

# SAVE THE CAT!<sup>®</sup> GOES TO THE INDIES

The Screenwriters Guide to 50 Films from the Masters



**SAMPLE BEAT SHEET**  
**BOOGIE NIGHTS**

## BOOGIE NIGHTS (1997)

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Written, produced and directed by Paul Thomas Anderson, *Boogie Nights* is a truly special film about movies, dreams, love and how to remain innocent even in an “establishment,” the porn industry, which “decent people” consider dehumanizing and lacking in moral fiber.

Meet the innocent, gentle-mannered “Sex Fool,” one who will end up finding his own powers while making a difference bringing innocence to this world and finding success in it — thanks to his formerly-disregarded skills. But can he remain an innocent in this seedy establishment?

The “transmutation” here is one of the clearest you will find, since it includes a necessary “name change” and a new persona as Eddie Addams gets to be “Dirk Diggler” (his better self), but whose goodness becomes endangered when his darker, “Brock Landers” side takes over.

This Fool Triumphant film is further enriched by a large cast of great actors, giving the film a much-mentioned Altman-esque feel that makes it dynamic, easy and fast-paced, and also allows the writer/director to further explore similar “fool” themes shared by many of the characters. So let’s go back to the ’70s and... roll!

FT Type: Sex Fool

FT Cousins: *The Dreamers*, *The Piano Teacher (La Pianiste)*, *Crash*, *Intimacy*, *Belle de Jour*

## BOOGIE NIGHTS

*Written and directed by Paul Thomas Anderson*

**Opening Image:** 1977, San Fernando Valley (California): a masterful continuous shot immerses us in a world of neon lights, disco music and celluloid in which several characters are introduced. We will soon know that they all belong to the porn industry (our “establishment”) directed by suave, easy-going film director Jack Horner (Burt Reynolds). By the end, not only the world, but the era, environment, film industry and characters will be very different.

**Set-Up:** Meet our “fool,” Eddie Addams (Mark Wahlberg), waiter and school dropout with a “gift”: apparently, he is marvelously endowed and a great lover, too. Eddie is gentle, nice and lovable (in a non-sexual way), but suffers at home under an obsessive mother. “I plan on being a star. A big shining star,” he says. As we will see, many of his future companions are a little bit of a “fool,” living in their own self-made worlds of illusion.

**Theme Stated:** “I’ve got a feeling, beneath those jeans there’s something wonderful just waiting to get out,” Jack tells Eddie. This is our theme, not only referring to his maleness, but also to his big heart, which will change them all.

**Catalyst:** One night, Jack and his crew ask Eddie to come home with them. Although reluctant, he joins them and learns about Jack’s ambition to make a “film that is true, and right and dramatic.” Eddie has sex with Rollergirl (Heather Graham) and he is “in.” In the industry, we mean.

**Debate:** Can innocence survive in this tough establishment? Can a sweet soul really be a “star”? Several new characters show us the darker side of the business: cocaine, underage actors, absent families, competition, lack of true love and commitment, self-esteem issues... and the list goes on. Eddie seems to be developing a relationship with

Jack's wife Amber (Julianne Moore). She is the *Insider*, the one who seems to "get" that everything around them is not as bright as it seems and who will not see Eddie as an actor, but as a substitute son.

**Break into Two:** As in every good Fool Triumphant story, our hero gets a *change of name*, this time solemnly announced: a new persona is born as Eddie Adams turns into magnificent-sounding Dirk Diggler. As Blake said, the "transmutation" is offered by circumstances that seem divine, and as if to confirm it, Jack says, "I think heaven has sent you here, Dirk Diggler."

**B Story:** In this case, the film's love story takes the shape of a mentor-mentee relationship between Eddie (sorry, Dirk) and Jack. His respect and faith in Dirk as an actor will give Dirk the self-esteem he needs, and in dark times, Jack will be the one to put Eddie back on the right path.

**Fun and Games:** At last, the '70s world of porn films is finally explored, surely the *promise of the premise*. Script, lighting and camera roll record the *upside-down world* of love and human relationships, bad acting and extraordinary, well, performances. Parties, leisure, debauchery and sleaze are the world in which Dirk finds himself at home. New clothes, shoes and bad haircuts mark the passing of time and the fulfillment of Dirk's ambitions — critics and audiences love him, and he is on his way to becoming a star.

**Midpoint:** Dirk gets many industry prizes in his *false victory* and *publicly comes out* at the ceremony, still showing that he is a "fool" at heart with his gentleness: "These movies we do... they can help." But the *stakes are raised* and new times are ahead as Dirk gets a new persona: Brock Landers, a darker, more violent character that mirrors his own slow, dark turn. *A and B Stories cross* when Jack realizes that he has fulfilled his own dream: "It's a real film, Jack." The *clock starts ticking* as an era ends: "Goodbye '70s, hello '80s."

**Bad Guys Close In:** The advent of video and the modernization of “the business” is a Bad Guy, though Jack refuses to change. Much worse Bad Guys are cocaine and shady new characters like Todd Parker. The “team starts disintegrating” when Dirk rejects Scotty (Philip Seymour Hoffman) and Little Bill (William H. Macy) shoots himself. Dirk, in Brock-character, justifies violence and grows apart from Jack over creative differences, and their producer gets imprisoned for owning child pornography. Bad Guys further close in when a young actor is hired, a possible new star rising.

Drugs, partying and stress also cause Dirk to have trouble getting erections, and he even fights Jack in front of his crew, getting fired. Dirk tries to start a side career (getting his “change of mission”) in music. Hearing him sing a verse, we know he will fail, while the rest of his team find it difficult to make new lives for themselves because of their past in porn.

**All Is Lost:** Dirk has to work as a hustler in the outside world and gets severely beaten. Other characters reach their lowest, darkest moments of violence, aggression and morality when confronting real life.

**Dark Night of the Soul:** Injured and bleeding, Dirk lies almost dead on the ground in a parking lot.

**Break into Three:** *A and B Stories cross* by means of a parallel montage in which the characters’ fates are shown, with a special focus on Jack’s video adventure with Rollergirl and Dirk’s beating.

**Finale:**

1. Gathering the Team: Dirk and his friends (among them, Todd) “gather” to begin a poorly-planned drug-related deal with fake powder.
2. Executing the Plan: They “execute the plan” by showing up at the dealer’s house and performing the transaction. It seems to work, despite their clumsiness.
3. High Tower Surprise: The surprise is that Todd’s actual goal was using the robbery as a means to get inside the dealer’s house to rip him off. A shooting ensues, and Dirk escapes by the skin of his teeth.
4. Dig, Deep Down: Knowing that he has reached rock-bottom, Dirk “digs, deep down” to return to his mentor and friend, Jack. They embrace and Dirk asks him and Amber for forgiveness.
5. The Execution of the New Plan: “We all need to start again,” says Amber. And indeed, that is their new “plan”: to be together and work together again, and to help and support each other — opening a stereo store, going back to school, re-opening a bar with the family’s help, becoming a magician, having a son...

**Final Image:** ...and of course, shooting films again. We see our “fool” Dirk Digglar rehearsing his lines, his confidence and self-esteem regained, but most importantly, his innocence untouched: “I am a star.”