

Perform!

a game of movie simulation

by JL

Forward

This is my first attempt at writing a role-playing game, or anything similar. I got the idea while pondering a question: “What would a game be like that was overtly geared towards Illusionist or Participationist play, to the point that it had mechanics to support this style?” This is the result, with aforementioned mechanics being Scene Changes and Cues. I do not know if it is any good; I designed it as much as a theoretical exercise as actually trying to make a fun game. To summarize, this is meant to be a game of explicit Participationism, made for the purpose of understanding whether or not such a thing is worthwhile.

This game was made as part of the 24 game challenge. It was started at 7 PM PST on 4/26/03, and finished by 7 PM on 4/27/03.

I should note two inspirations; one is the webforum The Forge (www.indie-rpgs.com), which got me thinking about the above question, and The Pool, which served to inspire the resolution mechanic I went with.

Do you like to watch movies or go see plays performed? Have you ever been entranced Have you ever been in a play yourself? Have you ever wished you could, or wished you could be in a movie? Then this is the game for you!

Perform! is a role-playing game of theatrical and movie magic. In it, you, the Director, guide the Actors through the script you have written, while the Actors play their parts to the best of their ability while doing their best to follow your cues.

This book is written with the Director in mind; Actors can still gain a lot from reading this, though.

Part One: Writing the Script

Running a session of Perform! isn't easy; it takes a lot of preparation before you can even bring the Actors to the table; however, this prep work can be well worth it. The first step is to write the script. The script is the series of scenes that will comprise the story you'll be Directing. This will help you to guide the Actors in the roles they're portraying.

Start with the general genre and plot. Action movies work best with Perform!; however, there are still many different avenues you could pursue. Do you want a spaghetti western, a dramatic film of backroom political dealings a la Tom Clancy, or perhaps you want a slasher flick? Deciding this is the first part.

Next, you need to begin making an outline for the plot. What's the story? Who're the bad guys, and what makes them bad? What will it take to stop them? Once you have these questions answered, start writing down how the story goes. You don't need to write a novel; in fact, all you really want to end up with is an outline for what you see happening in the story, maybe written down in bullet-point form. This will help move you on to the next part: Scene writing.

Scenes are the defining events of play; once the game starts, all of play will be done in the form of Scenes. A Scene is an event or set of closely related events that happen one after the other which are all related, happen within the same space within the story, and involve the same people. Each Scene should be written with a pre-determined end. This end is the Scene Change; it is a set of conditions which conclude the

scene and move it on to the next one. It is very important to know exactly what the Scene Change is, as this is an integral part of play. While going through this process, try to think about the different kinds of Characters that will be needed for the story.

Okay, now that you've got the Scenes for the story laid out, it's time to work out Roles. Roles are attributes or characteristics that a Character has. Roles can take many forms; they could be a career, such as **Lawyer** or **Marine**; they could be an ability or attribute such as **Kicks Ass**, **Super Smart**, or **Sees Dead People**; they could be personality Characteristics, such as **Aggressive When Pushed**, **Timid**, or **Wacky Attitude**; or they could be broader, such as **Damsel in Distress** or **Wolf in Sheep's Clothing**. Write down a list of Roles that would be appropriate for the game. Some Roles may be necessary for the story to unfold, while others can be optional. It can help to divide the Roles into separate categories, such as the ones described above. You should end up with a set of groups of Roles, with each category having at least one Role per Actor. You should also build the extra Characters besides the ones the Actors will be playing; these Characters are known as Extras.

Well, now that you have the Script written, you can gather your Actors and begin the casting process!

Part 2: Casting Call

Okay, so you're ready for the Casting Call. To start, you should get your Actors all together. You should also have with you notes with the different Roles, the Script (at least for the first few Scenes), a notecard for each of the Actors, pencils, and a bunch of six-sided dice.

The next step can be approached in a couple of different ways. One of the better ways is to list the Roles according to category, and then have the Actors choose at least one from every category. They should note every Role on their note card for quick reference and reminding. Another way is for you to pick the Role combinations beforehand, and let the Actors pick which Character they want. Yet another is to put the Roles in a hat, and let the Actors pick at random. Use the method that works best for your group.

Once Roles are chosen, it's time to flesh out the Characters. You and the Actors should work together to create a brief description, 50 words or less, for each Character. Have the Actors write these down on their notecards.

A final note: Not all the Characters have to be "good guys". If you wrote the script with one or more of the bad guys showing up in most scenes, you could have Actors playing both good guys AND bad guys. Just as long as all the Actors will get plenty of screen time, it's okay.

Now you have the Main Characters made, and are ready for the first scene!

Part 3: Running the Game

All right, now it's time to get down to the nit and gritty: how to play. It's fairly simple, once you get the hang of it.

We'll start with the opening of the Scene. You should start with the Scene's name, followed by the conditions for the Scene Change. Now, the action may begin. You, the Director, should set the scene up, describing what's going on, what things look like, and then allow the Actors to respond.

Now, the Actors should really "get into Character", doing their best to portray and act out their Character, possibly using hand gestures, accents, and other things to bring their Character to life. Eventually, they're going to want their Character to take some kind of action.

When an Actor wants their Character to do something, you give them from one to three dice to do it, along with two more for every Role that might come into play. Encourage Actors to be descriptive and creative with their action descriptions, to incorporate as many Roles as they can. Finally, at the beginning of every Scene, every Actor gets ten Improv dice. An Actor may use as many of these as they want in an action.

Once the Actor has all the dice they need, have them roll and add up the totals. If they can beat the difficulty you set (10 is pretty easy to hit, and therefore good for simple tasks, while higher numbers could be used for difficult tasks or things that don't advance the story), then you should describe how their success worked out, making it sound cool. If they beat the number by a wide margin (measured in multiples of 5), then

you should add something special to the description, making their victory that much more effective. If, however, they lose, then only do you describe some new complication that came about from their failure, but they lose whatever Improv dice they used on the role. You shouldn't give complications that make the Scene Change impossible, however.

Sometimes, Actors will need a little help knowing how to get to the Scene Change. This is where Cues come in. A Cue is something the Director throws into the action to help guide play. It could be an extra yelling advice or asking the Actor's Characters to "follow me", it could be mentioning a door or path that's wide open or some item that looks interesting before asking the Actors "What happens next?" The Director is discouraged from giving Cues that aren't meant to help the Actors; after all, confusing the Actors won't move the story along, plus it'll weaken the story's strength. Every time an Actor properly responds to a Cue, give them another Improv dice. You can also use Improv dice to reward good acting, cool catch-phrases, or anything. And don't forget to give ten more dice at every Scene Change.