

WRAP BY MIDNIGHT

by Matteo Bonvicino

ACT I

THE PITCH

FADE IN:

EXT. PICTURING PICTURES - MAIN GATE - DAY

An enormous gate of iron and ambition. Carved in stone above it, the motto: *WE PICTURE PICTURES*. Under it, a small hand-painted sign: PLEASE DO NOT ASK WHAT IT MEANS.

A line of people carrying clipboards, scripts and cappuccinos trickles through the gate. Nobody looks up.

CASTING DIRECTOR (V.O.)

Picturing Pictures is the oldest, the biggest and the least understood film studio in the world. It makes blockbusters, costume dramas, musicals and one documentary about its own canteen.

A MOTORBIKE courier delivers a box of biscuits to the gatehouse. Each biscuit is stamped with the motto.

CASTING DIRECTOR (V.O.)

Lately we have a small problem. Our films cost a fortune, and the audience keeps asking for something called "a story."

CUT TO:

INT. PICTURING PICTURES - BOARDROOM - DAY

A long table. Twelve EXECUTIVES, none of whom has ever finished a film. At the head, a flip chart with a single word, underlined three times: IDEA.

CASTING DIRECTOR (V.O.)

The board came up with a brilliant solution. Why should one casting director choose the actors alone? Hire two associates for every film, let them compete in front of the cameras, and give the credit to whoever impresses us most.

An EXECUTIVE raises a hand.

EXECUTIVE

And if somebody gets hurt?

CASTING DIRECTOR (V.O.)

That is what the insurance is for.

Applause. The flip chart is turned over. On the back: BUDGET: ASK THE ACCOUNTANTS.

CUT TO:

INSERT - THE BOARD OF PICTURING PICTURES

Twelve nameplates, polished every morning by somebody nobody has ever thanked.

SEAT EXECUTIVE

 1 (an empty chair, for now)
 2 (an empty chair, for now)
 3 (an empty chair, for now)
 4 (an empty chair, for now)
 5 (an empty chair, for now)
 6 (an empty chair, for now)
 7 (an empty chair, for now)
 8 (an empty chair, for now)
 9 (an empty chair, for now)
 10 (an empty chair, for now)
 11 (an empty chair, for now)
 12 (an empty chair, for now)

THE DIRECTOR (V.O.)
The board of directors. Twelve
chairs. None of them has ever
finished a film.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. CASTING OFFICE - DAY

A corner office on the Picturing Pictures lot. Two desks, a monitor the size of a billboard, and a framed motto on the wall. Nobody has ever explained it. Nobody has dared to ask twice.

On the wall, a framed photograph of a legend still to be announced, winner of a Golden Clapperboard in 1974, last seen at the canteen in 1975.

LYNN and JULIET, casting associates, sit at their desks. Same lot, same canteen, same coffee machine. One job between them.

CASTING DIRECTOR (O.S.)
Two associates. Five actors each.
One credit. Whoever impresses me
most gets the next big job.

CASTING DIRECTOR (O.S.)
Remind me of your names.

JULIET
Juliet.

LYNN
Lynn.

A long silence. Somewhere in the building, a real casting director feels a chill.

CASTING DIRECTOR (O.S.)
(a beat)
Rings a bell.

JULIET
(whispering)
Does he ever come down to the
set?

LYNN
Never. He watches every Take on
that monitor.

CASTING DIRECTOR (O.S.)
I heard that.

A silence. Somewhere, a coffee cup gives up.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTING OFFICE - THE PITCH - DAY

The monitor on the wall flickers to life. A spotlight, from nowhere, falls on the two desks.

CASTING DIRECTOR (O.S.)

This is not a game about recreating a film. It is a game about making one, and fighting over who gets the credit.

LYNN

How does it work?

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR

It plays like a classic wargame: d6, inches, alternating activations, and the miniatures shoot it out, only they do it by acting. It is also, deliberately, a joke about showbusiness. Four things make it different.

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR

One. You work for the Casting Director. Other cinematic games ask you to play the heroes and villains of a movie. Here your miniatures are actors in costume, and you are the casting associate who picked them.

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR

Two. You cast like a producer. A budget, a Star, clauses and demands in the contracts, and PR to spend. Building the cast is half of the game.

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR

Three. The set is never the same. Every Take the Director rebuilds it with random tables: scenery, props, set dressing, cameras, and a phone call from Production.

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR

Four. Win the light, not the objective. The cameras frame only some cells. Fight to control the Focus points and to be seen. Whatever happens off camera was cut in editing.

JULIET
(to Lynn)
I like the cut in editing part.

LYNN
You would.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTING OFFICE - LATER

A whiteboard. The SCRIPT SUPERVISOR, clipboard in hand, draws a square with a marker. She never wastes a word.

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR
The game in sixty seconds. Each of you hires five actors, one of them the Star. Miniatures from any game: every figure is an actor in costume. A Space Marine can play a cowboy. It just won't be convincing.

LYNN
How many Takes?

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR
Five. Six, if the Director calls the Reshoots. Every Take the set is struck and rebuilt, and the Director builds it with random tables.

JULIET
The Director is a person?

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR
(a thin smile)
The Director is not a person. The Director is the rules.

She taps the whiteboard.

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR
Actors perform. A *Monologue* hits at a distance, up to 12 inches, and needs line of sight. A *Duet* hits in contact. Every die that beats the number is a Line.

JULIET
And the defender?

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR
Improvises. One die per Line,
against IMP. Every Line that gets
through takes one Nerve. At zero
Nerves, you go Backstage.

LYNN
And how do we win?

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR
Screen Points. You earn them for
the Focus, the pool of light that
each camera puts on the set, and
for sending the right actors
Backstage while the cameras are
rolling. Most points after the
last Take wins. Or at once, if
all five of your opponent's
actors are in Backstage at the
same time.

LYNN
Has that ever happened?

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR
(without looking up)
It is a deterrent.

CASTING DIRECTOR (O.S.)
Don't forget I'm watching.

JULIET
We know.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTING OFFICE - HOW A GAME FLOWS - DAY

The whiteboard is now covered in arrows. The SCRIPT SUPERVISOR points at each of them with the cap of her marker.

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR
How a game flows. Roll the film's
budget, then both players build a
cast within it, and secretly
choose three perks. The players
choose the film's genre, and the
Director rolls the Mood of the
set.

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR

The game runs five Takes, six if the Director calls the Reshoots. Each Take, the Director builds a new set with random tables, each player rests one actor and places the other four, and then players alternate activating actors.

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR

At the end of each Take you check the gate and score the Focus points. After Take 5 the player with the most Screen Points wins, or you win at once if every actor of your opponent is in Backstage at the same time.

CUT TO:

INSERT - THE SCRIPT SUPERVISOR'S GLOSSARY

A clipboard, a pen, a page of neat handwriting. Read it twice.

CASTING ASSOCIATE. You. You work for the Casting Director and compete with a rival associate to impress them.

CASTING DIRECTOR. The boss you want to impress. They never appear on the set. Not to be confused with the Director, which is the tables.

TAKE. One round of the game: build the set, deploy, alternate activations, check the gate.

CHECK THE GATE. The end-of-Take scoring step: Focus points are counted and SP awarded.

MOV, PRE, VOC, IMP. Movement in inches. The number to hit in a Duet (Presence), in a Monologue (Voice), and to neutralise a Line that hit you (Improv).

NER (NERVES). Wounds. At 0 the actor goes Backstage.

GLA (GLAMOUR). Adds to Light. Raised by make-up and paint.

AD (ATTACK DICE). The dice an actor rolls when it performs. A Duet adds one.

LIGHT. The number used to win a Focus: 1 + GLA, modified by zone and effects.

LINE. One successful attack die. Each Line the defender does not neutralise removes 1 NER.

BACKSTAGE. Where actors go at 0 NER. They may return later.

STAR. Your headline actor. Costs more, scores double in the Focus, and gives the opponent big points if sent Backstage on camera.

RIVAL. The opposing actor you name as your nemesis: +1 to hit it, and a bonus for sending it Backstage.

IN ROLE. A miniature that honestly fits the film's genre: once per Take it may improve one roll by 1.

SP (SCREEN POINTS). What the Casting Director remembers: Focus points and Backstage trips score them, and the player with the most SP after the last Take wins.

BLOOPER. A reroll: the actor flubs the line and shoots it again. A die is never rerolled twice.

MOOD OF THE SET. A 2d6 result rolled once before Take 1 that affects both players, until a Mood swing changes it.

FRAMED CELL. A cell covered by at least one camera shot this Take.

PR. Public Relations markers, bought with unspent credits. Spend them for bloopers and light.

CREW. Production staff, hired from the same budget as the actors. They never take the field.

PROPS AND SET DRESSING. Objects the Director scatters on the set. Props are carried; set dressing is fixed in place and has an effect.

FADE OUT.