

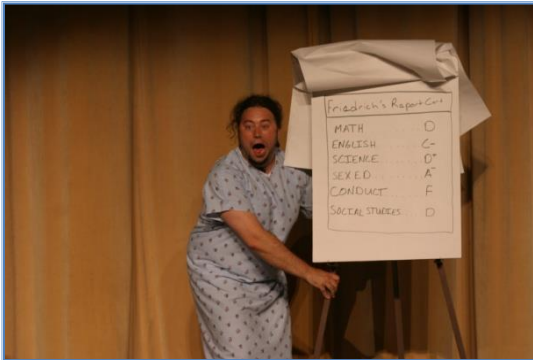
# Alaska Overnighters

## *Participant Guide*

by Dawson Moore

Fifteenth Edition

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The Overnighters is theatre written, staged, and fully realized within 24 hours. What you hold in your hands now (or perhaps are reading off a computer screen) is a guide on how to get the most out of participating in the Overnighters: how to succeed, whatever your role, in stepping up to the challenge. I may be a bit of a sadist, but I enjoy how freaked out first-time actors are at 4:00 p.m. Really, though, I enjoy it because it makes out excited they are after the show has gone up and they've succeeded.

There are three main positive aspects to this slapdash theatrical form: One, it provides consistently good, thought-provoking **entertainment** for the audience. Despite the rough edges and some plays that don't turn out well, the show invariably crackles with an energy often not found in more traditional, rehearsed productions.

Two, it is excellent **training**. No matter what part of the show you are working on, Overnighters force you to boil your craft down to its essentials: given a limited amount of time to prepare, what must you do to be ready for the audience.

Three, because of what a small time commitment it is, the Overnighters provides a great opportunity for theatre community **bonding**. Companies can often become insular, working with the same people over and over again; this gives their members an excellent opportunity to come together, create, and learn from each other.



This process isn't for everyone. A good friend and strong director said after their experience: "You told me this was like theatrical cocaine. I think it's more like theatre crack." An actress told me after one performance that she hated not feeling like she had time to prepare what she was presenting. The first time I was the producer, an old friend who was acting in the show read me the riot act about how it wasn't a valid process. He did this a half-hour before we went up. These are talented people I respect. They're entitled to their opinion. For me, this is a unique, exciting, entertaining way to explore why we love theatre. It is not here as a replacement for the old form, but as a way for the participants (and audience) to grow.

### The Basics

Three to six playwrights are given topics the evening before the production. They are also assigned a director and their cast (2 to 10 people). Then they go home to write a ten to fifteen minute play.



In the morning, the playwrights turn their new little masterpieces over to the cast and crew. In addition to leading their casts through the day, directors are responsible for getting lists of props, set pieces, and lighting & sound cues to the tech crew, who spend the day acquiring all the needed items. If the volunteer base is big enough, it's great to have an assistant stage manager to help with

the tech elements and to be on book once actors are getting memorized. That night the shows go up, off-book and with full tech, theatre created within twenty-four hours!

### Project History

Under the auspices of Three Wise Monkeys Theatre Company, the Alaska Overnighters first went up in July, 2002. I had taken part in the Rough Theatre Company's Daytrippers Play-in-a-Day Marathon in San Francisco, which was run by Brad Cooreman and Jenn "Bulldog" Garagliano. I worked on four productions with them, and wrote, acted and directed for their "Best of the Fringe" winning productions in the San Francisco Fringe Festival. Our process is unabashedly stolen from them, as they stole it from those who came before them.

TBA Theatre came aboard to aid with the logistics of the project, and have been co-producers with Three Wise Moose, the Alaska extension of the SF-based Monkeys, ever since. The first productions took place in the Jerry Harper Studio Theatre at the University of Alaska Anchorage, with subsequent Overnighters taking place in other theatres at UAA, Prince William Sound Community College, and Alaska Pacific University.



It can work in almost any space. There just have to be enough rehearsal spaces for each show (3 to 6 per night is usual), and if it works out that the theatre to be performed in is one of the spaces, that is ideal.

### **Basic Schedule**

The following schedule is an only an example of how the 24 hours go. **IF YOU'RE READING THIS AND WORKING ON AN OVERNIGHTERS**, make sure to know where and when the starting meeting will take place. There and in an e-mail the week before the show is where you will get the specifics on a given production. But don't schedule anything else when you're working on the Overnighters: this is an all day commitment.

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<b>8:00 p.m.</b>	Starting meeting. If the event is over two days, this meeting will be on the night before the first show. The meeting for the second night will be after the first evening of shows.
<b>8:00 a.m.</b>	Actors, writers and directors meet at the rehearsal space and get to work.
<b>Noon</b>	Lunch break. Tech lists are due now. Lunch is provided by the production company.
<b>12:45 p.m.</b>	Back to rehearsals.
<b>4:30 p.m.</b>	Dinner break. Everyone is on their own for dinner arrangements.
<b>6:00 p.m.</b>	Tech rehearsal.
<b>8:00 p.m.</b>	Show Time!!

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Times vary. Often tech rehearsals and dinner break overlap, with different casts starting dinner earlier or later to give each show more time in the space. It is not uncommon for shows to never run in the actual performance space... go with the flow!

### **Basic How To's for Everyone**

There are a number of basic ideas that apply to everyone working on the Overnights. **Take care of yourself.** Water is provided. When lunch comes, eat something. When dinner break comes, eat something.



Time is limited, so **stay focused.** Don't overwork yourself, but don't let your focus falter.

**Be prompt.** Don't leave your partners waiting for you, either in the morning or after breaks.

There's some basic info we'll need from you:

1. Your most current contact info.
2. An emergency contact phone number, just in case you get **KILLED** while working on the Overnights.
3. A humorous bio to be turned in by lunch of the day you're working on.
4. Let the producers know about allergies & dietary needs. That way you'll have someone to blame when no one remembers to bring healthy food to lunch.

### Playwright Recommendations

None of the following advice is intended to force you into writing a particular way. These are just suggestions from previous experiences on how to get the best production of your script possible. The recommendations for writers are three times as long as anyone else's, because the success or failure of the production starts here.

#### **Drink water.**

**Be on time** in the morning, with one copy of the script for each actor and the director, and two for the tech.

**Be reasonable** about what you ask for in terms of sets and props. If your play **HAS** to have something, something will be provided, but don't be excessive in your demands. If you have something and are willing to bring it in yourself, that is always helpful.

**Read your work aloud** as you go, and when you finish a first draft, time it. Don't go by the "one page equals one minute" formula, as it can often be wrong. There's no reason to accidentally write a forty-five minute opus. No one will be able to memorize it anyway.

**Write with your actors in mind.** This means a number of things:

1. Write parts that are **age appropriate** for them.
2. If possible, give every actor some **time offstage** during the course of the play, as this is when they will have the best chance to memorize their lines during the day.
3. Don't create an **unreasonable line load** for a single actor. As a rule, it is much easier to remember short lines of dialogue, as opposed to thick chunks of text. Example:

Jon: I used to be a fisherman.

Mary: Really, what kind?

Jon: I worked on a crab boat.  
 Mary: For how long?  
 Jon: Twelve years.  
 Mary: Why'd you move on to real estate?  
 Jon: My wife. She couldn't stand the smell.

*As opposed to:*

Jon: I used to be a fisherman. I worked on a crab boat. For twelve years, in fact. But I gave it up and decided to go into real estate instead. The problem was my wife. She couldn't stand the smell.

(I know neither of these are examples of good dialogue.)

A couple of **useful suggestions**:

1. **E-mail your script** to the director and cast when you're finalized. This doesn't mean not to bring copies as well, but can give them a great jump on the rehearsal process.
2. If you can **include a list of props and set pieces** in your script, that saves the director time.

After you've been assigned your topic, cast, and director, you then have the opportunity to **talk with them about the play** you're going to write. You can just leave and get writing if that's what works for you, but some examples of things you might do with the cast and director that night include:

1. Brainstorming plot ideas
2. Improvise some scenes
3. Talk about their level of past experience
4. Ask actors about skills they'd like to use in the show.
5. Find out if there is anything they specifically would be uncomfortable with, such as physical intimacy, swearing, sacrilege, nudity... well, the producers would actually rather you didn't write that in. I've done it, and I was never the same afterward.



In the morning, **stay for at least a read-through** to answer questions and fix mistakes you might have made early in the morning. Some people stay much longer and are more involved in helping out, but just make sure you don't get in the way!

Add a line to your **playwriting resume!!!**

Don't be precious about your writing. Believe that everyone is doing their best to do the play you wrote. If your director comes to you to request changes in the script, strongly consider what he's asking. Unless it's literally a wrong, let your collaborators on the production do what they need to do to get your play up.

### Actor Recommendations

**Drink water.**

**Be on time**, for everything.

**Memorize as quickly as possible.**

The sooner the script is out of your hands, the better. Try your best to be exact when memorizing... it's tough to do in a short time period, but will make them much easier to remember later if you get them right to begin with.



Be up front with your writer about **what you are unwilling to do**. Examples of possible qualms might include nudity, language, and taking the name of the Lord in vain. Sometimes people are embarrassed to bring things like this up... don't be.

Make **active choices** as an actor, and pursue objectives. You know, all that actor stuff.

**Bring** two sets of **clothes** with you in the morning to provide costuming options. They may still need more.



**Stay positive** during the rehearsals. Don't be that actor everyone hates working with!

**Director Recommendations**

**Drink water.**

**Be on time**, for everything.

You will want to **focus on working with the text**, not using too many acting exercises. The actors need to go through the script as frequently as possible.

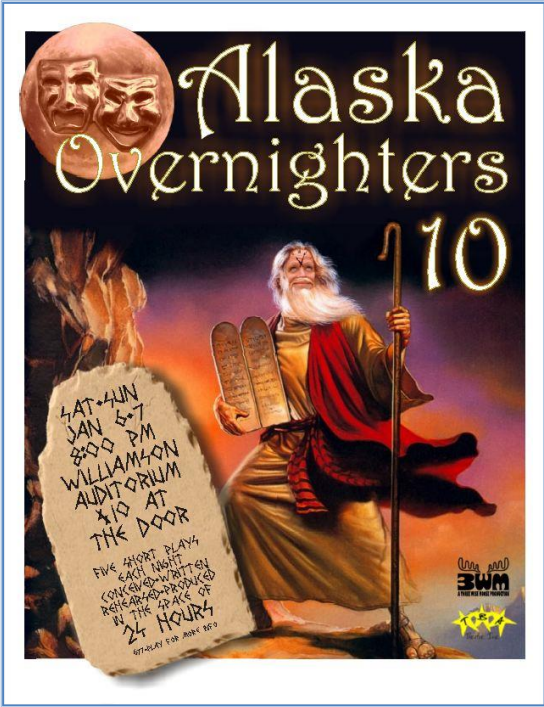
Make sure to **give actors time to memorize lines** on their own. Keep them engaged, but let them do script work as well.

Your job is to **stage the play you are given**. There are times when this will involve making changes to the script... you and the cast are the ones in the room, dealing with the practical questions of producing the play. But do not default to making it what you want it to be.

Realize the script, don't recreate it. With small changes, you don't need to wake the author up; anything more than a minor line revision, you should check with them, get their feedback, and respect their wishes.

By lunch, you should have a props list, sound & light cues, and a set design to the production team. If there is an assistant stage manager, they will help you with this.

After the dinner break, it's time to **stop worrying** about actors getting the lines exactly right.



The key to directing for Overnighters is to **challenge your cast**, push them hard, and also **create a positive environment** where they can succeed.

### Ticketing

People participating in the Overnighters are comped in to all the performances, regardless if they're involved in individual evening or not. There are no other comps to performances, though exceptions can be made for the press and in cases of financial hardship. Talk to the producers on the day of the show with any questions you have about this.

### Respect for the Space

Whatever space you're working in, make sure to leave things as you found them. During the day, you will probably be moved a couple of times to ensure that everyone gets to rehearse in the actual performance space (assuming this is possible).

### Publicity

The producing companies will deal with getting out press releases and creating a flier to distribute around town. You can help out by letting your friends, family and enemies also know via e-mail. The audience gets their money's worth, and it's more fun to play to a packed house.

### Writers Produced

As of January 2018, the Alaska Overnighters has produced 263 new works by 66 different writers. A complete alphabetical list of the authors follows, with their plays listed in the order they were produced.

**Greg Aldrich:** *Cash Only*

**Forrest Attaway:** *Alone; Lust; The Thirteenth Commandment*

**Brendan Babb:** *Egg Macguffin*

**Jill Bess:** *Tinkle Bells; The Rapunzel Syndrome; Alien Autopsy*

**Linda Billington:** *Pilates of the Caribbean; The Ballad of Sidenvinder Slade; Alamo Confidential; Final Forest; A Day at the Post-Apocalyptic Beach; The Talkeetna Chainsaw Massacre; Good Business; The Party's Over; The War of the Pennies; Flotsam; The Importance of Ritual; Big Teeth; The Bachelor Dance; Sudden Death; Everything's Just Paranormal Here; Love Me Tender, Baby; Sofa, So Good; Poetic Justice; Science Friction; The Outsider; Here There Be Dragons*

**Dave Block:** *Die Again Another Day With Love; The Solution; The Brain Center*

**Carl Bright:** *The Least Likely Villain; Sounds About Right; Awkward; The Sky is Falling; Death Day; The Sky Was Opened; Something Magic; No More Settling*

**Paul Brynner:** *Melody; Immaculata; Lithuania; Live Free or Die, a True Story of the American Heartland; Cockroach's Countdown; Moon Pies: An American Tragedy in Five Scenes; Taking Shortcuts; Trading Up*

**Ryan Buen:** *Riding Toward Bethlehem; The Pigeon Play; Spelunk; The Night of Your Life; The Sinking of the Titanic; Thorns; One More Game; The Journey; What are you afraid of?; Desperate Times; The Nabisco Lady; I'll Be Back; Go, Giants!*

**Daniels Calvin:** *I'm Not Saying It's Aliens, But...*

**Brett Chatelain:** *Afterglow*

**Dennis Cleary:** *A Christmas Quarrel; Chariots*

**Tonya Derrickson:** *Norma's*

**Mike Daniels:** *Proof of Love; Mistaken Identity; Birthright*

**Sam Dunham:** *When You Can't Think of Anything, Go For Racist*

**Cynthia Glucksman:** *Plies*

**Michael Hansel:** *Strings of Pearl/ Succulent*



**Megan Harty:** *What's For Dinner?*

**Rand Higbee:** *Fools; Emma's Hand*

**Jason Hodges:** *The First Table Read; And the Little Dog Laughed to See Such a Sight*

**Steven R. Hunt:** *Hush Little Mama; Jubilation*

**Sarah Hurst:** *Fun Things to Do; Flashforwards*

**Arthur M. Jolly:** *A Last Minute Addition*

**Arlitia Jones:** *Rhoda Palmer, Three Days Dead; Sharkers; The Bodice Rippers; What the Mountain Keeps; Babe Magnet; Go This Way; King Koi; Over the Sea; Grand Central & 42<sup>nd</sup>; The Last Freaks Out Egypt; The W Dream; Big Blue Petri; The Boy With Daffodils; The Edeson Sisters' Society for Embroidery, Literary Discursion, and the Worldwide Annihilation of Peckerheads; Why; By Gnome Light*

**Matthew Kress:** *Quest of the Pentacle; Andromeda's Rat; Home Is*

**J. Sibley Law:** *Depth of Emotion*

**Brandon Lawrence:** *Damsel*

**Stephanie Leigh:** *Sundays With Alice*

**Anthony Lounsbury:** *Just Cheers*

**Becca Mahar:** *Drive By Pizza*

**Bill McAllister:** *Jack of Spades; Lies; twentysomething (Before the Crash)*

**Jerry McDonnell:** *In the Mood, Inc.*

**John McKay:** *Games People Play; A Perfect Pleasure; Rules of Engagement*

**Jon Minton:** *A Buncha Misguided Folks in a Seedy Bar; Who Wants to Marry a Mute Millionaire?: Reunion Special; Mortimer's Moribund; Out of the Mouths of Babes*

**Rita Miraglia:** *Blighted*



**P. Shane Mitchell:** *Emotional Modifications; The Miraculous Resurrection of Humpty Dumpty; Mt Fuji: A Parable; Naughty Friedrich Goes to Heaven; The Heart of the Children; Omega; Five Minutes to Glance Backward; Sebastian's Vigil; Explaining & Unexplainable; And Lo the Kings; Daddy Long Legs; Oh Happy Day; It's Your Play, America; Veritas; The Memento; The Lightness; What Doesn't Count; The*

*Reading, The Awakening of Aphrodite, The Hill Hag, Winter February Night, Holy of Holies, Madame Zuza Sees All, Who's Your Daddy?, Enduring Things*

**D. Wayne Mitchell:** *A Wish for Wings, After Midnight, Before the Beginning, And Then There Were Five, Admetus Revisited, The Fifth World*

**Dawson Moore:** *The War of Virginia and Alabama, The Fears of Harold Shivers, This Really is the End, Alyson and the Great Bagel Mistake, The Final Caveat of Phineas Bartholomen, The You'll-Never-Have-a-Second-Wife Club, Cacophony Amore, Father, Past, Present, David's One Miracle, That's My Saddam, Almond Joy, The Gaping Void of Human Loneliness, a comedy, Strange Far Place, America's Next Saddest Family, The Big Beelzebub Boggle & Brouhaha, or, The Possession, Violent Louts Fight Bad People, Bugs, Plants, and a Mayan God*

**Tom Moran:** *In the Red, First Kiss*

**Anson Mount:** *Monkey*

**Mark Muro:** *The Eccentricities of a Monkey Rat, Cloak of Stars, Not In Your Name, Squid, Pickle Days (revisited), Bird in Hand, Nifty Zippers, Mistaken Identity, The Golden Prawn*

**Aaron Phillips:** *The Light Fantastic: a short tragedy about bugs*

**Ernie Piper:** *The Art of Manly Love*

**Peter Porco:** *Saving the Union, Wrinkles in Time, Onions, The Sky with Diamonds*

**Doreen Ransom:** *Love in Darkest Suburbia*

**Ann Reddig:** *One Nation Under, A Bowl of Strawberries, Christmas at Ground Zero, Salmon Taloned by Cardinal Knowledge, Taint Corn, A Tree By Any Other Name, Princess Court, #5 Closest to God – But Not About Him, Rattus Rattus, A Nameless Play By a Random Overnighter Author, Come Along to My House, Ignite Your Bones, God Speed, Baby Precious Always Shines, Seven Swords for Seven Sisters, A Tale of Two Stars, Blue Light Special, Shoggoth on the Roof, Take Me to the River, Poltergeist... the Clone Awakens*

**Guillermo Reyes:** *Guys Drunk Out of Their Minds*

**Mark Robokoff:** *The Feast of the Assumption, Fastrax, Fortudinine, The Bridge Place, Division of Zero, Dusk, Fifth Wheel, The S-wordsman*

**Lia Romeo:** *The Thing About the Neighborhood*

**Lucas Rowley:** *Goat Man Goes North*

**Schatzie Schaefer:** *A Cross to Bear, Ancient Chinese Secret, Green Legs & Spam, One Lonely Mute Protagonist, The Don of Smyrna, A Stiff Pounding, Sabbatron, Where Strawberries Come From, The Founder, Are You With Us?, Rerun, Towel Skirt Guy, Wednesdays and Saturdays, The Cross, Café Gratitude, Interpretive Dance, Will Power, One Shoe*

**Paul Schweigert:** *Karma, The Tenth Commandment... Finally!, Family Values*

**Carey Seward:** *The Only Way*

**Janna Shaw:** *Sudden Death, Under Cover*

**Oliver Siemans:** *Impromptu No. 1 in Z Majo, Heart to Heart Counseling*

**Andrea Staats:** *Event Horizontal, Charity Dinner, When You're Consciously Couple (But Not to Each Other), Paternity Test*

**Mark Stoneburner:** *Sevenfold*

**Cori Taylor:** *Four's Company*

**Kavelina Torres:** *Bob and Bones*

**Dennis Thurston:** *The Runaway, Rock Fall*

**Amy Tofte:** *Currency*



**Mira Vasiljevic:** *Wonderful, Wonderful*

**Adam M. Warwas:** *who's your god now?; A Little Town Just Outside of Nowhere; The Need to Intentionally Suffocate All Things Beautiful*

**Antoinette F. Winstead:** *What Would You Do For A Million Dollars?*

**Wendy Withrow:** *Only a Hippopotamus Will Do; Shitty Haircut; Graven Images; You Have an Active Mind and Keen Imagination. Apply Your Ideas; Prom Night; Three*

**Billy Worthy:** *The Edge of Town*

**Michael Yichao:** *Shoot the Moon*