Fiasco

Fiasco is a cooperative interactive narrative roleplaying game inspired by small-time capers gone disastrously wrong. You play a group of normal people with big ambitions and poor impulse control. Unlike many games of its type, Fiasco does not use a Game Master to oversee the narrative. This particular game will take place in the “Tales from Suburbia” setting.

Setup

Put 2 index cards per player in the center of the table. Put 2 white and 2 black dice per player in a pile in the center of the table, then roll the whole pile. Choose someone to go first and give them the Fiasco book. Play rotates clockwise until all the die in the center are used.

Relationships exist between a pair of characters sitting next to each other. Needs, Locations, and Objects (called Details) are associated with a Relationship. At the end of the setup, there must be exactly one Relationship between each pair of adjacent players, one Detail attached to each Relationship, at least one Need, at least one Object, and at least one Location.

On your turn, take any die from the central pile (color does not matter). You can choose to start a new index card or finish one that someone else started. If you choose to start a card, take a blank card and choose a Relationship, Need, Location, or Object from the lists on pages 82-89 with the Arabic numeral that corresponds to the number of your die. If you choose to finish a card, turn to the list for that thing and find the description that corresponds to the die image of your die. The very last die picked up is wild and can be any number.

Say a player takes a die that reads 3. She chooses to create a Relationship with the player on her right. Page 82 lists Relationship 3 as “The Past,” so she writes that on a blank card and places it between her and her neighbor. The next player chooses to finish her card with a die that reads 5, so that Relationship is now “The Past: Mutual keepers of an ominous secret.” Everyone at the table should brainstorm about what would make an interesting secret.

Act 1

Put all the dice back in the middle of the table in two piles: white and black. Act 1 consists of 2 scenes per player. Start with the first player and, moving clockwise, play out all the scenes.

Every scene is first Established and then Resolved. When Establishing the scene, describe where it is, who is involved, and (optionally) set up a conflict. When Resolving a scene, describe how it plays out and the consequences for everyone involved. The player whose scene it chooses whether to Establish or Resolve. If the player Establishes, the other players resolve. If the player Resolves, the others Establish. Everyone at the table is encouraged to offer ideas and even play the parts of the non-player-characters that arise.
If you are Resolving, choose a white or black die from the pile in the center (do not roll it). If you Established, the other players choose a die and give it to you before they Resolve the scene. A white die means the scene must end favorably for you; black means it must end badly for you. Once the scene is over, give the die away to another player of your choosing. They keep this die for the rest of the game (having a balance of both colors is bad in The Aftermath).

**The Tilt**
Everyone who has dice should roll them. Subtract the total of all your black dice from the total of all your white dice. The player with the highest positive score (white high) and the player with the lowest negative score (black high) get to choose two Tilt elements from pages 56-57.

Roll all the dice left in the center of the table. The high and low scoring player choose from the Tilt list like they did in the Setup, but do not keep the dice that get taken out of the central pile. Each player chooses their own general category (e.g. Paranoia) and chooses the other player’s specific detail (e.g. Paranoia: A stranger arrives to settle a score).

**Act 2**
Put the four dice used during the Tilt back in the central pile and separate them back into white and black. Act 2 works almost exactly like Act 1. Play out 2 scenes per player. However, you keep the die that you choose (or are given) for the scene outcome rather than giving it away to someone else. The last die chosen is wild; it can be either white or black.

**The Aftermath**
Roll the dice as in the Tilt, subtracting black from white. Consult the tables on pages 58-59 to find out how badly the story ends for your character.

This part of the game is played out as a montage. Choose one of the die in front of you, put it back in the center, and narrate a brief but poignant scene about your character’s future. Play moves clockwise until all players are out of dice.

**Discussion Questions**
1. Fiasco is different from many other roleplaying games because it does not require a Game Master to oversee the narrative. This reduces the setup required to play, but how does it affect the quality of the stories produced?
2. In stories like this, things are expected to go haywire and may not always make sense. Would it be possible to play a game like this that creates a drama rather than a farce?
3. Many roleplaying games rely on players to act in character. In Fiasco, other players sometimes get to control your character. How does this affect your connection to your character? How does it affect metagaming?