain swatch book. I set out all of the fabric swatches Skinner had given me earlier, to show me the colors I should not choose. I picked out warm muddy grays, deep greens, cool grays, creams, blue-greens, a purple-black, coral pinks, and a dark burnt umber wood. Van Winkle had suggested I go the neutral route so he could manipulate set with washes of color. I chose a blue and red hue that matched as close to the fabric swatches of the Cardinal and Musketeers. I wrote down every color name, the company, and swatch number.

The color meeting took place on December 18, 2011, in the prop shop. Van Winkle had already left for the holidays, so his assistant took notes for him. Skinner and I laid out what we had on the worktables. She told me she had stayed away from warm browns and favored the more olive browns. Skinner did this because her costume advisor told her my set was all brown. I was confused, since I just chose colors myself and I had also tried to stay clear of medium value browns. I assumed all the costumes would have some brown fabrics, based on historical research showing the color brown was predominant. This was a good example of how trusting information that doesn’t come directly from the source can be misleading. We corrected one another and discussed the costume designs. She told me the ball costumes would have some elements of sheen, which affected lighting more. Skinner confirmed the group tones for the scene, but had decided the Queen would wear more white to make her stand out in the crowd. The rest of the information was made clear by her colored renderings and swatches.
On December 20, 2011, Donaghy and I received the next estimated budget. We were still over budget by nearly $1,000.00. King was starting to suggest that we cut some of the scenery. I refused to give in, knowing if one piece was gone the other elements wouldn’t work. King, Donaghy, and I continued to think of ways to cut the budget. We asked King if there would be a difference in price between pink and white foam. Could we lower her contingency percentage, which was 15% of the total, to 10%? I redesigned the gazebo to be half the size, as to not lose the positive space SL, but have less material cost. We could cut all the maso on the top of every stair and platform. I even called the props mistress about her estimate budget. She thought she had to rent a weapon that we ended up having, so she gave us $150.00 of her budget. King continued to look into sales and deals online. By the end of that week we tallied up the new budget, and we were still $400.00 over.

I was confused and frustrated by this news. All I could do was continue to work on and refine the elevations. I decided where the practical lighting units would be placed on set and the hooks for the signs. I added two spinning tubes to the street and farmhouse flats. I would incorporate them into a painted sign and paint the different titles of locations on them, so the same flats could be used more than once in different scenes. I didn’t like the idea of cutting set elements, but the first job of the designer is staying within the perimeters of the budget. Two other shows had already far exceeded their budgets and after the scrim accident, I knew I must stay within my limit. I received another email from King on December 29th, 2011 giving the most recent update on the budget. As it turned out, the TD had entered some prices incorrectly into excel. After she fixed the miscalculations, we miraculously ended up at an estimated budget of
$3,602.30. King joked that she could spot us the $2.30. The draftings were finalized and we could continue on with our design. We were even ahead of the schedule we gave ourselves over break.
Chapter 11: Production Begins

Winter break was over and students were heading into the spring semester. The first week back the shop was closed. The shop was booked throughout the second week with staggered orientations. The third week back the majority of students would be attending KC ACTF in Iowa. King was more than concerned about the lack of students coming in to get hours for classes by working in the shop. But as the second week rolled around, the shop was bustling with workers. She had a week before the semester began and the first week to draft up construction drawings. Then she needed to complete a shop list of materials to purchase. I began working on paint elevations, which would show the undergraduate paint charge, Morgan Cooper, what he would be working on in the next five weeks. It would be no easy task.

Our first production meeting back was on January 12, 2012. King presented her final budget. I presented the final elevations. Skinner had been purchasing fabrics over the break. She had also begun mask construction for the ball scene the semester before. Van Winkle hadn’t worked on the show during break but his light plot wasn’t due for a week. During the meeting, I agreed that if there were not enough students working in the shop during the production of The Three Musketeers, I would cut the scrim walls surrounding the rock band. I hated the thought, but it would have been better for the audience to see the band as opposed to seeing an empty chunk of stage. Sometimes if scenery needs to be cut, the audience is none the wiser. My set design filled the entire stage, spilling into the wings. The audience would have been aware that something didn’t look right.
The main topic of that first meeting was the tech schedule. The central question was whether we were to have one-twelve hour tech Sunday. There was a group of us who wanted to try what the last main stage production team did, and split tech Sunday into halves. This would give the stage manager the Friday of tech week to run cue-to-cue. The designers would then have the leeway to take all of Saturday and Sunday morning to correct director notes. Sunday night would then become the first complete run-through. Our director was not in favor of this proposition in the beginning because he wanted more tech hours total. But the design team felt splitting up tech would greatly benefit them. From experience, I have seen how frantic and chaotic the full tech can become. Having the days split gives all of the designers, painters, run crew, and stage managers the chances to fix problems and sharpen details. It helps the next run be that much further along. This question was not resolved during that meeting. It was later confirmed that paper tech would take place on February 14th, 2012.

The next production meeting was on January 19th, 2012. Each team asked questions and gave a general update on their progress. The master electrician Aja Jackson felt that she needed more stage time for hang and focus, so she was given two additional Wednesday evenings. Van Winkle wanted to know if I could place the candelabras back by “Shady McStairs A lot” in Act II, Scene 5, “The Ball.” A few feet made no difference to me, and I could see that it would give the masquerade dancers more room on the turntable. McDermott wanted to install larger speakers. After a test-run he would let me know if they affected the zip-line. The director wanted the chess pieces to be at least 3’-0” tall. I wanted to know if my advisor, Veneziano, would be
using the studio during production, or whether we could use that space to paint. All of these questions created a sense of uncertainty and anxiety as we proceeded.
Chapter 12: It All Comes Down To Paint

I took on dual roles during the production of *The Three Musketeers*. This was my thesis set design as a graduating Masters student and I was also fulfilling my assistantship for the school as House Paint Charge. This meant that during productions from 1:30pm-5:30pm, Monday through Friday, I was to be in the shop painting. My duties also included keeping the paint room clean and organized while supervising the show’s paint charge, Morgan Cooper. This was Cooper’s first time being the paint charge of a main stage show. When a new paint charge is assigned a show, I mostly train them on the responsibilities, texture styles, shortcuts, and running a paint crew. Being the set designer as well blurred the boundaries.

As a paint charge, you take the visual information given to you by the designer. You break that information down into priority, budget, and step-by-step instructions you can relay to your crew. The charge makes samples of the textures and color matches to the paint elevations. Being the designer with a vast scenic painting background also means I know exactly what I want and have an automatic understanding of execution. It was a challenge to instruct Cooper while still allowing him the opportunity to learn through hands-on experience. The paint charge’s goal is to produce work that represents as accurately as possible the set designer’s renderings and paint elevations. Cooper had to likewise balance two roles. He had to get the approval of every sample and painted element from me, the set designer, as well as producing quality work for me, the House Paint Charge. This dance of hierarchy wound throughout the paint progression.

My design was very paint heavy. To save money I designed every scenic element to be realistic 3D paintings, also known as Trompe L’oeil. For instance, I designed all of
the molding to be painted trompe l’oeil instead of purchasing real molding. Trompe
l’oeil is considered a technique for the more skilled painter. One must have a trained
steady hand and also an understanding of light. Highlight and shadow techniques create
the push and pull of the image to fool the eye into believing the object is real. Cooper
had painting experience and had taken scenic painting from Ahna Packard. I trusted his
capabilities and was sure that with a little guidance he could be a proficient painter.
Cooper communicates well, which is the most important trait of being a charge. The title
explains itself.

I took the first week of school off for myself after I completed my drafting. When
build began, I set to work on my paint elevations at night. I prefer to render in
watercolors, but I have a tendency to go too light and washy. The flat Rosco latex paint
we generally use covers opaque, while watercolors reveal multiple layers. I tried to keep
this in mind when mixing the watercolors to match my chosen paint swatches. King
related that the first scenery pieces that needed to be completed (by the third week), were
the leaf-cut borders. The Johnny Carson School does not have an adequate paint frame or
paint deck where you could staple a drop to make painting easier. The largest space we
could use to staple the borders was the stage floor of Howell Theatre. That meant the
turntable would be compromised for rehearsals. It also meant that build and lighting
could not use the space till all four banners were complete and pulled up. The leaf cut
borders were the first elevation.

Cooper, Donaghy, and I began work on the borders. We decided to do the rest of
the muslin banners at the same time. I prefer to starch the drops when sizing the material
taut. Using a series of stamps over a green wet blend gave the borders more depth than I
was able to achieve in my elevations. The borders became darker as they receded away from the audience. The banners were placed in the studio in one large sheet of muslin. It was a process for them to get fully cartooned-out with the symbols of the characters. On January 23, 2012, I noted in my journal that the students continued to flood in for shop hours. I wrote, “It seems like this show was blessed to have some luck.” Those can be dangerous words for a designer to speak so early in production.

I also mentioned in that entry that a few members of the production team were waiting on design information from me. Van Winkle needed lantern designs to give one of his assistants to build. Blunk was waiting for sign designs, over prop and dressing designs. King needed the painters to get the borders done quickly so that her team could load in the turntable. I began to realize that even though I had been working for almost a year on the design, there were still some elements that I hadn’t addressed or were too low on my priority list. I did not fully understand how one unfinished, small scenic piece could hold up the other departments. It did look like the shop was running smoothly at this point because King didn’t have as many questions. I was working hard to communicate with my team, but in so doing I overbooked my schedule and may have neglected other areas. I was going to try to work on giving more attention to the other designers, even though the workload was growing.
Chapter 13: A Stumble Through

The next few production meetings were mainly for discussing how each department was doing and tying up loose ends. This was nice because when you are in the shop can be chaotic. The scene shop, Howell stage, and the studio were filled with cutout flats, sawhorses holding up scenery, the sounds of students yelling, and saws going off at random. I was devoted to painting alongside Cooper in and out of shop hours. Even before I designed the show, I knew it was going to be paint heavy. When any department had questions though, I stepped away from paint and helped where I could. When I design, I put my ideas down on paper or in the computer. I work out the space and measurements so everything fits nicely. Then I take that design and put it in the hands of humans, who are capable of mistakes. I also realize that I am human, and I make mistakes.

There were things I hadn’t thought would be a problem, or had not thought of at all. As the production got more intense and a couple of weeks went by, I was fixing and tweaking things. The chess pieces needed to be weighted because the actor’s capes were knocking them down as they walked by. The trestle table that Blunk and I pulled from basement storage needed to be able to support up to three actors at a time. The bassist in the rock band also needed to play the electric keyboard so the rock band tower platform was extended again. I could not have anticipated the amount of on-the-spot decision making. I did my best to stay calm, focused, and communicative with all parties and tried to remember to laugh.

I went to the first stumble-through of Act I in the space with the actors. It was the first view of Borden’s blocking that I had seen. Immediately I was glad I was there,
because though my assistant and I had gone through the set with the actors, they were confused on the layout. The director had asked me for front view elevations for each scene, but I was unable to find time to draw them. Very few scenic elements were loaded in yet, but the actors were following the taped out ground plan on the floor. The actors walked through walls, missed doorways, and came in on the wrong side of the stage. They even exited off the rock band tower where there would be no exit. I corrected the stage manager and the director when I saw these actions. With all the transitions and fight scenes, I didn’t blame the director or actors for getting confused. I understood that when more scenery was loaded on stage it would help them.

As the run went on, the director would ask for additions, or alterations to props and scenic. Borden wanted a small hole placed in the turntable to slip a sword into, so that when the turntable moved the sword wouldn’t roll off. In the end, it wasn’t necessary. He asked if we could push “Lonely McSmall-and-Sad”, the small apron platform, up stage and adjust the angle. During a fight rehearsal where Rochefort breaks D’artagnan’s sword in half, they saw an opportunity on how they could switch from a real sword to a pre-broken sword. “Lonely McSmall-and-Sad” was wider on the up stage side than the down stage, and it was almost large enough to hide a sword inside of it. The exact size of the platform wasn’t greatly important to me. If he needed it 3” longer without facing on one side, and the shop was willing to adjust or remake it, then I could gladly agree. It was that sort of collaboration that helped the show feel whole, instead of separate designs competing. There were times where I felt I had made huge errors in my design, and times where other team members made errors to my design. Everyone relied on each other to be as accurate as possible. In a student setting, however, it was more
important to learn from inaccuracies. I did my best to try and let go of the things I could not control.

In a journal entry from February 1, 2012, I wrote about how anxious I was. It was three weeks until the show opened and I was overwhelmed. The shop put the borders up in front of each electric to hide the lights from the audience’s view. It turned out that they were not long enough to cover all the sightlines. You could see the back walls and lights in the wings. I decided to paint side panels of muslin like the leaf borders. I attached those panels to a black material and extended the border battens on each side. This way we blocked more of the upper wings from sight. Since I chose to have masking flats that don’t extend up to meet the borders instead of having legs, there would always be a gap. Van Winkle did not seemed concerned though, and told me that when the work lights are off it would be darker, thus eliminating any problem.

A small change created a big problem about a week before technical rehearsals. There is a muddy road scene and a forest scene in the show. I designed four tree trunk cutouts to fly down in front of the turntable. During the construction of the trunks I chose to extend luan on the sides by 8 inches. By doing so, I was able to draw a more organic shape at the base of the trunks, rather than the rectangle shape I had designed originally. When I did this I did not communicate with the other departments, thinking that it was such a small change it wouldn’t affect anyone. This assumption caused trouble for Van Winkle, because he had plotted his lights on the neighboring electrics around the trees. This was an important lesson in communication and collaboration.

I looked at the light plot and ground plans to see what I could do to fit the trees around the lights on their batten. As I looked at the plot I realized there were more
electrics than I'd anticipated. Van Winkle had taken two of the “No Use” battens and
turned them into electrics. Now in front of the tree batten there were two electrics back
to back, and no space between them and my trees. My new concern was the possibility
of Van Winkle’s lights hitting the scenery when they were focused at an angle. We had
both made assumptions that our changes wouldn’t affect each other and it got us in
trouble. Van Winkle’s suggestion was to switch the tree line with the bush line. I agreed
at the time, but later found out that if the bushes were more up stage they would fly down
behind the exterior walls on the turntable. The trees stayed where they were and Van
Winkle said he would add bumpers to the electrics. After the trees were hung we realized
they had warped during the painting and they bowed toward the electrics. To solve this
Van Winkle added even more bumpers and soft material so any lights that did touch the
trees would not scratch them. Van Winkle and I learned from these mistakes and agreed
we would let each other know about all future changes, regardless of size.

We had another production meeting on February 2, 2012. Scenic, lighting, sound,
and costumes all needed a run crew of students. We would not find out how many
students we could get to help until tech, which worried the designers. In total we needed
11 people, whose jobs included running the Vortec, hand rails, turntable operator, quick
change assistants, board ops, and a crew to move furniture and set dressing, along with
other small jobs. During the meeting we scheduled paper tech for the next Thursday at
12:30 p.m., where we would work out the placement of cues for the stage manager to
call. We scheduled dry tech for February 16th, 2012, to go through scene changes. In
addition, I still needed to receive a portrait painted by a UNL alumnus living in California
and choose wall sconces for lighting.
The next day, I noticed a problem with the bridge. It took a while for the shop to rig the bridge, and even longer to attach the box steel frame stairs to it. When they did get the long bridge rigged to the high grid it was more than a foot off its mark. I asked King why this was and she told me that all the measurements were accurate. I knew this could not be the case, so I went to the ground plan. I had the bridge placed so that the cable would fall right in front of the 3rd border. They had rigged it off mark so I asked them to move the bridge down stage where the ground plan had it. They moved the bridge, but it was still behind the border and 5” off mark. The shop foremen told me it was because of a bulkhead up in the high grid that would not allow them to move it any closer to mark. Now the bridge stairs would not line up with the two towers, and one of the bridge stair units had been made incorrectly. I chose to handle this by having the shop add three sheets of plywood to the rock band platform to make it flush with the flawed stair unit. The other tower, whose name was “Shorty McSquat-and-Fat” was a round platform. Moving the bridge meant the edge of the bridge stairs were no longer resting on the platform. King added a 2x4 underneath it so it had a foundation. I didn’t like this but there was nothing I could do at this point in build, so I accepted the changes and hid them as best I could. This taught me that even if you communicate as best you can, others in charge could decide to change something or make mistakes. In this academic setting, I couldn’t make demands or fire anyone, so I made sure to watch the shop when they loaded scenery in.

Paint was falling behind and the work was piling up. Cooper could not be in shop the whole time because of classes. He also expressed that he could not work as often outside of shop as I was. I could not make any demands or force any student to work
outside of shop hours. From then on I took on more of a leading role in the paint area, and Cooper helped when he could. The first paint call was not as productive as I had hoped and the second paint call was coming up. At this point, I still did not have the masking flat elevations drawn and painted. It became more important to paint the real set pieces than the paint elevations. I knew what I was after, and because Cooper was not as involved in the painting as I was, I executed what was in my mind and not what was on paper. In the future I want to be more prepared with elevations, because the next time I may not have anything to do with the painting process. I must learn to communicate better.
Chapter 14: The Race To Open

Buzz about the set was not only floating around the school but also Lincoln’s theater community. The set had a zip-line, spinning turntable, walls that moved, flying pieces, and sword fighting; I understood why people were talking. It made me nervous though that the set would not live up to the talk. So I pushed to work even harder on the show. I had to bump up the texture on the floor and paint the scrim walls in the few days before tech week. Paper tech and dry tech went well. First tech on Friday the 17, 2012, was slower going through the cue to cue. The set and its cues had to go in a specific order so that none of the scenery crashed into one another. Also the rock band needed to learn their cues and play at the right moments. The design team completed the notes given that Saturday. We all needed time in the space and the rock band needed to sound check. Cue-to-cue continued on through second tech and the first dress rehearsal. Everyone was nervous because there were very few full runs with all the technical elements.

During tech we loaded in the painted scrim walls on the rock band tower. These were essential so that the band could be revealed and hidden. The scrim walls were posing a challenge for lighting. We could still see the band through the material. Their instruments and amps all had shiny metal surfaces that reflected through. Even their skin could be seen. Van Winkle tried several different lighting combinations with front light, back light, top light, and side light. I masked every stand, the drum kit, and anything else that wouldn’t affect their instruments. Finally by first dress rehearsal the band was mostly obscured from view. I was very proud of the scrim walls. I had taken a risk in
working with this material not knowing if it would work. It paid off, and now I have that experience and knowledge for the future.

I pulled three all-nighters in a row, painting morning and night. I personally do not like painting when I am exhausted. When I am tired my hand is not as steady, my eyes become blurry, and I am more prone to causing paint spills. In the last 6 days before opening, 4 large paint spills occurred. I was grateful that everyone stayed calm and cleaned up the messes together. I was painting right up till the house doors opened for the show. I finished the painted windows on the scrim walls, which was something I was leaving for last. The scrim material made it difficult to go over any paint previously applied, and would stretch when brushed too aggressively. Mistakes could not be covered, which made me scared to try. I kept my hand still and painted the window and bars. I used a spray paint tool that adds paint as desired, called PreVals. This created a soft shadow, which made the stone and window on the scrim look very realistic. It would be the last touch to the set before opening.

I went to opening night and sat with the audience. I was going to see first hand what the audience’s reaction would be. I was scared, but happy I didn’t have to work on it anymore. The audience seemed to love the set. I heard people whispering about it during the show and talking about it at intermission. I did not hear any negative comments from the crowd. After the show, I was greeted by old friends, colleagues, and known theater patrons from around Lincoln. I received compliments, not only on the set structure itself, but also the paint execution.
Conclusion

The show opened with success. The reviews came in, and the majority of people really liked the show. They didn’t feel that the acting was as strong as it could have been, but the sword fighting, set, and costumes got several compliments. Jeff Korbelik, a critic from the Lincoln Journal Star wrote, “Brandi Kawamoto struck gold with her scenic design. She used a rotating set to give her actors three "stages" to work from for the many scenes. Very well done…” I was shocked that he chose to call me out by name, but was greatful. The KCACTF adjudicator said she thought that the set and lights were communicating back and forth, and that she wished the actors had got off stage so she could watch. She also praised the designers for integrating each other’s design in our own. Everyone involved with the show worked very hard. I could not have asked for a better outcome.

In my design I thought that the unit structure worked well. There was no crashing of scenery and no hurt actors. I thought the painted scrim walls were very successful. I talked to audience members to see if they saw and enjoyed the rock band. Some raved about it, others thought there was only a guitarist, and there were few who never saw the band at all. It really depended where you sat in the theater and what part of the set you could see. I feel if I could go back, or design this show for a larger theater, I would have worked those sightline problems out better. I regret not thinking much about the balcony audience. More people sat up there than I thought, and though the apron was more visible, the bridge was not. I fought for the bridge to stay, and yet not all of the audience got to enjoy the action on it.
My favorite part of the design is the levels I created. I wanted to give Borden a set that allowed him and his actors to play. In our first few meetings I told him I wanted to create a jungle gym for the actors. I didn’t end up going in that direction, but I wanted to still have that feeling. Borden used “Shady McStairs A Lot,” the unit on the turntable with steps at random heights, extremely well. The actors ran and jumped off of the levels, hiding, and fighting on them. It became the fun neutral space I had hoped for.

I have learned many things from the process and execution of *The Three Musketeers*. Communication is above all the most important part of the design collaboration. Theater does not revolve around one person or one design. It takes every person involved for the show to be complete and to operate as intended. It is important to fight for what you love and have created, but also to compromise for the betterment of the show. I am happy with the outcome and will always reflect on my thesis. I used the knowledge and experience I had gained from my eight years of college in this design. I hope to continue to learn and grow.
Appendix A: Research Photos
Plate 1  Tudor style pub.

Plate 2  17th Century French architecture
Plate 3     Stone to building.

Plate 4     Organic boulders.
Plate 5  Rope bridge.

Plate 6  Old tree stump.
Plate 7  17th Century French castle top, Chambord.

Plate 8  Exterior inspiration.
Plate 9  Rock slide inspiration.

Plate 10  17th Century x-frame chair.
Plate 11  Column inspiration.

Plate 12  Jungle gym.
Plate 13  Prop jewelry box.

Plate 14  Aged Tudor barn.
Plate 15  Roofing.

Plate 16  Tavern inspiration.
Plate 17  Torch inspiration.
Appendix B: Props List
### Budget for Props List - Three Musketeers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Set Dress</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Candelabras</td>
<td>pulling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easel (add shelf for paints)</td>
<td>pulling adding small shelf $5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrel?</td>
<td>pulling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanity (small)</td>
<td>pulling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Balusters</td>
<td>pulling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wall Decoy for Three Musketeers?</td>
<td>pulling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arch for Convent</td>
<td>pulling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone bench (permanently on stage)</td>
<td>pulling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Wood Benches</td>
<td>pulling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra Side Table for Convent</td>
<td>purchase or build - $50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X Frame Chair</td>
<td>pulling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trestle Table</td>
<td>pulling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Flower Beds</td>
<td>building or pulling - $10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crucifix</td>
<td>build</td>
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</table>

**Total: $65**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pub/Drinking</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metal Goblets for Convent</td>
<td>pulling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitchers for Beer/Wine</td>
<td>pulling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mugs at least 5</td>
<td>pulling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weapons</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Swords for Beginning (D’Arty and Father)</td>
<td>pulling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Swords for Musketeers</td>
<td>pulling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sword for Rochefort (girly)</td>
<td>pulling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dagger for Rochefort</td>
<td>pulling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D’Arty’s Broken Sword</td>
<td>$150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Swords for Henchmen</td>
<td>pulling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reuse 1 Sword for Medea Statue</td>
<td>pulling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosary Beads</td>
<td>$5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Musket pulling cleaning fee - $50
Pistol pulling cleaning fee - $50
Conduit for Swords $15

Total: $270

Props in Script
Rope for Buttercup $15
Tankard for Milady’s Entrance pulling
Things in D’Arty’s pocket (coins, etc.) pulling
Letter to Monsieur de Treville $5
Bandages for Athos’ wound pulling
Fan (real and wooden box) Real: $25 Wooden: $10

Chess Pieces $30
Easel/Portrait $30
Paints/Palette Knife $20
Jewelry Box $20
4 Loose Diamonds with Box $5
Flower pulling
Letter to Queen $5
Letter to Buckingham $5
Letter to Constance $5
3 Government Documents $15
Pardon Document $5
Vase with Flowers pulling
Vile for Poison pulling
Medea with sword (adding arms) $100

Total: $295

Total Budget: $630
Appendix C: Drafted Elevations
This is not going to change. Make sure even hidden is.

Walls H and I can be used to help support system for the bridge. Please refer to reference number plan to see that Wall H has an unusual path behind it that needs to be kept clear.

Filling of tears and staple holes will be at Designer’s discretion. Discuss w/ Designer what needs to be filled.

No facing on stairs, only trends should be solid.

Thickness of support for stairs are estimates. Keep the dimension close to 1/4” as possible to allow clearance for wall on turntable unit. Stairs must be therma-tically sound.

Designer understands that the bridge may need to be secured to the grid and/or changes or allowances will need to be made. Keep lines of communication open regarding any changes that will affect the look of the set.
Appendix D: Sightline Plans
Appendix E: Scene Breakdowns
A1/S1: The Sword of the Father
A1/S3: Milady's a Knockout
A1/S5: Meeting the Musketeers and Constance
A1/S6: Chess in the Garden
A1/S7: Dueling and Fighting
NOTE:
From Tavern scene, turn table spins to Lusk set and Street. Comes down.
Tavern dwellers take off dressing. After set stops, Muslceeters come through Street Building Door.
Street Drop and Columns "Building" has a working door.
A1/S10: Beggars in the street
A2/S2: Milady Must Go
A2/S3 p1: Riding to England-Chantilly
A2/S3 p3: Riding into England-Muddy Road
A2/S4: Retrieving the Necklace
A2/S7 p1: The Siege-Outside
A2/S7 p2: The Siege-Farmhouse
A2/S8: Plotting to kill the King
A2/S9: The Death of C and M
A2/S10: The Big Finish
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Plate 40  Front Rendering 2.

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Plate 43   Paint swatches.
Plate 44  Masking flat 1.

Plate 45  Masking flat 2.
Plate 46     Masking Flat 3

Plate 47     Masking Flat 4
Plate 48  Masking Flat 5

Plate 49  Masking Sketch
Plate 50  Costume Rendering 1

Plate 51  Costume Rendering 2
CARDINAL

Act 1 All Scenes

Act 1 Scene 2 (hat stolen)

Act 2 All Scenes

Act 2 Scene 5 (no hat, red cape, red robe, or white robe; only black robe plus half-cape & wool mask)

*This red will be mauve PURPLE, not orange

Plate 52  Costume Rendering 3
Appendix G: Models
Plate 53  Rough white model garden.

Plate 54  Rough white model tavern.
Plate 55     Rough white model Lux.

Plate 56     Rough white model zipline.
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Plate 58  White model Lux
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Plate 60  White model interior
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Plate 63  Tree trunk elevation.

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Plate 65  Buckingham and musketeer banner elevations.

Plate 66  Cardinal and King’s banners elevations.
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Plate 74     Frame of rock wall.

Plate 75     Farmhouse flat.
Plate 76  Loading in leaf cut borders.

Plate 77  Musketeers banners.
Plate 78  Cartooned King’s banner.

Plate 79  King’s Banner
Plate 78  Buckingham banner.

Plate 79  Cardinal’s banners.
Plate 80  King’s small banners.

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Plate 82  Stubby McNubbins without facing.

Plate 83  Facing Shady McStairs-A-Lot
Plate 84  Bridge with rigging.

Plate 85  Large chess pieces.
Plate 86  Faced Shady McStairs-A-Lot

Plate 87  Columns for street scene.
Plate 88   Box steel framed stairs.

Plate 89   Lonely McSmall-and-Sad
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Plate 91  Close up tree trunk
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Plate 103  Scrim wall without window.
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Plate 116  Finished Exterior.

Plate 117  Finished Interior.
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Plate 132  Masquerade ball.

Plate 133  Prisoner in Cardinal’s chamber.
Plate 134  Kiss in the streets.

Plate 135  Happy Time Tower with Bridge and torches.
Bibliography

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Plate 2  <http://t1.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcQhjhMAsGmipb-ZxE1BMwYNaNV3v-2G1CBFTKydQ_g7Wg6vPWv8>

Plate 3  <http://farm1.static.flickr.com/47/158536626_fec9dbe481.jpg>

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Plate 15  <http://www.buglercoaches.co.uk/images/users_images/Cockington%20Weavers%20Cottage.JPG>

Plate 16  <http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_R9JwdOLpUMw/TBuSoJvyivI/AAAAAAAAKQQ/hIMefhRALKQ/s1600/a+highland+cottage+by+myles+birket+foster.jpg>

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