

WRITER'S EDITION



IS OUR QUEEN A
EAST END KILLING
GANGSTER HIDE
SECRET DIAMOND
KAYSIDE **LONDON**
O FAT FOR HER
GRAHAM OF CH
TERROR PLOT TO
CH **WALMSLEY**

GWO1 GANGSTER LONDON WRITER'S EDITION

CREDITS

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Gangster London was Playset of the Month, February 2010.

BOILERPLATE

This playset is an accessory for the *Fiasco* role-playing game by Bully Pulpit Games.

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For more information about *Fiasco* or to download other Playsets and materials, visit www.bullypulpitgames.com.

If you'd like to create your own Playset or other *Fiasco*-related content, we'd like to help. Write us at info@bullypulpitgames.com.



"When you play, play *hard*." - Theodore Roosevelt

THE SCORE

A NASTY PIECE OF WORK

A dead body, a Cockney drug-dealer selling from the back of the kebab shop, three suitcases full of blue flake cocaine and an unexploded World War Two bomb—these are a few of the things that make for a proper East End fiasco. This Playset is for fans of films with a certain ugly, stylish sensibility.

Maybe you're just a working-class bloke looking to catch a break, and your mate from the pub knows a guy who has a sure thing. Only it's not a sure thing and then your mate's dodgy girlfriend gets involved, and then the Russians find out what you've done and it's all going to go tits-up, isn't it?

MOVIE NIGHT

Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels, The Bank Job, Sexy Beast.

WRITER'S EDITION?

This is a special edition of *Gangster London*, including Will Hindmarch's exploration of using *Fiasco* as a writer's tool. See page 12 for more information.

RELATIONSHIPS...

1 WORK

- ◻ Me and this bloke I used to work with
- ◻◦ Me and my boss from work
- ◻◦◦ Me and this bloke from work
- ◻◻◻ Me and this bloke who fixed our car / plumbing / electrics
- ◻◻◻◻ Me and this bloke I bought something off of
- ◻◻◻◻◻ Me and my doctor / lawyer / accountant

2 FRIENDSHIP

- ◻ Former cellmates
- ◻◦ Army buddies
- ◻◦◦ This bloke from down the pub
- ◻◻◻ "I saved his life, you know"
- ◻◻◻ "I've known him since school"
- ◻◻◻◻◻ "We're just mates, we're not like shagging or anything."

3 ODD

- ◻ Alcoholics Anonymous
- ◻◦ Salvation Army
- ◻◦◦ Young Conservatives
- ◻◻◻ Socialists
- ◻◻◻◻ Environmental campaigners
- ◻◻◻◻◻ Probation officer and criminal

4 ROMANCE

- ◻ Secret lovers
- ◻◻ Married
- ◻◻◻ Separated
- ◻◻◻◻ On-again, off-again partners
- ◻◻◻◻◻ Stalker and stalkee
- ◻◻◻◻◻◻ Don't like each other much, but can't stop shagging

5 CRIME

- ◻ Criminal boss and underling
- ◻◻ Gamblers
- ◻◻◻ Small-time housebreakers
- ◻◻◻◻ Con man and mark
- ◻◻◻◻◻ Drug dealers
- ◻◻◻◻◻ Hoodies

6 FAMILY

- ◻ Siblings
- ◻◻ Cousins
- ◻◻◻ Distant relatives who have never met
- ◻◻◻◻ Parent and child or stepchild
- ◻◻◻◻◻ Uncle / aunt and nephew / niece
- ◻◻◻◻◻◻ Parent-in-law / son- or daughter-in-law

...IN GANGSTER LONDON

NEEDS...

1 TO GET LAID

- ...to prove something
- ...to get something you want
- ...to forget about getting dumped
- ...to rekindle an old romance
- ...for the first time
- ...for the last time

2 TO GET SOME ANSWERS

- ...about Ned's "Four o'clock meeting in Brixton"
- ...about someone's infidelity
- ...to a question of parentage
- ...from the police, about an unsolved crime
- ...about the accident that still haunts you
- ...about Shelley's commitment to the enterprise

3 TO GET REVENGE

- ...on Steps and his crew
- ...on the Russians who humiliated you
- ...on a co-worker
- ...on a television personality
- ...on a family member
- ...on a police detective

4 TO GET RESPECT

- ◻ ...from the London criminal underground
- ◻◦ ...by showing everybody who the real boss is
- ◻◦ ...from your lover, by keeping an unfortunate promise
- ◻◻ ...from a family member, by backing their plan
- ◻◻ ...from yourself, by standing up to a bully
- ◻◻◻ ...by going straight at last

5 TO GET RICH

- ◻ ...by ripping off a dealer
- ◻◦ ...by running eastern European prostitutes
- ◻◦ ...by robbing a family business
- ◻◻ ...by working a political deal in the neighborhood
- ◻◻ ...by opening a kebab shop
- ◻◻◻ ...by finding a buyer for these diamonds you “found”

6 TO GET OUT

- ◻ ...of London before the Russians find you
- ◻◦ ...of debt, through one last bold deal
- ◻◦ ...of a relationship gone dangerously sour
- ◻◻ ...of your interminable marriage
- ◻◻ ...of an obligation to a powerful criminal
- ◻◻◻ ...of England before Scotland Yard catches up with you

...IN GANGSTER LONDON

LOCATIONS...

1 RESIDENCES

- ▣ Flat 253, Broadwater House
- ▣ "The Rivings"
- ▣ 23 Mulberry Grove
- ▣ Raddeston Place
- ▣ Villa El Mariachi, Costa Del Sol
- ▣ The Squat

2 HOUSES

- ▣ Penthouse
- ▣ Auction House
- ▣ Whorehouse
- ▣ Family house
- ▣ Country house
- ▣ Warehouse

3 LANDMARKS

- ▣ The British Library
- ▣ The Tower of London
- ▣ The River Thames
- ▣ Canary Wharf
- ▣ The Millennium Dome
- ▣ Kew Gardens

4 FOOD AND DRINK

- Ali's Cafe
- ◻ The Crown and Anchor
- ◻ Grabber's Nightclub
- ◻ Stan Fish's Gentleman's Entertainment Club
- ◻ The Ivy
- ◻ The Royal India Tandoori

5 WORKPLACES

- Reiman, Losser and Reiman, a large bank
- ◻ The pig farm
- ◻ Jacob Fein, jeweller
- ◻ Captain Comic, books and graphic novels
- ◻ Bulldog English's specialist bookstore
- ◻ The Paper Recycling Plant

6 ODDITIES

- Cat rescue home
- ◻ Royal Northern Hospital
- ◻ The Lodge of the Masonic Order of the Stars
- ◻ A synagogue
- ◻ Locker 3867 At Waterloo Station
- ◻ "You Do Not Ask What Goes On Back There"

...IN GANGSTER LONDON

OBJECTS...

1 UNFORTUNATE

- ▣ Forty chickens in eighty cages
- ▣◦ Hydroponic cannabis-growing facility
- ▣◦ Collection of priceless stamps, ruined
- ▣◦◦ “Peckham Rolex” electronic ankle monitor
- ▣◦◦ Dead body
- ▣◦◦ Ten thousand leaflets about Jesus

2 TRANSPORTATION

- ▣ Motorbike
- ▣◦ Nondescript white van
- ▣◦◦ Subaru Impreza 5-door wagon
- ▣◦◦ Milk float
- ▣◦◦ Speedboat
- ▣◦◦ Rolls Royce

3 WEAPON

- ▣ Sawn-off shotgun
- ▣◦ “Jesus Christ, it’s a fucking katana!”
- ▣◦◦ An unexploded World War Two bomb
- ▣◦◦ Antique duelling pistols
- ▣◦◦ Three hand grenades
- ▣◦◦ A water pistol that looks like a real gun

4 INFORMATION

- ◻ Angus' mysterious last words
- ◻◻ A conversation you shouldn't have been listening to
- ◻◻◻ A contract; maybe a legally binding one
- ◻◻◻◻ An encrypted CD
- ◻◻◻◻◻ Property deeds
- ◻◻◻◻◻◻ Compromising photographs

5 VALUABLES

- ◻ Ten thousand pounds in 5 pence pieces
- ◻◻ An arse-load of diamonds!
- ◻◻◻ Vintage car
- ◻◻◻◻ "All you need to know is: what's in here is fucking valuable."
- ◻◻◻◻◻ Suitcase full of cash
- ◻◻◻◻◻◻ Purebred cat

6 EXTRA-LEGAL

- ◻ The strongest weed you will ever smoke
- ◻◻ Three suitcases full of blue flake cocaine
- ◻◻◻ Five thousand fake passports
- ◻◻◻◻ Six Romanian asylum-seekers
- ◻◻◻◻◻ Floor plans of a Ministry of Defence establishment
- ◻◻◻◻◻◻ "This is the most dangerous weapon you have ever laid your dirty little hands on."

...IN GANGSTER LONDON

A CHAV-TASTIC INSTA-SETUP

RELATIONSHIPS IN GANGSTER LONDON

For three players...

- * Friendship: Mates from prison
- * Crime: Drug people
- * Family: Siblings

For four players, add...

- * Romance: Secret lovers

For five players, add...

- * Community: Church friends

NEEDS IN GANGSTER LONDON

For three players...

- * To get revenge: On the Russians who humiliated you

For four or five players, add...

- * To get rich: By opening a Kebab shop

OBJECTS IN GANGSTER LONDON

For three or four players...

- * Weapon: A water pistol that looks like a real gun

For five players, add...

- * Unfortunate: Collection of priceless stamps, ruined

LOCATIONS IN GANGSTER LONDON

For three, four or five players...

- * Food and drink: The Crown and Anchor

USING FIASCO AS A WRITER'S TOOL

We asked our friend, author and game designer Will Hindmarch, to say a few words about using *Fiasco* as a writer's tool. Will being Will, this simple request turned into an epic investigation into the nature of the writer's process, and the intersection of word count and exhilarating play. Much of what he has to say appears in *The Fiasco Companion*, but—Will being Will—he also gave us a very thorough worked example that included a meaty and kick-ass script.

The script is worth reading for entertainment alone, but when coupled with his thoughts on repurposing *Fiasco*'s Setup phase in the service of writing, it is a slice of fried gold.

WILL HINDMARCH SAYS...

This won't be entirely "in a writer's head," but it'll be lonely fun. I've wanted to write a one-act play (or something like it) based on a *Fiasco* Playset for some time, so let's see how it goes.

To give this a shot, I took Graham Walmsley's Playset, *Gangster London* and drew a little three-sided play space out of it. I didn't roll dice. I just picked things that I thought intersected in interesting ways, grabbing what struck me as compelling options off the list—but not necessarily the most compelling items. I wanted to challenge myself to work with somewhat more subdued selections.

As soon as I started picking Relationships, though, a story started to emerge. It was everything I could do to avoid sorting out the whole story at once—to "break it," as TV writers say. I wanted some things to emerge naturally through the telling.

As of this writing, I've laid out the cards, assigned Relationships, a Need, a Location, and an Object and I'm ready to write.

THE SETUP

JONNY

RELATIONSHIP

SMALL TIME
HOUSEBREAKERS

OBJECT
INFORMATION
OVERHEARD
CONVERSATION

RELATIONSHIP
FRIENDSHIP

I SAVED HIS LIFE
ONCE, YOU KNOW

NEED
TO GET RICH
SELLING DIAMONDS
YOU ... FOUND

IAN

ODDITIES
YOU DO NOT ASK
WHAT GOES ON
BACK THERE

NICK

RELATIONSHIP

ODD
ALCOHOLICS
ANONYMOUS

GANGSTER LONDON: AN EXERCISE

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Based on “Fiasco: Gangster London”
by Graham Walmsley

EXT. IAN AND JONNY'S GARAGE - DAY

It's a tiny little ground-level garage in London's East End, one in a row of look-alikes crammed into the rear arches at the base of a big brick building. A big blue door blocks off the garage from the alley it would open onto. A lorry wobbles down the cobblestones outside.

Two blokes, IAN (26, in skinny jeans and a sweatjacket) and NICK (42, regular jeans and a wind-breaker) stride up the alley and enter the garage.

INT. IAN AND JONNY'S GARAGE - DAY

IAN waves NICK in and pulls the big blue door shut behind them. As IAN fiddles with the lock, NICK takes a few HESITANT STEPS into the garage. There's no car, just a table and chairs under a low, arched ceiling, and a narrow red door on the back wall.

NICK

You know, this is my
first time here.

IAN

I know.

NICK

You guys own this place?

IAN

Almost. We're hoping to get
it paid off soon. In time to
sell it when the gallery
owners eventually make their
way down here.

NICK
Almost. So you and Jonny
share a mortgage or
something?

IAN
Or something. Not to any
bank, if that's what you're
thinking.

NICK nods.

IAN (CONT'D)
Have a seat.

NICK does. IAN doesn't.

IAN (CONT'D)
Fancy a Coke?

NICK
You didn't bring me down
here for a Coke, did you
now?

IAN
(beat)
No.

NICK
Then what?

IAN
I wanted to talk to you
about something.

IAN walks in a slow circle around the table.

NICK
You want to sit?

IAN
I want to stand.

NICK
Okay.

IAN
So...

NICK
(cheeky)
What is it, my son?

IAN
I have a job coming up. A
meeting. Me and Jonny do.
And...

NICK
You're afraid you'll take a
drink.

IAN
I'm thinking I have to. I
know I want to, even though
I don't want to, but I'm
thinking I have to.

NICK
Ian.

IAN
I know!

NICK
Ian.

IAN
I know.

NICK
I think I'll take that Coke
now.

EXT. IAN AND JONNY'S GARAGE – CONTINUOUS

A YOUNG BLOKE (26, ratty jeans and a hoodie) walks up to the big blue door and PAUSES. He reacts, as if he hears something. He peers through a crack in the door, then puts his ear to it.

INT. IAN AND JONNY'S GARAGE – CONTINUOUS

NICK sips Coke out of a can. IAN paces.

IAN

It's an important meeting, though. It's about, you know, it's about our future. Mine and Jonny's.

NICK

If you start drinking again, Ian, you have no future.

IAN

I know that, don't I?

NICK

Then you can't be serious about this. Take the meeting and just don't drink.

IAN

I can't do that.

NICK

Have a fucking Sprite!

IAN

I can't do that. You don't know these people. I need to look hard in front of these gents if I want them to take me seriously, don't I?

NICK
You need to decide where
your future lies, my son. If
you go back into the bottle--

IAN
I'm talking about one drink.

NICK
--then I can't help you.

IAN
Fucking great sponsor.

NICK
I am. I am a fucking great
sponsor. This is tough love,
mate. I saved your life
once, you know, and I'm not
going to give you fucking
permission to put it back in
the fucking bottle now, am
I?

IAN
I'm not looking for--

NICK
Hell you're not. Let me ask
you this, young man: Why
can't Jonny go?

IAN
Alone?

NICK
Yes.

IAN
Because.

NICK
That's a crap answer. Why
can't he go on his own?

IAN doesn't answer.

NICK (CONT'D)
Is he not up to it? No
minerals? No sense for this
sort of thing?

IAN
He might... you know.

NICK
No, I don't know.

IAN
He might... fuck it up.

EXT. IAN AND JONNY'S GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

The YOUNG MAN looks around, then puts his ear
back to the door.

INT. IAN AND JONNY'S GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

NICK slurps soda and scratches his beard. IAN
stands still.

NICK
That's because Jonny's
something of a fuckup, Ian.

IAN
Jonny's great at what he
does, but first
impressions...

NICK
Yeah.

IAN resumes pacing.

NICK (CONT'D)
Then here's what you do. You
bring a flask.

IAN
I do?

NICK
You do. A flask with tea in
it.

IAN
Really.

NICK
Fucking iced tea or apple
juice or whatever you like.
You drink out of that.

IAN
And if they pour me a shot?

NICK doesn't say anything.

IAN (CONT'D)
What do I do if they pour me
a fucking whisky?

NICK
Then you decide whether you
and I are ever to speak
again, Ian.

A KNOCK shakes the big blue door. A key works
the lock.

IAN
Shit.

IAN rushes to the door but is too late. The
YOUNG MAN from outside has it open.

IAN (CONT'D)
Hey, mate.

NICK

(beat)
Hello, Jonny.

JONNY

Nick. Didn't expect to see
you here in our villainous
lair.

NICK

Wouldn't think so.

JONNY

Everything all right, then?

IAN

Everything's fine. Good,
even.

JONNY

You shites don't look it. Am
I interrupting?

IAN

We were just--

NICK

Not at all. I'm just off
actually. Said what I need
to say.

NICK stands up and heads for the red door.

NICK (CONT'D)

Loo through here?

IAN and JONNY both puts hands out to stop
NICK.

IAN

No!

JONNY

Fuck, mate, no!

IAN
We don't have a loo here.

NICK
(beat)
All right.

IAN
Yeah. Sorry.

JONNY
There's a pub up the alley.
You can piss there.

NICK
Right. Well.

NICK crosses to the big blue door.

NICK (CONT'D)
Ian, my son, you let me
know?

IAN
Right.

NICK
Ta, then, boys.

NICK leaves.

IAN and JONNY stand in silence for a moment.

JONNY
I miss anything?

IAN
No. I just, you know, no.

JONNY
Alcky talk, then?

IAN
Yes, actually.

JONNY
(nodding)
You ready for tonight?

IAN
(beat)
Yes.

INT. CROWN AND ANCHOR PUB - UPSTAIRS - NIGHT

We're upstairs at the Crown and Anchor, a narrow, worn-down, badly lit pub. All the tables are empty except one, which is ringed by three surly blokes in leather coats. The remains of game birds lay scattered on four plates for four people sat around the table:

IAN and JONNY sit together on one side. Opposite them are a pair of gentlemen in patterned suits. One wears a WHITE SCARF (60s), the other wears DARK GLASSES (30s) with tortoise-shell rims.

A pint stands in front of IAN, untouched.

IAN
So we're sorted, then?

WHITE SCARF
If you accept our terms for the first delivery, to prove yourselves...

IAN
(looking at Jonny)
We do.

WHITE SCARF
Good. Then future deals should be considerably more lucrative. For us both.

(MORE)

WHITE SCARF (CONT'D)

Boys, I think your days of moving silverware and Blu-Ray players are over.

DARK GLASSES

(accented)

Welcome to big time.

IAN

Thank you.

JONNY

Yeah, thanks, you two. What do you say we celebrate?

IAN looks at JONNY.

JONNY (CONT'D)

No?

WHITE SCARF

Fine idea.

WHITE SCARF snaps his fingers and twirls a finger in the air. A waiter brings over SHOT GLASSES and A BOTTLE. He POURS.

IAN looks from the shot glasses to JONNY, who doesn't return the look.

WHITE SCARF and DARK GLASSES raise their glasses. JONNY does likewise, and finally looks to IAN... Who gently raises his.

JONNY

(to Ian)

To the future. To not working alone.

WHITE SCARF

To bigger things.

Everyone but IAN drinks. One of the BODYGUARDS nods his head toward IAN and says something in a foreign language. IAN looks from the BODYGUARD to JONNY and, eyes on JONNY, drinks.

BEGIN MONTAGE - JONNY AND IAN DRINK:

- JONNY and IAN at a nightclub with DARK GLASSES and his BODYGUARDS, where JONNY hands IAN a shot and then pats him on the belly

- JONNY and DARK GLASSES with their arms around each other, singing, while IAN rubs his eyes

- IAN with his hand in the air to get a bartender's attention

- IAN tosses his flask in the garbage

- IAN tosses back a shot

- JONNY, elated, hands in the air, as IAN drops a shot into a Guinness

- IAN up in some BRICK OF A BLOKE's face. Their eyes wide, their neck veins bulging.

- JONNY backing IAN up, pointing a finger in the BRICK's face, yelling until his face is red.

- IAN and the BRICK brawling. IAN's in a headlock. JONNY's on the BRICK's back.

- DARK GLASSES sits in a booth full of smiling women, laughing

- IAN and JONNY kicking the shit out of the BRICK, who's on all fours on the club floor

- IAN, battered, on all fours in the club bathroom, puking in a toilet. Alone.

INT. IAN AND JONNY'S FLAT - MORNING

A mobile chimes. JONNY, bleary, goes over to IAN, who's bruised and passed out on a couch, and fishes IAN's mobile out of his jacket.

CLOSE ON MOBILE SCREEN:

"FROM: NICK

I need to talk to you. It's about work."

JONNY clicks REPLY and types out "Meet me at the garage right now"

JONNY snaps the mobile shut.

INT. IAN AND JONNY'S GARAGE - DAY

JONNY's sitting at the table when a KNOCK comes at the blue door. JONNY walks over and lets NICK in. JONNY locks the door behind him.

NICK looks around.

NICK

Where's Ian?

JONNY

You don't want to talk to Ian, I don't think, Nick.

NICK

What's that supposed to mean?

JONNY

Ian's pretty sure you don't want to see him, not after last night.

NICK

(beat)

I see.

JONNY

He thinks you're pretty
furious with him. He wonders
why you want to piss on his
chances.

NICK

Really. He said that.

JONNY

Sure he did. He said you
wanted him to throw away
everything we'd worked for.

NICK

I know what he's worked for.
I know what he's thrown
away. I saved his life, you
know?

JONNY

Sure I do. I know what
you've done for Ian.

NICK

Right, then.

JONNY

If you want to talk work,
let's talk.

NICK

Without Ian?

JONNY

I'll take it to Ian.

NICK

I don't think--

JONNY

I'm no fuckup, Nick. I'm good at what I do. Just not so much at first impressions. Right?

NICK

(beat)

Right. This isn't... I'm not talking about a "job" job. Not exactly.

JONNY

Let's hear it.

NICK

I just have some things I want moved. Sold.

JONNY

Uh huh.

NICK

Family things.

JONNY

You understand we don't pawn things, don't you, Nick?

NICK

I don't want these pawned. I want them turned into quid and quietly. My sister can't know what happened to them.

JONNY

What are we talking about?

NICK

I'm sorry?

JONNY

What things?

NICK
Jewelry.

JONNY
Oh yeah?

NICK
Yeah. Diamonds. My sister
came into them through her
husband's side of the family
and I don't think they know
what they're worth. They're
old. Twenties or thirties,
at least. My sister's just
going to sit on them.

JONNY
And you want us to go get
them.

NICK
No! I... I'll get them. I
want you to sell them for
me.

JONNY
When?

NICK
Right away.

JONNY
Wait. Do you have them now?

NICK
I... Yes.

JONNY
You have them with you right
now?

NICK
I brought them, you know,
for Ian.

JONNY

Sure.

NICK

So, will you boys help me out?

JONNY

(beat)

Our cut is twenty percent.

NICK

Is that--

JONNY

That's a friendly rate, Nick. I'm not a villain.

NICK

Right, then.

JONNY

Now, then. Let's see what you've got.

INT. CROWN AND ANCHOR PUB - UPSTAIRS - NIGHT

A pile of jewelry spills out of a plastic bag onto a sticky wooden table.

JONNY sits alone across from WHITE SCARF and DARK GLASSES, both standing, both dressed more casually than we saw them last. The bodyguards form a triangle around the table.

JONNY

So, what do you think?

DARK GLASSES and WHITE SCARF exchange looks.

DARK GLASSES

I think you are idiot.

JONNY

What? What?

DARK GLASSES

You think we are idiots?

JONNY

What? I don't--

DARK GLASSES

This is how you prove
yourself to us? With this
shit?

JONNY

What do you mean?

JONNY looks around at the bodyguards.

DARK GLASSES

These? Are fake.

JONNY

No, no. It's old, but--

DARK GLASSES

Aren't even very good fakes.

JONNY

They're... not diamonds?

DARK GLASSES

They're fucking fuck all!

JONNY

Oh, shit.

DARK GLASSES

We give you this chance.
This one chance--

JONNY

Not one chance! Just let me--

DARK GLASSES
--and you waste our time
with this artificial shit!

JONNY
No! I don't! I--

WHITE SCARF
Do you think so little of
us, Jonathan?

JONNY
What?

WHITE SCARF
Or are you so stupid? Such
a...

DARK GLASSES
Fuckup.

WHITE SCARF
Such a fuckup?

JONNY
You don't understand, I just--
-

DARK GLASSES
(to White Scarf)
He's not answering.

WHITE SCARF
Answer my question, Jonny.
Is this skulduggery or
stupidity? Are you a liar or
are you stupid?

JONNY
I...

JONNY looks at everyone, in turn.

JONNY (CONT'D)
I'm stupid. I swear! I'm so
fucking stupid!

DARK GLASSES
Yes. You are.

WHITE SCARF
And you've made us look
stupid, haven't you?

JONNY
Not on purpose. I swear. I
fucking swear it.

WHITE SCARF
Let's talk about how you can
make it up to us, then.

JONNY
Yes. Absolutely. Just tell
me what to do.

WHITE SCARF
Be a canvas.

JONNY
A... I'm sorry?

DARK GLASSES
Yes you are.

WHITE SCARF
Be a canvas. Be a canvas on
which these men can paint a
message for all of your
filthy, idiotic, mouth-
breathing, third-rate shites
of cohorts to read. These
men will paint them a
picture, a picture in
bruises, all over your
miserable waste-of-flesh
body.

(MORE)

WHITE SCARF (CONT'D)

And you will show your lowly
scum-slurping wannabe-
gangster brethren what
happens when you waste our
time.

DARK GLASSES

Then we hang you in a
gallery for all your hipster
friends to piss on.

WHITE SCARF

That's right.

JONNY

I... I...

JONNY opens and closes his mouth, trying to
find words. As he searches, the triangle of
muscle closes in on him.

FADE TO BLACK.

I gave myself about 15 pages to explore the setup I'd selected out of the Playset, without doing any major self-editing. I chose to write my piece in something approximating screenplay format because it's quick and, obviously, cinematic. It seemed to fit the material.

Notice, by the way, that I picked two elements—a Relationship and a Location—defined by dialogue. I wanted the challenge of rolling those into the telling, but ended up not getting both lines of dialogue directly into my piece. I didn't want to force it. (I could've kept writing to get to the scene in which the missing Location line is spoken outright, but I didn't get that far before I reached the 15 pages I'd set for myself.)

Almost immediately, I broke from *Fiasco's* scene-setting customs, though, and lost track of exactly which character each scene was about. My scenes were focused on dramatizing the facts established on the cards (because my imaginary audience presumably wouldn't have access to the cards). They were also mostly about more than one character at a time, which is just the way those scenes developed in the telling. I used the cards as a place to start, then got wrapped up in the story and didn't think to pursue the game's format through the rest of the exercise.

Put another way, this shows that those cards defining the spaces between characters are fruitful. It shows how stories—especially theatrical stories—are so often about the collisions of characters rather than the plight of single character. It shows how *Fiasco's* setups are wonderfully provocative and inspiring. With just a quick jaunt through a Playset, I immediately had a character dynamic interesting enough that I pursued it for fifteen pages of solo playtime, with ease.

Something I didn't do, at least not on purpose, was build the scenes around *Fiasco's* resolution method. I didn't build in specific turning points, hinges on which each scene results in a positive or negative outcome for each character. Such turning points emerged naturally, but not quite scene by scene.

This highlights, for me, how *Fiasco's* narrative architecture isn't quite the literal scene but rather a more compelling metric: the question. A *Fiasco* scene doesn't end until an important question is answered: good or bad, yes or no, success or failure. Which die is assigned? Which goals are met and which schemes are confounded? Where are the victories and where are the defeats?

Because the question and the scene all but overlap in *Fiasco*, you have little exposition. You have leaner stories. In play, we don't need to establish things like our Relationships, because we established them during the selection process. Our writers (the players) are our audience (the players). I've seen *Fiasco* groups establish facts on the ground and dramatize known story elements in actual play, but such things almost necessarily manifest only when they serve double duty, when they carry some interest beyond just exposition.

For example, in my exercise, I have a short scene that explains why two characters meet in the following scene. In play, we might establish the premise of a scene through out-of-character negotiation—behind-the-scenes talk where we're playing the parts of writers and directors, rather than actors. "Okay," we say, "this is a scene between Jonny and Nick, in the garage, after Jonny has responded to a text message on Ian's phone, so Nick thinks he's coming to meet Ian. Let's start it with Nick walking in to find Jonny, and just Jonny, waiting for him."

In my exercise, the outcome of that scene—a black die given to Jonny—results in a completely different scene that answers the question: *How does this scene turn out for Jonny?*

This would be fair game in a *Fiasco* session, I'll bet, though I've never seen it happen myself. This is what I mean by the question, rather than the scene, as the unit of play in *Fiasco*. The question—"What color die does Jonny get for this scene?"—could actually result in a whole scene that dramatizes the black die, showing us not how the scene goes wrong in the moment but, rather, how it leads to bad things for Jonny is a scene that follows right on the heels of the first scene, dramatically speaking. "Here are some diamonds to sell," Nick says to Jonny. Smash-cut to Jonny in trouble, discovering too late, in the follow-up scene after the black die is bestowed, that the diamonds are fakes. Jonny's turn ends with him being surrounded by gangster muscle... and then we're on to the next player.

– Will Hindmarch, 1 February 2011