A Movie-Making RPG by Duffy Austin

BLOCKBUSTER! is a game about being a star!

Formula Pictures has fallen on hard times: No one is seeing their artsy, ground-breaking films! In desperation, they sign some of the world's hottest stars for movies without scripts or directors. It falls to these celebrities to make up the story as they go – each convinced that they are the star!

The goal of BLOCKBUSTER! is to work together to complete a three act film. Unfortunately, you are all narcissists, so you are also competing to be the main character. The studio couldn't care less, as having major names like yourselves involved pretty much guarantees that the film will make money (especially considering what's saved on creatives). It's entirely up to your team of self-involved shmucks to put together a story that is remotely coherent.

BLOCKBUSTER! is a game-masterless, rules-lite, dice-pool based role-playing game where players take on roles in more ways than one. They don't just fill the role of a character, they fill the role of the *actor* playing that character!

Games can be played with 3-6 players, ages 8 and up. A single film can last up to 2 hours and up to 4 with a three act film.

HOW THE GAME WORKS

BLOCKBUSTER! takes place over three **acts (or, if you're short on time, just one)**. Players take the role of **actors** who work **backstage** to build **charisma** they can use **onstage**, where they play **characters** in the movie they're making. Players spend their charisma or goodwill from their **filmography** to **change the genre** of the film and **upstage** their peers.

The over-arching plot of the film is determined by the players as it goes along.

Each onstage section has a goal declared by the **act director** that must be achieved for the act to be complete. The first person to fail to earn charisma backstage is the act director for onstage. They have to keep in mind that everything that has already happened in the film is canon.

To win the onstage portion of an act, a player must use their actor's talents to complete three successful **scenes** (turns), earning points called **starpower** that makes them the center of attention and completes the act goal.

During their scenes, they can use the charisma they earned backstage, or a film from their filmography, to change the film's current genre to one their actor is more skilled in. On someone else's turn, a player can also spend their charisma or a film to try to upstage them, changing the genre, but forcing them to compete against the current player's choice of talent.

Whenever a player fails to have a successful scene, they receive a **studio note** that adds a new detail to their character that persists the entirety of the film.

After the third starpower is earned in the final act of the film, the player with the most starpower acquired over all the acts gets to title the film and gives its epilogue. The player with the most studio notes over the course of the film gets to explain how their character became the breakout star and how the studio plans to capitalize on their popularity.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED TO PLAY

To play BLOCKBUSTER!, you'll need the following:

1. Character sheets found at the end of this document.

2. Something to write with.

3. A deck of note cards (to write plots, act goals, plot details, characters, and studio notes on).

4. The Genre Sheet, a sheet divided into four quadrants where players will write the names of the genres the movie will switch between (This is placed in the center of the players for everyone to see).

5. A marker to move on the above Genre Sheet to denote the film's current genre.

6. An large number of two different colored tokens to represent charisma and starpower (These will be passed around a lot. Poker chips work well).

7. About 12 six-sided dice (d6)

GETTING STARTED

DECIDING ON THE GENRES

At the beginning of the game, even before making characters, players need to decide what kind of genres they want to play in for their film. These can be as broad or specific as the players wish. They can just be a simple Action, Horror, Drama or Comedy, or be more specific like a Jukebox Musical, Space Opera, Chase Movie or Period Piece.

Write these four genres on the Genre Sheet, each in its own quadrant.

STUDIO NOTES

Each player gets five blank note cards that they need to write studio notes on. **These are notes that are given to players during the onstage section when they either fail to make a successful roll to perform a scene, or lose an upstaging.**

Each player must write a detail that is given to a character who receives this card. Narratively, its something that the studio wants in the film in order to make it more appealing to a wider audience.

These can be nearly anything within the group's comfort zone, and should be something that you would see in a big Hollywood blockbuster film, regardless of how logical it is. Possible studio notes include:

• You now have a CGI comedic sidekick that follows you around.

• Your character suddenly has crab claws instead of hands.

• Your future self has traveled back in time to train you to prevent an apocalyptic future.

Studio notes should also include a genre from the Genre Sheet written in the upper-right corner of the card. If this card is received when a character attempts a scene and fails, the genre changes to what is on this card. If this card is received during an upstaging, the genre is unaffected

Once all the notes are filled out, they are shuffled and put into a pile face-down. Players are encouraged to make more studio notes and shuffle them into the deck during the game.

MAKING AN ACTOR

Begin by coming up with a name for your actor. It's best to base them off of a broad parody of a type of celebrity, as it gives you more room to be creative.

Talents

Players flesh out their actor by first determining their talents. These are the stats that help players succeed at being BLOCKBUSTER! Superstars, because **they factor into everything they do, both backstage and onstage.**

The player has 4d6 to divide among their talents. The more dice they have in a talent, the better the actor is at it. NO TALENT CAN HAVE MORE THAN 3d6 PUT INTO IT.

Talents are:

- **PHYSICALITY**: The actor's ability to perform physically impressive acts. This talent is used to test physical feats like gunfights or winning the big ski race to save the youth center.

- **SCREEN PRESENCE**: The actor's ability to charm those around them. This is when an actor has to interact with another actor or extra, such as when they have to give a rousing speech to Congress or convince their lover that life is worth living, even after discovering that they have cancer.

- **METHOD**: The actor's ability to fall into a role and understand things about the film like the setting. This is used when an actor has to do something technical like navigate a mountain pass, or restore a 1957 Chevy Convertible in order to bridge a generational-gap between father and son.

It's a good idea to have your character's dice distributed differently than your peers. This not only creates different actors, but can give an advantage when trying to upstage someone.
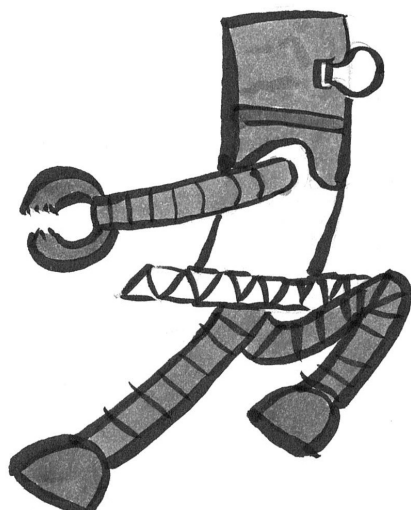
Genres

Players fill in the four genres the group chose at the beginning of the game on their character sheets. **The player has 5d6 to divide among their genres. The more dice they have in a genre, the more at home the actor is in it. NO GENRE CAN HAVE MORE THAN 3d6 PUT INTO IT.**

During the onstage portion of the game, players can add any dice they have in the film's current genre to their roll, no matter what their action is. Doing so represents the player tapping into their actor's experience in the genre to succeed at their scene. Whatever they do should appropriately include that genre's tropes.

Filmography

An actor's filmography is their history in previous movies that made them the person they are today. They can be used to flesh them out, while also offering a way to use their experience to control the film.

The two ways players can use a film are to:

- Change the genre.

- Upstage another player.

If a player uses a film in their filmography to do either, they can not use it for the rest of the current movie, no matter how many acts it has. Its the equivalent of an actor using their goodwill in a film as leverage to do something in this new movie.

PLAYING THE GAME:

Act 1

BACKSTAGE

At the beginning of every act, players take on the role of their actors in the backstage portion of the game. In the game's narrative, they are doing publicity for the film in order to gain the public's attention (even though, as established, they do not know what the film is going to be about).

Actors are using this opportunity to acquire **charisma**, a currency that is used during the onstage portion of the game to:

- Change the film's genre.

- Upstage another player.

Spending charisma in a film is like the actor using their goodwill from backstage to influence the film. Charisma functions similar to films in the filmography, but is only usable in the act its earned in.

Players begin by going around the group introducing their actors. Then, beginning with the person who most recently saw a film (or otherwise selected randomly), players take turns describing the actions their actors are taking to build anticipation of the film.

On a players turn, they receive a point of charisma, then describe what the actor is doing to gain attention, which of their talents the action ties into, and rolls those dice. Depending on the result, the player describes how they succeeded, or other players describe how they failed.

It is entirely up to the player how they reason that the action ties into their talent. The reason for this is because it gives them a way to flesh out how their character thinks, and doesn't provide them with any advantages over other players since everyone can take advantage of this way of playing.

Every time a talent is used to perform an action, it must be rolled at one less dice on every following turn they're used while backstage. This stacks, meaning that a player can only roll 4 times before running out of dice, the first time they use their new actor. This only happens backstage, because the actors are running themselves ragged trying to gain attention. Onstage, they don't have to worry about tiring themselves out since they can always call cut or have a double take their place.

If any of dice used to perform an action land a 4, 5, or 6, the action is considered a success, and the player describes how it was successful.

EX: Brick Thudgun is a famous action star who has decided to make online videos of themselves doing stunts. Brick is going to jump over the Grand Canyon in their car.

*Their player rolls Physicality, since this is all about Brick **looking** cool. They have 3d6 in Physicality, and the dice land on a 3, 4, and 5. Only one of those dice needed to be 4 or higher, so the action is considered a success.*

The player explains how Brick's car came up short on the jump, but they managed to leap out the window at the last moment and grab the ledge!

If a player fails to make a successful roll to perform an action backstage, one of their fellow players takes the role of a gossip (think TMZ) and explains how the action failed.

EX: Brick's player failed to get a 4 or higher on any of their dice, so the jump across the Grand Canyon failed. A fellow player pretends to be a gossip news pundit, and explains that Brick got tangled in the seat belt as they attempted to jump out of the car when they realized it wasn't going to clear the canyon. The car plummeted to the canyon floor. Brick managed to survive due to the giant air-mattress that had been inflated on the canyon floor, but the ecological damage that the canyon-sized mattress has done has caused a scandal for Brick.

The turn then goes to the next player in a circle till everyone has gone. Then, the process begins again with everyone having one less dice available to roll.

Players who fail their backstage rolls are done earning charisma, and have to come up with the plot of the movie for the onstage section.

The turn goes around the group until there's one player left who has not had a failed roll, or everyone has run out of dice to roll. They receive one final point of charisma, then it's on to the onstage section.

Coming Up With The Movie

The first player to fail their roll becomes the act director for the following onstage portion of the act. Since they've fallen out of the public eye, it's their job to actually start working and come up with the movie that's being made.

Using note cards, they write out:

- The premise of the act, including setting, genre, and act goal.

- The name and one sentence profile of a character that someone will play in the film.

As other players fail their rolls, they also take part in the creative process. They provide both:

- The name and one sentence profile of a character that someone will play in the film.

- A detail added to the plot. This can be something about the environment (THERE'S A VOLCANO GOING OFF!), a conceit about the setting (ROBOTS RULE THE EARTH!), or something that impacts multiple characters (THREE OF THE CHARACTERS ARE SECRETLY RELATED!)

Once every player has created a character and a plot detail, they give them to the act director in two piles, face down.

Setting the Stage

The act director reads off the premise and act goal, followed by the details added by the other players. These are laid out for everyone to see and reference during the onstage portion of the game. Adherence to the details isn't mandatory, but they do add flavor.

The act director assigns characters to the actors. They can either read them and determine which actor should play which character, or they can shuffle them, and have the players draw to randomly assign characters.

Before anyone rolls any dice, every player gets a chance to introduce their character in a scene. Once that is done, the competition begins

ONSTAGE

On Your Turn

The act director goes first. On their turn, players describe what actions they are going to take in order to work towards the act goal. They explain why they chose the talent they are using to do so, and roll the number of dice they have in that talent, and the current genre. **If any of the dice land on a 4, 5, or 6, the action is successful and the player explains how they were able to use their talent, and tropes in the current genre, in order to be successful.** They take a point of starpower, and pass the turn to the player of their choice.

EX: Brick plays Carthag Amabigo, a hardboiled detective. They need to find a missing formula for nuclear fuel in a Sci-Fi movie. They do this by using their Physique to rough up patrons of a nearby science bar, using their plasma gun to intimidate the people they're questioning. They have 3d6 in Physique, and 2d6 in Sci-Fi, giving them a total of 5d6 dice they can roll. They were successful, and managed to intimidate a black market scientist into telling them what they want to know.

If the roll fails, the player gets a studio note, the genre changes to what's on the note, and they explain how they failed in their goal. Other players are allowed to offer suggestions.

EX: Brick tried to intimidate the scientists, but failed to realize this was a criminal science bar, and was beat up by the cyborg criminal scientists.

No matter what, the current player gets to choose who goes after them, even if they are upstaged. To ensure your own victory, it's best to select the person with the least amount of starpower

Changing The Genre

Sometimes the genre the story currently takes place in is not one in which a player is strong. If that's the case, the player can change the genre on their turn. To do this, they either give up one of their charisma or sacrifice a film from their filmography. They move the marker on the Genre Sheet to the new genre, and explain how they are going to perform the scene using dice from a talent of their choice, and any dice they have in the new genre.

If the scene succeeds, the player describes how they utilized genre tropes to make the story about themselves and work their way to achieving the act's goal.

EX: The film is currently a Sci-Fi movie where aliens are invading the planet. Brick has 2d6 in Sci-Fi but has 3d6 in Drama. They declare that they change the genre, give up a point of charisma, and roll 6d6 with the dice they have in Physique. One of the dice lands on a 4, so the scene succeeds. This gets them starpower. Brick's player then explains how they were able to make contact with the aliens through the universal language of dance they learned while studying ballet in England.

If the scene failed, treat as a normal failure, complete with the genre change to what is on the studio note.

Upstaging

One thing a player may do on another player's turn is try to upstage them. Thematically, this means that they are trying to take the opposing actor down a peg. This can be butting-in on their lines or doing something distracting in the background that endears them to the audience. You can only upstage someone on their turn.

Mechanically, the player is stealing another player's starpower for themselves. This is an opposed roll. **The current player declares the talent and the person who wants to upstage them must sacrifice charisma or a film from their filmography. As a bonus, they can change the genre. They should explain how they're trying to upstage the actor using the new genre's tropes.**

The current player can avert a genre change by spending their own charisma or filmography to control the genre instead.

Both players roll the number of dice they have attributed to the talent and genre being tested.

If a player ends up not having any dice in either the talent or genre being rolled, they get a single dice.

The player with the most successes upstages the other. If both players get the same number of successes, they reroll all dice until the tie is broken.

The winning player gets one starpower. The loser gets a studio note (the genre on the note doesn't impact the game). The winner of the contest explains how the scene played out (other players can contribute).

ONLY ONE PLAYER CAN ATTEMPT TO UPSTAGE SOMEONE DURING THEIR SCENE. The opportunity always goes to the player who volunteers first (This can be represented as throwing a point of charisma into the center of the table).

If multiple people throw in at the same time, the person with fewer starpower wins. If the people who throw in have equal starpower, the person who has had the most time since their last scene gets to go.

WINNING THE ACT

To win the act, a player must gain three starpower, representing them completing the act goal.

When a player is about to get their third starpower, every player may attempt to upstage them to stop them, so long as they have the resources. Basically, everyone gets a single chance to upstage the player who's about to win, so long as they have a film or charisma to spend.

The first person who earns three starpower accomplishes the act goal and explains how the act ends.

Players write down how many starpower they earned this round, and return all tokens - both starpower and charisma - to the center of the table. Charisma doesn't carry over between acts.

CONTINUING THE GAME

(IF YOU'RE PLAYING A SINGLE ACT GAME, SKIP TO "WINNING THE GAME")

Players return to backstage, where they go about earning charisma for the next act. The winner from onstage goes first. As before, when a player fails a roll, they begin to work on the onstage portion of the game. This time, though, they do not create characters.

The next act director comes up with the plot, act goal, and genre, but they consider everything that happened before as canon. They can turn the Sci-Fi film into a Western Musical, but they have to include everything that happened before in some capacity. The same goes for other players' plot details.

This is the same for the third act as well.

WINNING THE GAME

At the end of the final act, the player who is first to earn three starpower determines how the act ends.

Players subtract their number of studio notes from their number of starpower. The player with the highest positive number determines the film's epilogue and also title the film.

The player with the biggest negative number explains how their character became the breakout star and how the studio plans to capitalize on them.

Every player gets to explain the fates of their characters, and how the film impacted their actor's career.

All players add this new film to their actor's filmography to use in future games with this actor.

ADVANCEMENT

At the beginning of the next film, players may permanently sacrifice three films from their filmography to give them a dice that they can put into a talent or a genre.

BLOCKBUSTER!

ACTOR:

TALENTS
Divide 4 points among categories

PHYSICALITY: ☐ ☐ ☐

SCREEN PRESENCE: ☐ ☐ ☐

METHOD: ☐ ☐ ☐

GENRES
Divide 5 points among categories

_____ ☐ ☐ ☐

_____ ☐ ☐ ☐

_____ ☐ ☐ ☐

_____ ☐ ☐ ☐

Filmography
Create 3 films for your actor

BLOCKBUSTER!

ACTOR:

TALENTS
Divide 4 points among categories

PHYSICALITY: ☐ ☐ ☐

SCREEN PRESENCE: ☐ ☐ ☐

METHOD: ☐ ☐ ☐

GENRES
Divide 5 points among categories

_____ ☐ ☐ ☐

_____ ☐ ☐ ☐

_____ ☐ ☐ ☐

_____ ☐ ☐ ☐

Filmography
Create 3 films for your actor

BLOCKBUSTER!

ACTOR:

TALENTS
Divide 4 points among categories

PHYSICALITY: ☐ ☐ ☐

SCREEN PRESENCE: ☐ ☐ ☐

METHOD: ☐ ☐ ☐

GENRES
Divide 5 points among categories

_____ ☐ ☐ ☐

_____ ☐ ☐ ☐

_____ ☐ ☐ ☐

_____ ☐ ☐ ☐

Filmography
Create 3 films for your actor

BLOCKBUSTER!

ACTOR:

TALENTS
Divide 4 points among categories

PHYSICALITY: ☐ ☐ ☐

SCREEN PRESENCE: ☐ ☐ ☐

METHOD: ☐ ☐ ☐

GENRES
Divide 5 points among categories

_____ ☐ ☐ ☐

_____ ☐ ☐ ☐

_____ ☐ ☐ ☐

_____ ☐ ☐ ☐

Filmography
Create 3 films for your actor

BLOCKBUSTER!

ACTOR:

TALENTS
Divide 4 points among categories

PHYSICALITY: ☐ ☐ ☐

SCREEN PRESENCE: ☐ ☐ ☐

METHOD: ☐ ☐ ☐

GENRES
Divide 5 points among categories

☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐

Filmography
Create 3 films for your actor

BLOCKBUSTER!

ACTOR:

TALENTS
Divide 4 points among categories

PHYSICALITY: ☐ ☐ ☐

SCREEN PRESENCE: ☐ ☐ ☐

METHOD: ☐ ☐ ☐

GENRES
Divide 5 points among categories

☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐

Filmography
Create 3 films for your actor

GENRE SHEET

GENRE 2:

GENRE 3:

GENRE 1:

GENRE 4: