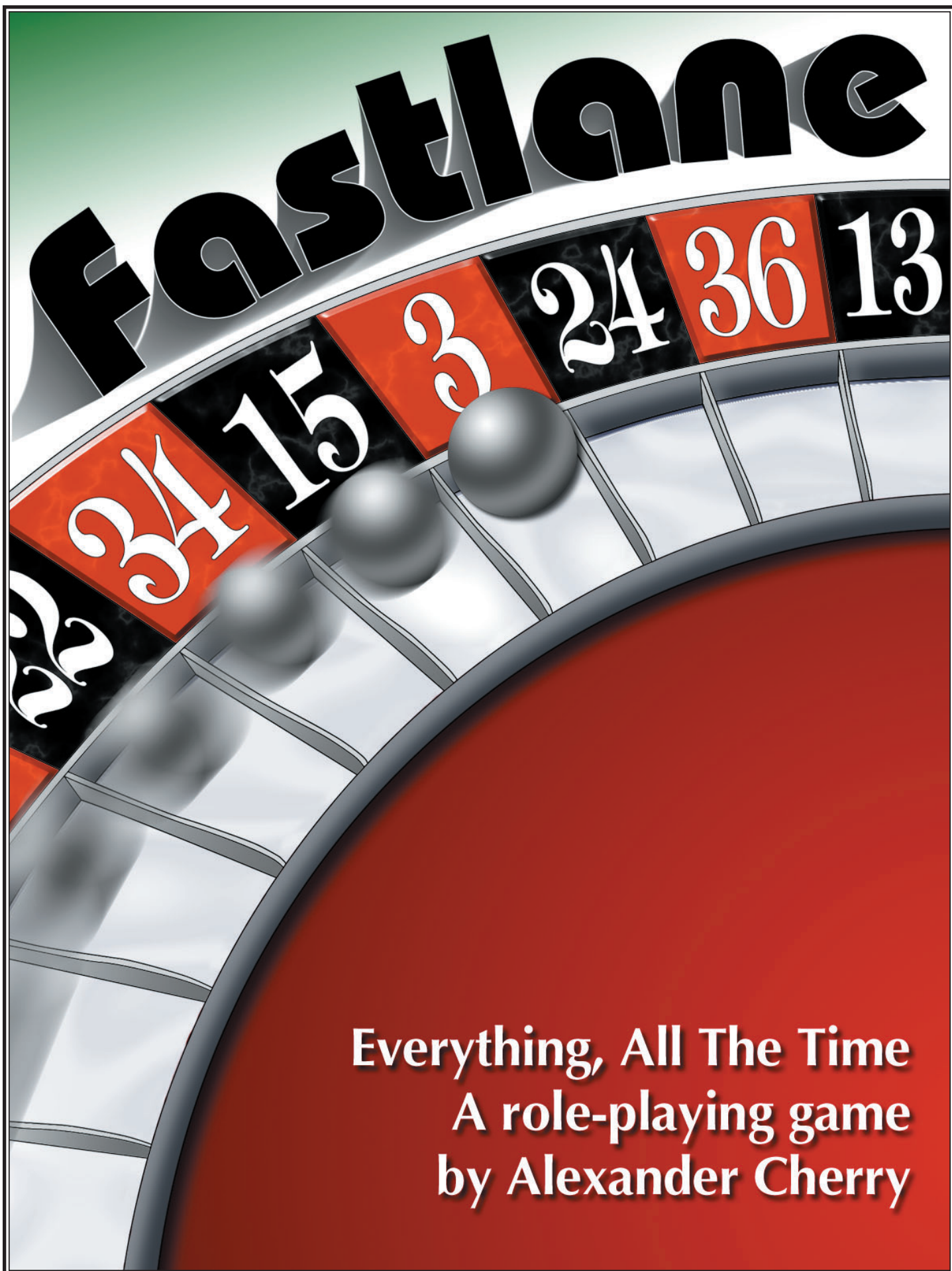
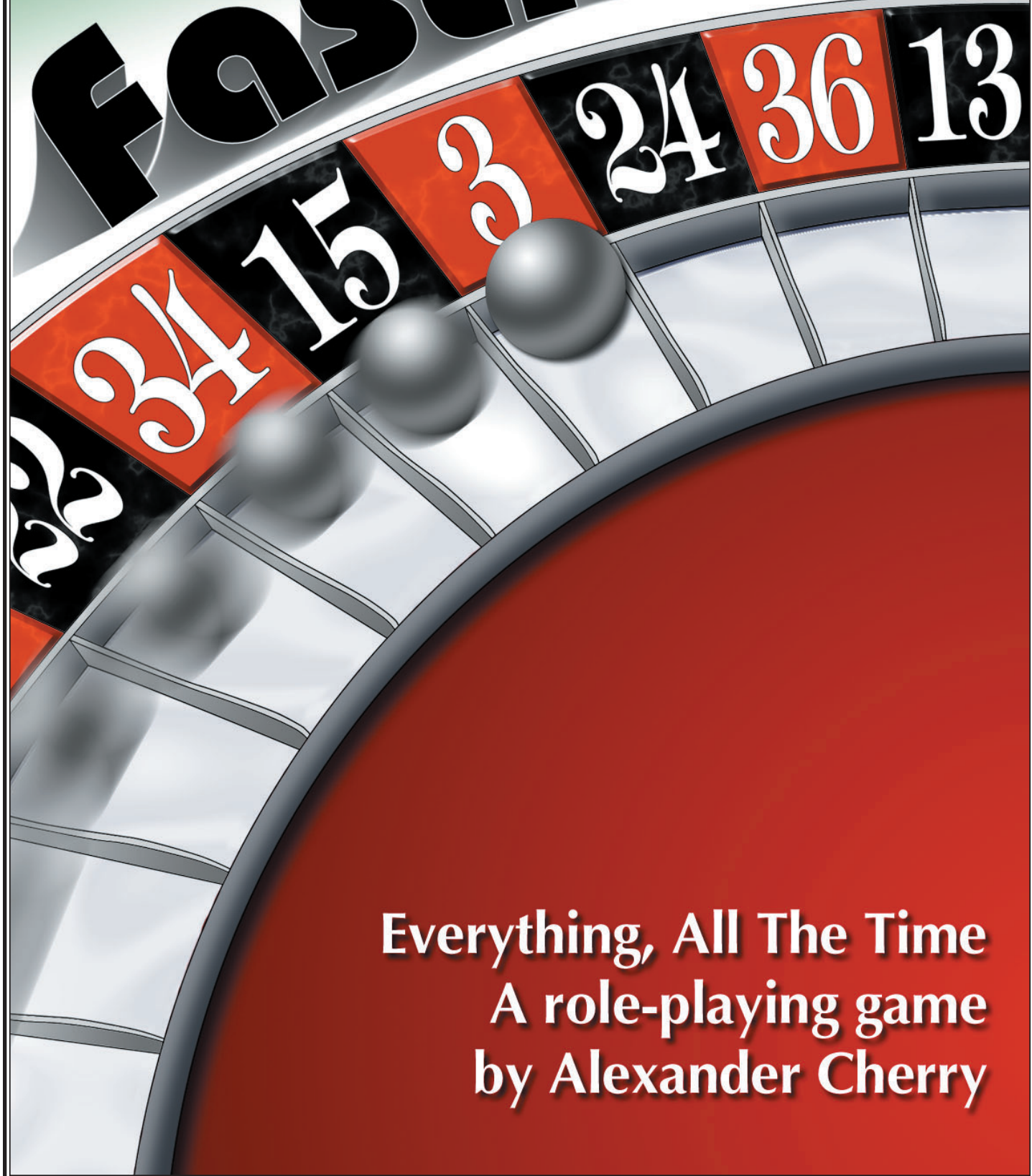




Fastlane



Everything, All The Time
A role-playing game
by Alexander Cherry

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Fastlane

Fastlane is a game of unchecked indulgence and reckless abandon, insatiable lusts and lofty ambitions, a roller coaster of sky-high peaks and rock-bottom valleys in a world of decadence and debasement. Characters burn their candles at both ends, hoping to live fast, die young, and leave a good looking corpse. Their debauchery continues even as their life unravels before them—they put the things they love on the line, and lock horns with everyone else on the same wild ride. Sometimes, if they're lucky, they'll find new meaning at the bottom of the glass, but more often it's a reflection of the emptiness in their hearts and souls. And when the abyss starts looking back into you, it's time for another shot.

In Fastlane, friendships and rivalries are as fluid as the alcohol that constantly flows—people are passed around like pills and needles and plastic bags. The guy who stabbed you in the back this morning might be your drinking buddy by tonight, and that girl who you took home last night is now hanging off the arm of the next high-roller. Everyone's out for themselves, feeding their own appetites, and alliances rarely last longer than the next binge.

Playing Fastlane is all about reveling as much as you can in the moment, until everything finally crashes down around you—and unless Lady Luck shows her face, you WILL crash, so you might as well go out in a blaze of glory. In Fastlane, there is no such thing as too far, too fast, too much, too wild, too hard. Moderation is simply not in your character's vocabulary. Neither is restraint.

Fastlane does not tie itself to any one setting, genre, or milieu. No matter where you find humanity, you'll find individuals willing to devote themselves full-time to feeding their carnal appetites and indulging their base desires, and this game will let you wallow in high-living anywhere. This means that you, the players, are going to have to decide where your game is set, and what the stakes are, although several examples will be provided, along with guidelines for doing it on your own. Everything else is background. It doesn't matter whether you try to kill someone with a gun, a knife, a fireball, a laser, or your bare hands—what matters is why you're doing it, and what the consequences are if you fail.

Fastlane was designed around the ordinary Roulette wheel (either European or American), which is the preferred randomizer for the game, as it adds a lot to the feel of game play, and personal sized wheels can be purchased for a very reasonable price. However, you don't need to own one to play Fastlane—there is a simple and functional rules alternative that uses ordinary six-sided dice instead, which can be found in the **modus operandi** section.

Besides a roulette wheel and some poker chips, all you need are players! Generally, one player should take on the role of croupier. The **croupier** is the person generally responsible for setting up scenes and conflicts, playing all the supporting characters and antagonists, and narrating failures and complications. The other players take on the role of the protagonists—each should create a single character using the rules below.

Acknowledgements

Nikki Noble belongs at the top of the list. When I first mused about buying a roulette wheel, on the off chance I could design a role-playing game with it, she found me one at half the price. Without her encouragement about both *Twisted Confessions* in general and *Fastlane* in particular, this game (and all that comes after) would likely not have occurred.

Thanks to the great people at **The Forge** (www.indie-rpgs.com) and on the *Indie-Netgaming* email list and its associated IRC channels (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/indie-netgaming>) for much discussion, brainstorming, and encouragement. Specific thanks go to Josh Kashinsky for suggesting the first facet, Sobriety—that was the domino that caused so much else to fall. Also thanks to Mike Holmes for all his interest and encouragement in the early stages.

Nobilis and the 2003 version of the **Marvel Universe RPG** were both inspirations on the resource allocation mechanics, but it was Jesse Burneko's aborted attempts at producing "*Sorcerer Diceless*" on The Forge that was the anvil dropping on my head.

Dust Devils and *The Pool* both helped inspire *Fastlane*'s model of distributed narration.

InSpectres' model of stress, directly reducing attributes as an artifact of damage, was an inadvertent contributor to the **humbling** system.

The Connections/Love of the game *My Life With Master* (available at www.halfmeme.com) by Paul Czege were, to different degrees, inspiration for *Life*, *Factions* and *Favors* (*Life* most strongly). His Endgame mechanics also influenced the burnout rules.

Finally, thanks to my faithful playtesters from the earliest games, in alphabetical order—Lance Allen, Nathan Banks, Kory Fritz, Michael Goins, Sam Kong, Trevis Martin, Bob McNamee and Nikki Noble. A special mention also goes to Jason Sims for creating a character that never was played.

Premeditation

Before you begin playing Fastlane for the first time, some things need to be prepared. This usually takes no more than an hour, and should be done with all the players in attendance, if possible. Everyone should agree on a setting in which the game will take place—there are some short sample settings in the back of the book, but don't feel constrained by them, feel free to make your own.

Will your game be set in the past, the present, or the future? What is the environment like, and is there anything special that you want to keep in mind, or make prominent? Are there forests, deserts, mountains, plains? What are the people there like? What sort of special effects might people see if this were a movie or a television show? Not all these questions need answers immediately, but it is a good idea to get everyone on the same page before you go any further.

Players should also spend at least a little bit of time deciding what sort of protagonist they want to play. What does this character do for a living, if anything? What are their hobbies, their passions, their hopes, their dreams, their pains? Why are they living the high life? What are some signature items they might employ? What is their attitude towards life? What is important to them? Heck, what is their *name*? Meanwhile, the croupier should be answering the same set of questions for any supporting characters he feels might add to the game, or might be fun to have around.

You don't have to answer all these questions right now, but these are the sorts of things you might want to have in mind before you dive into the game mechanics. It is harder to get lost if you have a goal in sight. On the other hand, sometimes the numbers will give you ideas, so if you find yourself hesitant and unsure of a character idea, go ahead and dive in!

Meet Allison, Bill, Charles and Darren. They have decided to play a game of Fastlane, not knowing that they are our guinea pigs, showing us how the game works. Their fictional game is based on one of the early Fastlane playtests—only the facts have been changed to protect the innocent.

Charles is elected to be croupier, leaving the other three as the story's protagonists. "What's our setting?" Darren wants to know. They toss a few options on the table, and eventually narrow it down to two: a game set in modern day aspen, or a game set in the courts of a decadent fantasy city full of smog. But they reach an impasse—both sound interesting.

"Let's let the wheel decide," Bill says. "Red we play aspen, black we play the fantasy game."

"Sounds fitting," Allison replies. "But what happens if we hit a zero?"

Charles laughs, "We'll play that ice ages game that you were pitching." Darren starts the wheel spinning.

"Works for me," she replies. "Then I can play a polar bear!" Everyone else groans.

"It's red," Darren says as the ball stops bouncing. "Red 27, not that it matters."

"Okay. Let's get started." Charles hands blank character sheets out to everyone. "And remember, I've never been to the city before, so it's going to basically be Hollywood Aspen. Allison, I know you visit there for your job sometimes, so I'm counting on you to keep me honest and not too far off the mark."

"Got it," she says.

"But I'm still going to change anything I want. Now, each of you gets 36 chips in your bank. That gives me 108."

1. The Bank

Central to every player is their **bank**, which is composed of **chips** in standard casino tradition. Each player gets a their own color of chips, except for the croupier, who uses whatever is handy. This helps keep the bets of the var-

ious players separate on the roulette board. As the croupier does not bid, he does not need a particular color.

The croupier decides how many chips every other player gets at the start of the game—this should generally be the same number for each player. A recommended value is **36**—the same as the highest Roulette payoff on a single chip, but the game scales easily, and that number can easily be higher or lower. The more chips handed out at the start of the game, the smaller the impact a character's **lucky number** will have when it comes up (see below). Conversely, players will be able to bid a larger amount of chips, allowing for more volatile rises and falls, along with more stable averages.

Chips in a bank are an abstraction of the resources a player has at his disposal. They are used mainly for conflict resolution, but chips are also a resource for character advancement, and before the game starts, character creation as well. The more chips a player has, the more that player can do to affect the game. When spending on the various parts of character creation below, keep in mind that you will want chips left over in the bank.

The croupier's bank is slightly different. His is equal to the sum of the starting banks of each other player. For example, if there are three players starting with 36 chips apiece, the croupier has 108 chips when the game starts. For the croupier, chips represent the resources available for making conflicts challenging—for the other players, chips represent how able their protagonists are to overcome the challenges set before them, or challenge their rival protagonists. A bank at zero is a tragedy for the player in question, but not an endpoint—it is more than possible to climb back up from rock bottom.

2. Facets and Styles

Protagonists in Fastlane are described by five **facets**, each ranked by a number. Facets act as limits, the house maximum for your character—the higher a facet of a particular character, the less limited that character is. Keep track of facet values in pencil, because they will change often over the course of an average game. Facets are not meant to be a measure of a protagonist's overall effectiveness, but rather their specific ability at a particular moment in time. Only the moment matters.

Each facet starts with a value of one, although they may go down to zero during the game. A facet value of one is quite deficient—one is the only number unable to guarantee a return on its investment. Players should have a rather specific reason for choosing to leave a facet at one. Lucky for the player, facets may be increased during character creation at a cost of one point for one chip. The only limit a character has on the value of his facets is the number of chips in the bank. Assuming a starting bank of 36 chips, the average individual probably has facet ratings between two and three, but that is subject to interpretation.

The five facets of Fastlane characters are **People**, **Assets**, **Nerve**, **Guile** and **Sobriety**. A useful mnemonic to remember them is the acronym “PANGS.”

- ◆ **People** is the most important facet your character can have. It covers all the people your character knows (as well as the people they might know), the names you can drop, your character's skill at dealing with people at face value, and generally how well others will like you when they meet you. People defines your character's place in the world, and is generally the only facet a protagonist can use in a conflict without being physically there—imposing their influence through secondary characters. With a high People score, your character can call in favors from kings, can get into most places without waiting in line, gets the best tables at the fanciest restaurants, and simply saying their name will command respect. He moves in all the right circles, hears all the right rumors, and can get in on all the right deals before others even hear about them. The character with the low People value finds his friends falling away, his reputation tarnished, and the noses of others turned up at him.
- ◆ **Assets** is the most important facet your character can have. It covers not only one's liquid assets, but also the total wealth the character can draw on at any time, as well as the usefulness and value of all the possessions the character has, in and of themselves. If a character needs to get a hold of a particular object, needs to get bribes in the right place to get something done, or simply wants to spend lavishly on something (like a party), this is the fact of your character that governs the outcome. On top of all that, Assets also governs a character's intangible assets—physical appearance, memberships in exclusive groups and sometimes, in certain games, inborn or supernatural abilities. A character with a high Assets value is rich, attractive, and always has the right tool at the right time. Those with low Assets values can often be described as seedy.

- ◆ **Nerve** is the most important facet your character can have. With a low Nerve, your character has no backbone; with a high Nerve, your character can stand proud. Nerve is the facet that covers a character's fortitude, stamina, and strength, both mentally and physically—the kind of strength that would allow a mother of three to lift up a car to save her son trapped underneath, or an angry man to best someone twice his size. It is a character's boldness and determination, the fire that pushes them to be the best they can be. A character with a lot of Nerve can hold his own in a fight, stand up to intimidation, and laugh in the face of pain—he is brave and courageous, inspiring to his allies, and makes those who stand in his way quake in their boots. A character who has lost his Nerve, or whose Nerve was low to begin with, is more likely to just tremble in fear.
- ◆ **Guile** is the most important facet your character can have. Stealth, deceit, trickery, cunning, these are the true tools for success, and Guile governs all these and more. Where People determines how well you can influence people, Guile is all about the manipulation. It doesn't matter if people genuinely like you, as long as you can still get them to do what you want. It doesn't matter how strong your opponent is if you can dash out of the way of his blows, or avoid meeting him altogether. And if you can't afford what you want, a high Guile generally ensures that you are quick and smart enough to get it anyway. Sleight of hand, subterfuge, treachery, fraud: these are the signatures of the Guile facet. A character with a high Guile value is a smooth operator—he's nimble, quick-witted, shrewd, and has a mean poker face. On a good day, he can stab someone in the back and make them think he just did them a favor. Characters with low Guile, meanwhile, run the risk of being too transparent.
- ◆ **Sobriety** is the most important facet your character can have. Far more than just a simple measure of intoxication, Sobriety is the thinking man's best friend. Not every situation can be solved through chicanery, bribery, stubbornness, or even honesty. Even in the fast lane, a person needs to use one's noggin to stay alive. Sobriety measures a person's clarity of mind, his available mental resources, and his awareness of the world around him (as well as his ability to understand the consequences of his actions). Characters with a high Sobriety are rare in the fast lane—adrenaline can be intoxicating, and the high-rolling life can even leave one dizzy without chemical help. Nevertheless, while a character can keep his head below the clouds, his clear head will let him stay one step ahead of the competition. As for characters whose Sobriety is too low? They never know what hit them.

The descriptions above are a *starting point* for the facets—they are a list of permissions, not exclusions. As long as players keep that in mind, their protagonists will be able to attempt most anything.

Facets are further broken down into **styles**, which in one or two words describe a single, reasonably specific application of a facet. The croupier must approve any style, and should feel free to reject anything too broad. For Sobriety, a character might be *grim* or *clear-headed*. For Guile, a character might be *nimble* or *shrewd*. For Assets, a person might be *rich*, or just *beautiful*. You get the idea. Sometimes the same phrase could be a possible style for multiple facets—but a style only works for the facet it adjoins.

Protagonists start with one style for each facet, free, and may wait until after play begins to define them. However, once defined, they may not be changed. Additional styles cost one chip each, and *must* be defined before play. Keep in mind that no more than one style can be used at a time, regardless of how many a protagonist might possess.

Whatever the players choose, styles are the character's tricks and gimmicks, their signature moves, and protagonists are always rewarded for handling a situation in their own special way.

"So, what characters are you guys going to play?" Charles asks.

"I've been wanting to play a jewel thief," Allison says. "Lots of rich folk in Aspen."

"Let's see," Darren wonders, "fast-living folks ..."

Bill says, "Hmm, the handsome ski instructor? Wish fulfillment, I know."

"Hey," Allison says, "wish fulfillment is a big part of roleplaying. Do it."

Darren still seems to be having trouble with a character. Charles tries to help him out. "You could own a ski resort, you could be a movie director, an actor, a brothel owner, a corrupt

banker, a scummy rich tycoon, or even a crime boss.”

“Hmmm. I like the sound of a movie type.”

“Lots of producers and directors hang about in Aspen,” Allison observes.

“Maybe a location scout,” Darren muses, continuing to think out loud. “Bribes, corruption... His name is Trevor Striplin.”

“Go ahead and work on your PANGS,” Charles says. “I’ve got my own work to do.”

Now that Darren has a concept, he works quickly. He spends two chips to raise Trevor’s People to 3, and chooses a style of “connections.” He knows people who know people. His Assets gets three chips, giving it a value of 4—Darren imagines Trevor as a guy who’s into the whole bribery thing. Thinking ahead, he chooses an Assets style of “Jaguar”, figuring Trevor’s got a nice car, and doesn’t mind showing it off—by making it a style, he’s thinking ahead, ‘cause it’s harder to have the car taken away from him. Five more chips go into Nerve, giving Trevor a Nerve of six—he’s quite a gutsy fellow. Darren leaves that style open, as he does the next one, Guile—four chips spent, resulting in a value of 5. Finally he rounds it out with a Sobriety of 8 (costing him 7 chips) and the style of “calculating.” He has spent 21 chips, leaving him fifteen.

Allison also works her protagonist out quickly—Heather Fairlane. Her People is 2—she tries mostly to fly below the radar, and that reflects itself in her People score. Allison picks “shallow” as her People style, figuring if people see Heather as just a little air-head, it’ll help her be ignored and, more importantly, underestimated. She spends four chips to raise her Assets to five, and an additional chip to pick up a second Style—she is both “beautiful” and has a “stash.” Her character’s Nerve is bought at 4, figuring that Heather is pretty ballsy—her style here is “brazen.” She picks a Guile of 6, wanting it as her highest facet, and spends another chip to get a second style here too—she is both “stealthy” and “cunning.” Finally, Allison tosses a 3 into Sobriety, wanting her character reasonably clear-headed. She leaves that style open, to be defined in play. She’s spent 17 chips, leaving her with nineteen in her bank.

Finally, Bill works on Luc, a daredevil both on the slopes and in the lodge. Luc’s People is 3—he moves in social circles, but is still just a ski instructor, and is sometimes looked down upon for being gainfully employed. He leaves his free style there undefined. His Assets are also at 3, not too low, but not spectacular either—Luc spends more than he has, and often gambles, leading Bill to pick a style of “possessions.” Nerve is six, with the aforementioned “Daredevil” moniker as the style. Guile is five, with a style of “smooth talker.” Finally, his Sobriety is left at the default one—Bill figures Luc is all about impetuosity, and has a hot temper. He leaves that style open as well, since Bill’s not entirely sure what in Luc’s life would inspire him to be clearer minded. He only spent 13 chips, leaving him with 23 left in his bank.

3. Life

In addition to the five facets and their styles, protagonists in Fastlane are defined by a trait called **Life**. Life helps separate the protagonists from the supporting characters, and tells us what is important to the character—their reasons for living. Life can be a job, a hobby, a person (or group of people), lovers, friends, enemies, addictions, possessions, stuff, actions, and more. Life might be the reason a character is in the fast lane, or perhaps Life is what they risk by living in it. Although a character never wants his total Life value to reach zero, Life is not anything like “hit points.” It does not represent how much physical punishment a character can take before he dies. What would your character fill in the following blank: “_____ is my life!”? That is what Life represents.

In the high-rolling world of Fastlane, Life is a double-edged sword. On one hand, a character’s Life can spur him to greater heights, adding its value to a facet when the Life comes into play, and eroding the pro-

tagonist's relationship with it on a failure. On the other hand, a character's Life can be used against him, subtracting its value from a facet instead—but if the character succeeds despite the penalty, his connection grows stronger. Either way, a character's Lives are what keeps him going.

Every protagonist gets a single Life of their choice, worth one point, free (supporting characters do not have Life scores of their own). Depending on the particulars of the setting, the croupier may decide this Life is something specific, but usually the choice is left up to the player. During character creation, the player can improve their character's Life by one for each five chips invested—either by adding a new Life worth one point, or increasing an existing one. They may also add additional Lives that start out at zero points, free. Players are strongly encouraged to take more than one Life, representing different things their character holds dear.

This is an important step—the Life choices of the players will weave the tapestry of what the game will be about. In addition, each point of Life requires the croupier to spend at least five chips on appraisals related to that Life (see the next step).

4. Appraisal

While the other players are creating their characters, the croupier should be creating their supporting characters. Unlike protagonists, supporting characters have no facets—they are, in some ways, the croupier's facets, various reflections of the croupier's role as “everybody else.” As befits their nature, supporting characters have an **appraisal** value that determines how important they are to the narrative. As with the facets of protagonists, appraisal is purchased on a one to one basis, and can also be expected to change, though not quite as frequently. The croupier should set aside roughly one fourth of his chips for use in game play, and spend the rest appraising the supporting characters.

During play, newly-introduced supporting characters have an appraisal value of zero, which makes them easy to remove from play immediately, so anyone the croupier wants to make sure is in the story for the long term should be paid for now. In addition, what the other players choose as Lives for their protagonists will dictate certain things the croupier must buy—five chips must be spent on appraising supporting characters connected to a Life, for each point in that Life.

Sometimes this is simple (your Life is your wife? your wife has an appraisal value of five), other times more complex (your life is your family? it's worth two points? then here's your wife, worth four points, and here's your three kids, worth 2 points each). It should rarely be difficult, and the croupier is the final judge on what supporting characters reflect the Lives the protagonists chose.

Note that secondary characters do not necessarily have to be individuals—sometimes, it makes more sense to track groups than individuals (like say a cult, or a corporation, or a pirate's crew), and on some occasions inanimate objects or even emotions can be treated characters who can have their own voice in conflicts. This is especially true in the case of addictions and some forms of insanity—ask any alcoholic or schizophrenic. Use this technique to the story's advantage—defeating one ten-appraisal target (defined as ten men) is much easier than defeating ten one-appraisal targets (defined as one man apiece), and struggles against one's inner nature can be much more satisfying when that nature is embodied.

Unlike facets, appraisal values do not limit a croupier's spending. Instead, they are simply meant to define how important individual supporting characters are to the story, as well as being a gauge of how difficult it might be to remove them from the story. The croupier should pay close attention to the Lives the other players choose for their protagonists, not only because they have to spend a certain minimum chips as mentioned above, but even zero-point Lives can give additional insight into what sort of supporting characters the game might require.

Although supporting characters don't have facets, they may have styles. These work the same way as with protagonists—some specific word or phrase that, in one way or another, helps to define the character. Each costs one chip, and no more than one can be used at any time. Keep in mind that supporting characters can be taken out of the game once their appraisal reaches zero, regardless of how many styles they might have. Also, chips spent on styles do not count towards the required chips a Life requires the croupier to spend.

Charles wasn't just sitting around while the other three were making their characters—he had 108 chips to spend on fleshing out the city of Aspen. After setting aside forty chips for use later on, Charles considers what to do with the other 68. He throws nine

into a ski resort owner called Ronnie Cash, and another nine into Ronnie's rival resort owner, Abe Froman. He figures that these two will manage to provide their own conflict, with a little help from him of course—he decides to let Luc pick which one he wants to work for, since Charles doesn't have a preference. He also tosses sixteen chips into a scummy tycoon he names Eddie Vinson—he figures Mr. Vinson is pretty corrupt. No styles for now, he's not really got a handle on these characters.

Charles glances at what his players are creating, paying close attention to their choices for Life, as he knows he'll need to make characters to fit them. Darren's already got four written down: Movie Making, Speed, Stuntwork, and Blackmail. Darren put his free point in the first one, and spent five chips for a point in the second one, leaving the other two at zero (and bringing his bank down to ten). Allison only has two, but each has a point in it (her bank is now 14)—Flashy Cars, and Obtaining Wealth are her choices. Finally, Bill's guy has three. One of them has no points in it—Luc apparently has a son he only gets to see once in a while. The other two are Dangerous Stunts and Dangerous Women. The former is his free Life, but the latter is worth two (his bank is now 13 chips). Apparently, Luc really has a thing for Dangerous Women. Bill was right about wish fulfillment.

Charles looks over his short list of characters. Vinson definitely fits Heather's Life of Obtaining Wealth, but the rest are still open. He discards Trevor's Stuntwork and Blackmail, as Darren put no points into them, and also tosses Luc's Son, but even so he's got to spend 25 more chips to create characters related to the other Life choices—ten on Dangerous Women, and five on the rest. He erases Abe Froman's name (it was a silly one anyway), replacing it with Melissa Monroe. Still the rival to Ronnie Cash, making her female allows her to fulfill the role of "dangerous woman". Charles decrees that Luc works for Ronnie, just to up the stakes—she's more dangerous as the enemy of his boss, rather than as his boss. That's nine out of ten. The remaining chip is put into a six-appraisal woman—Kristina Cash, Ronnie's daughter, a reckless skier and a beauty to boot. She covers both Dangerous Stunts and Dangerous Women. Out of the 68 chips he started with, Charles has got 28 left.

That leaves Movie Making, Speed, and Flashy Cars unfulfilled, and each has to have at least five chips attached to it. Charles takes the easy way out with the first one, introducing Forman Mikumacher as a five-appraisal director and, more importantly, Trevor's boss—the odd name is because he's foreign, and a well-regarded if controversial genius. That leaves Speed and Flashy Cars, which seem to naturally go together. He creates three four-appraisal Flashy Car street-racers, two male and one female (just so he can have another dangerous woman for Luc). He names one of them Eddie Vinson Jr., and decides to work out names for the other two later. There, both Speed and Flashy Cars are covered, and overspent.

Charles looks over his list, trying to figure out what's missing, what he can spend his last eleven chips on. He's got rival resort owners, a scummy tycoon, the whole "boss's daughter" angle, fast cars. The one thing he thinks might be missing could be a local politician or two, but he decides to hold off on that. He decides to give Luc a rival ski instructor at the resort, who he decides to name Kit Cobain—he puts nine chips there, expecting him to be a major rival. He considers giving either Heather or Trevor direct rivals, but decides against it—there are ample opportunities for conflict in both characters already.

Now he tries to decide what styles these characters might have, with six chips left to spare. Kit Cobain is a snowboarder, so he picks "snowboarding" as a style for him. Eddie Vinson, Senior, is "rich" and "criminal." Finally, Forman Mikumacher is a "cre-

ative genius." Charles already has a lot of ideas on how to use that. Nobody else seems to really be crying out for styles, so the last two chips he puts back in his bank, giving him 42 chips.

"Okay," Charles says after he's done explaining these characters he created to the group, "let's work out the favors."

5. Favors & Factions

Friendships and rivalries are all but meaningless when you're living the high life—they're like sandcastles on the seashore, doomed to crumble when the tide comes in. True connections between people are rare, and should be treasured; they're the kind of thing you want to hold on to with your life (and, in the rules, should usually be represented with Life, even if it's only worth zero points). More often, people are a commodity that can be bought and sold, and the currency of choice in Fastlane is the **favor**. When somebody does something for you, you pay it back, and when you do something good for someone else, they "owe you one." Sure, you can try to buck the system, but don't be surprised if you wind up cold, naked, and alone when you're in need of a helping hand.

In Fastlane, favors are ranked by number. This number shows how significant the compensation needed to pay the favor off is. Collecting favors, calling them in, and working them off, will all be covered in the next section. For the purposes of character creation, all a player needs to know is that the protagonists start with a clean slate. The croupier can create any sort of web of favors between the supporting characters that he chooses, but may not tangle the protagonists into this web.

If players want their protagonists to have favors to call in at the start of the game (and they should), they can take them—as long as they have an equal value in favors owed to others. Protagonists can have one person owing them a nine point favor, and in return, they might owe nine people one-point favors. Or any other combination the player can imagine.

Owing favors is as rewarding as collecting them—when they are called in, they usually give the player extra chips, which can be used in a myriad of ways. Sometimes paying back a favor owed is the only way a bot-tomed-out protagonist has to fill an empty bank. It is certainly more reliable than the fickle hand of Lady Luck.

Players can choose to have their protagonists owe favors to the characters of other players, as long as both players approve, but the true utility of favors is to help create the social landscape outside the player group. For each favor written on the character sheet, there's usually a name attached. Sometimes, this will be one of the supporting characters the croupier has already selected, but players are encouraged to come up with other characters as well—these become new and permanent parts of the game.

If possible, try to come up with a brief story on how your protagonist came to be in the position of owing or collecting that favor. This is not a strict rule: sometimes it's worthwhile to keep some of this information undefined until an appropriate moment in the story, where it can be revealed to greater dramatic effect. In rare cases, it might even make sense to have favors whose NAMES are left undefined (their potential appraisal left unassigned to any supporting character until the player decides).

During this stage, every favor point related to a supporting character, whether owed or collected, adds one to the appraisal value of that supporting character. This is the only method a player has of introducing supporting characters into the setting (their starting appraisal is, of course, zero). As the choices for Life help determine what the Fastlane game will be about, the choices for Favors help determine whom the game will involve, at least at the start, and how important they are. That makes this a powerful tool for players to use. Don't be afraid to take advantage of it.

The croupier can decide that favors exist between supporting characters, but the supporting characters get no numerical benefit from that choice.

"Luc owes Ronnie for giving him his job when he had no prospects," Bill starts out. Allison says, "Heather caught the mayor naked in a hot-tub while she was casing a house—and she's got pictures."

"Both of those work," Charles says. He marks down the mayor on his list of supporting characters and figures maybe he should have come up with political figures after all. "I especially like the blackmail thing, Allison."

Bill says, "Wait, you didn't tell us about the mayor. We can create new characters?"

"Yeah, totally she can," Charles says. "That's half the fun of this step. Now, what are your favors worth?"

"Worth??" Darren looks puzzled.

"Yeah, favors get a point value," Bill says. "Makes it easier to track, and lets you decide how important a favor really is."

"Okay, let's make mine worth fifty then," Allison says, giggling.

"You'll have to owe fifty points worth of favors, then."

"What?! That's a sucky rule," Allison pouts.

"It only applies during character creation," Darren says. "You start out in balance, and afterwards you can rise or fall."

"Depending on your luck, of course," Charles adds.

"Always the luck. Mine's worth five," Bill says. "So that means I get five points worth of favors owed to me?"

"Yeah, that's right," Charles says. He raises Ronnie's appraisal by five, making it a 14.

"Five seems to be a good number, I guess," Allison says, mock-pouting. Charles writes the number down next to the mayor.

Darren says, "okay, Steven Seagal owes him a favor, for quietly using a stunt double to cover for his problem. Let's make that one worth three."

"Wow, a celebrity," Allison says. Charles just writes it down.

Darren continues, "Cindy, the limousine driver, I owe her because her Dad got me the director's job. Also three."

"If it's all the same to you, Darren, I'm going to make Cindy that unnamed girl street racer."

"Works for me." Charles raises that girl's value to seven, and gives her the name Cindy, making note that her father is involved in the movie, probably as a producer. He toys with the idea of making it the director's daughter, but decides that's too cliché. The boss, and thus Cindy's father, will be left unnamed for now.

"So, Heather," Charles says, "who do you owe?"

"I'm thinking, I'm thinking," Allison says, sticking her tongue out at him. "Why don't you ask Luc over there?"

Bill laughs. "I don't know either."

Charles says, "Maybe your fence, Heather? You owe him for something?"

"That works. He advanced me some money."

"All five points?"

"Yeah."

Charles begins to write something down, then stops. "Hey, Luc, want to be Heather's fence? That'll level out both your fives."

Bill smiles. "Hmmm... sure! She'll owe me, right?"

"Yup, I'll owe you."

"How bout you, Darren? Is Trevor all said and done?"

"Not quite. Ronnie Cash also owes me, for agreeing to use his lodge for shots in our film. Let's say that one's worth two."

"And to level it out?" Charles raises Ronnie's appraisal another two points, to sixteen.

"Um... Claude Rivera, for taking revealing photographs of a local politician who didn't like the movie. Also two."

"Does that politician owe you too?"

"No, he already paid it back. That's why we're filming here. I still owe Claude, though."

"Okay I'm still going to mark him down, though." Charles looks over his sheet and writes down 'Local Politician'—he decides to spend those two chips he threw away before on this guy instead of leaving him at zero. Heck, it's one more person to add to his political stable, and his bank is now at 40 chips. "I've got this one guy left without a name—mind if I make this Claude guy the remaining street racer to boot?"

"Sure."

"Keeps the number of people we have to keep track of down," Bill observes.

Charles writes that down, giving Claude a final appraisal of six. "Okay, kind of light on the favors, but I guess that's okay. I don't think factions are really appropriate, at least to start out."

The other players chime in agreement. Bill asks, "The option is always open to set some up later, right?"

"Of course," Charles answers. "One last thing... what are your lucky numbers?"

In Fastlane, **factions** refer to collections of loosely allied characters that can call on one another for assistance—they can represent families, gangs, corporations, agencies, fraternities, or even stranger things. Factions can overlap, or even completely contain other factions, and characters can be a part of multiple factions at once. For protagonists, factions start off at zero points, but can be raised like facets, on a 1:1 basis; for supporting characters, they are either in a faction (which costs one chip) or they are not. For each point a protagonist invests in a Faction, their player can choose one supporting character to be a member of that faction.

In play, a faction works as a favor that goes both ways. The protagonist can call upon any other faction member at any time, up to the value of the favor, but so can the other faction members ask the same thing of them. These and other actions can cause a protagonist's faction value to rise and fall. See the Factions section of **Modus Operandi** for more details.

If you can't think of any factions that make sense for your chosen setting and game, don't worry about having them. Not every game is quite so clear-cut, and sometimes you can't determine the appropriate "sides" until after the game starts. Other games have no need of any factions at all.

6. Finishing Touches

Now that everyone has spent their chips, and decided what favors were collected and owed, what's left? Well, first off, make sure the protagonists and supporting characters are all consistent, and that everything works together. Put the remaining chips in your bank. Make sure the protagonists are the kind of people that you would be willing to pay \$7.50 to see in a movie theatre (or read about in a book). If you haven't given your character a name yet, it is probably a good time to do so, and decide on any other details that seem missing. You're almost ready to go.

One final number needs to be set for each protagonist before they are ready to be played. But don't worry, this one's simple! Each protagonist has a **lucky number**, a number between 1 and 36—which one it is doesn't matter, as they're all equal. In every conflict where that protagonist are a participant, in addition to any other bid placed on the table, the character always get a chip on their Lucky Number, which is treated the same as any other bet. Since it's a straight roulette bet, it pays 35 to 1 when it comes up (or 36 chips total). In other words, every once in a while each player will get a windfall of chips, a perfect time to increase their protagonist's sagging facets, revitalize their Lives, and perhaps most importantly of all, replenish their bank. After all, the croupier has his own kind of lucky number—the zeroes. Each protagonist deserves their own.

Here are the characters from the preceding examples, followed by the Master Favor Record and Supporting Character List



Characters

Trevor Striplin wrote:

(played by Darren) - 10 chips starting bank, lucky number 5

People: 3 (connections)

Assets: 4 (Jaguar)

Nerve: 6 (open)

Guile: 5 (open)

Sobriety: 8 (calculating)

Life: Movie Making 1

Life: Speed 1

Life: Stuntwork 0

Life: Blackmail 0

Favor: Steven Seagal owes Trevor a 3 point favor

Favor: Trevor owes Cindy, the limo driver, a 3 point favor

Favor: Ronnie Cash owes Trevor a 2 point favor

Favor: Trevor owes Claude Rivera a 2 point favor

No starting factions

Heather Fairlane

(played by Allison) - 14 chips starting bank, lucky number 13

People: 2 (shallow)

Assets: 5 (beautiful, stash)

Nerve: 4 (brazen)

Guile: 6 (stealthy, cunning)

Sobriety: 3 (open)

Life: Flashy Cars 1

Life: Obtaining Wealth 1

Favor: The Mayor owes Heather a 5 point favor

Favor: Heather owes Luc Danes a 5 point favor

No starting factions

Luc Danes

(played by Bill) - 13 chips starting bank, lucky number 17

People: 3 (open)

Assets: 3 (possessions)

Nerve: 6 (daredevil)

Guile: 5 (smooth talker)

Sobriety: 1 (open)

Life: Dangerous Women 2

Life: Dangerous Stunts 1

Life: My Son 0

Favor: Luc owes Ronnie Cash a 5 point favor



Favor: Heather Fairlane owes Luc a 5 point favor

No starting factions

Master Favor Record

Favor: Steven Seagal owes Trevor Striplin a 3 point favor

Favor: Ronnie Cash owes Trevor Striplin a 2 point favor

Favor: The Mayor owes Heather Fairlane a 5 point favor

Favor: Trevor Striplin owes Cindy, the limo driver, a 3 point favor

Favor: Trevor Striplin owes Claude Rivera a 2 point favor

Favor: Heather Fairlane owes Luc Danes a 5 point favor

Favor: Luc Danes owes Ronnie Cash a 5 point favor

Supporting Character List

Name	Styles	Factions	Appraisal	Notes
Ronnie Cash	none	none	16	Ski resort owner, Luc works for him
Melissa Monroe	none	none	9	Ski resort owner, Ronnie's rival
Eddie Vinson	Rich, Criminal	none	16	Tycoon with his fingers in all the pots
Kristina Cash	none	none	6	Daughter of Ronnie Cash
Forman Mikumacher	'Creative genius'	none	5	Trevor's Boss
Eddie Vinson, Jr.	none	none	4	Road racer, Vinson's son
Kit Cobain	Snowboarding	none	9	Luc's rival ski instructor at Ronnie's resort
Mayor	none	none	5	Need a name
Steven Seagal	none	none	3	Has a "problem" that needed coverage
Cindy	none	none	7	Road racer, limousine driver, father involved in movie
Claude Rivera	none	none	6	Road racer, photographer, took pictures of local politician
Local Politician	none	none	2	Need a name and position
Cindy's father	none	none	0	Involved in Mikumacher's movie somehow
Luc Dane's son	none	none	0	Need a name

Modus Operandi

Rules are the core of any game—they form the framework on which the experience of play is built, and are the tools for building that experience. They are the method through which one can discern the meaning of their character's actions, and they provide a common ground for understanding. Now that you've built a character and had a taste of the game mechanics, take a look under the hood and see what you can do with the numbers you've assigned.

Conflict Resolution

Conflicts are at the core of any good narrative. Be it a conflict with other people, a conflict with the elements, or simply a conflict within oneself, conflicts and their resolution drive the story forward. During any given game of Fastlane, players are going to want to determine the outcome of the conflicts in which their characters are taking part. Any player, not just the croupier, can call for a conflict at any time their protagonist is in the spotlight. Most scenes in which the protagonists find themselves should involve at least one, if not multiple, conflicts—the roller-coaster ride of life doesn't stop just because they want to take a break, and downtime, when it happens, should be glossed over, not played out.

Scenes should be framed and played in order, usually starting to the left of the croupier and moving to the right, not returning to any one protagonist until everyone has been given a chance in the spotlight. Protagonists should never have more than one conflict per round of scenes, and sometimes not even that. Between rounds, all the players simultaneously spend their take on character improvement, while the croupier spends his bank to improve supporting characters.

The first step in conflict resolution is defining the conflict, which involves identifying the participants and their preferred outcomes. This is the time where, generally, a player would call in his character's favors to increase the numbers on his side, or perhaps find his character involved because someone he owed called him in. Remember that participants can include inanimate objects, emotions, whatever makes sense for the story being told. It should be decided whether a participant is an **obstacle** or a **character**, as the rules behave slightly differently for obstacles.

Determining the preferred outcome is usually very simple for obstacles—an avalanche coming down the mountain has a preferred outcome of “burying all in its path,” that newly-dropped vial containing the airborne killer virus has a preferred outcome of “shattering on impact,” and that addiction inside you has the preferred outcome of “giving in.” Other participants tend to be a bit more complex in their motivations and desires, but even then, the outcomes are usually obvious. Of course, conflicts rarely turn out the way anybody wants them—there are always compromises and complications.

While everyone else decided what they wanted on their pizza, Charles was working on the first scene, and making some plans for what comes after. Once the pizza was ordered and everyone was back at the table, he began describing Trevor and Heather driving down a windy mountain road outside of town.

“Okay, I know Trevor has a Jag, what sort of car is Heather driving?”

“A 2003 model midnight blue Jaguar,” Darren clarifies.

Allison twirls a finger in her hair. “A vintage black Porsche 911,” she finally says. “It's Heather's pride and joy.”

“Okay. Heather sees the blue Jaguar ahead of her, and drives up to take a better look. Sounds good?”

“Sure,” Allison says.

Darren sees what Charles is planning. “Trevor glances over at the hot babe in the Porsche and revs his engine.”

Allison smiles, a predatory glimmer in her eyes. “The dangerous road is covered in no passing signs, but Heather's never been one to follow the rules. She pulls into the opposite lane.”

Charles says, “Alright! The race is on. It's Heather versus Trevor, and I'm going to toss the mountain into the conflict too.”

"I don't get it," Bill says.

"The road's an obstacle," Charles replies. "So they've got to worry about handling the road as well as racing each other. Makes sense?"

"Oh. Okay. Cool."

"Can anyone think of any other participants in this contest?"

Allison suggests, "Um...cops or something, maybe?"

"No, that can be covered under the road obstacle. Same with opposing traffic."

"Oh, okay. We're ready then."

"Okay, Darren I'm assuming Trevor's using his Assets so he can take full advantage of his Jaguar style?"

After defining the conflict, everyone involved needs to decide how many chips they are able to commit to the conflict. Players need to pick an appropriate facet (with approval from the croupier), which should reflect the methods they are bringing to bear; this determines the maximum number of chips they can commit from their bank. Facets of zero can still be raised by Lives, or contribute styles. Players may also pick a **style** if they so choose, which gives the player an additional chip above and beyond any chips they might bid from the bank—the only limit is that it may not be placed on an inside bet.

The croupier decides if any of a protagonist's Lives are in play, applicable to a particular conflict. If a Life is in play, the player of that protagonist must choose whether they are putting it **on the line** or **threatening** it. A Life that is on the line augments a facet value, adding its value to the facet—and a player must bid at least a number of chips equal to the total of all his Lives that were put on the line – if the protagonist loses, the Life drops by one. A Life that is threatened reduces the facet value (though never below zero), but if the character wins the conflict, the Life goes up by one. Threatening a zero-point Life, then, is a risk-free proposition – look for opportunities to do this, for the worst-case scenario is nothing at all, and the best is an increase in your character's potency.

Meanwhile, the croupier, who has no limit on his personal spending other than the size of his bank, should consider how many chips he will expend on each non-player participant's preferred outcome(s). This is an entirely subjective choice on the part of the croupier—the more chips he spends on an obstacle, the more difficult it is to overcome, but the smaller his bank will be afterwards. New supporting characters introduced this way start with an appraisal value of zero.

The croupier never bids. This is important. Where the other players can bid chips and collect winnings on behalf of their protagonists, the croupier simply spends chips from his bank to represent the effort of supporting characters, chips that are irretrievably lost. Conversely, the croupier's only source of income is the losses of the players. If a supporting character has an applicable style, it adds a free chip to that character's effective effort above and beyond what the croupier spends. No more than one style may be used.

The croupier may spend as much or as little of his bank as desired, such that even the simplest conflicts turn horribly difficult and seemingly impossible situations might turn out to be a cakewalk. The croupier should be careful with his chips, however; once the croupier's bank is empty, everything becomes easy for the protagonists, and very little can stand in their way. In contests involving no player-character intervention, which generally happen off-screen, the croupier decides the outcome without touching his bank.

Allison is curious. "Hey, if I use my Nerves, would my style apply?"

"What is it again?"

"Brazen."

"Oh yeah, Heather's a brazen hussy. Sure, that'd work."

"Okay, then Heather's using Nerves with that style. That's four, or five with the style."

"And Trevor's using Assets with his Jag. That's also four, five with the style."

"I've got a Life that applies," Allison says. Heather's applicable Life is Flashy Cars.

Charles laughs. "I was just about to mention your Lives. Darren, you have a Life that applies too – Speed. They're both worth one, right?"

"Right," Allison says. Darren agrees a moment later. Then both of them simultane-

ously say, “I want to put it on the line.”

Charles laughs. “Okay, sure. So you both can bid up to five chips from your bank, plus the style chip. Allison, you’ve got a handicap of one.”

The roulette wheel is integral to Fastlane, as are its corresponding casino bets. With their chips, players have a very fine control over the results of their character’s efforts, and how much risk they care to take. As long as players have at least two chips in their bank, they can play it safe, bet on opposing even money bids, and get the same number of chips back almost every time. But who wants to play it safe? Reaching for higher returns requires risk, but the taste of success is that much sweeter if you win. Moreover, even the safest path can crumble when a zero finally turns up. A general rule given by many professional roulette players: don’t bid against yourself. In other words, do your best to ensure that there is at least one number that can come up, that will let you win every bid on the board. Mixing this strategy with the “playing it safe” strategy is a recipe for success.

The rules engine of Fastlane takes advantage of the American roulette wheel, which has two zeroes. While it is the most common wheel in the United States, there is also a European roulette wheel, which is more common worldwide. This variant has only one zero, and while it will slightly change the feel of the game, it can be used in Fastlane instead of the American wheel without any changes to the rules.

Using the European wheel gives the protagonists more of an edge. With only one zero instead of two, the house advantage the croupier normally enjoys is cut in half, and the lucky numbers of the protagonist’s are slightly more likely to appear (along with every other bet they make). This slightly changes the tone of the game and the flow of the conflicts, bringing in more genuine hope. Of course, Lady Luck can still spit on your character and leave him in the gutter, if she so pleases—it’s just that with the European wheel, she’s not quite as much of a bitch.

As most people are likely unaware of the roulette bets that are available, the table just below this paragraph indicates what they are, gives their payouts, and displays a few examples. Fastlane does not use the Five Number Bet common in American casinos, as it benefits the House too extremely, nor does it use the Split Dozens or Split Columns bets, as those are both rare and cumbersome, and have no advantage. A smaller version of the chart can be found on the character sheet.

Name	Payout*	Definition	Examples**
Straight	35:1 (36)	A bid on any single number	5, 17, 23, 0
Split	17:1 (18)	A bid on any two adjacent numbers	1, 2 / 2 ; 5 / 3, 0
Street	11:1 (12)	A bid on any three adjacent numbers (usually a row)	1, 2, 3 / 34, 35, 36 / 0, 00 ; 2 (American wheels only)
Square	8:1 (9)	A bid on any four numbers joined by the corner	1, 2 ; 4, 5 / 5, 6 ; 8, 9 / 0 ; 1, 2, 3 (European wheels only)
Sixianne	5:1 (6)	A bid on two adjacent rows	1, 2, 3 ; 4, 5, 6 / 4, 5, 6 ; 7, 8, 9
<i>Dozen</i>	<i>2:1 (3)</i>	<i>A bid on a group of 12 numbers</i>	<i>First 12, 2nd 12, 3rd 12</i>
<i>Column</i>	<i>2:1 (3)</i>	<i>A bid on one column on the layout</i>	<i>First Column, 2nd Column, 3rd Column</i>
<i>Even Money</i>	<i>1:1 (2)</i>	<i>A bid on any group of 18 numbers</i>	<i>Red, Black, Odd, Even, High 18, Low 18</i>

Italicized bets are “outside bets”—all other bets are “inside”

* The number in parenthesis is the # of chips in your take if the chip wins.

** A semicolon separates conjoining numbers on different rows, while a slash denotes separate examples

Lucky Number bets should be placed on the board first, for all to see—remember, these do not come from any player's bank, but are bonus chips. Then, each player will declare how many chips he is able to bid, how many he must bid, the facet (and style, if appropriate) being used, and any Life that is in play. Remember that the chip given by a style is a gift separate from the player's bank.

Every protagonist in a conflict after the first will be assigned a **handicap**, a number that starts at one for the 2nd player, and goes up from there. The handicap determines how many steps, clockwise from the ball, their final result will be. The fourth player in line, for example, would have a handicap of three for a conflict. By ensuring each player gets a different number, handicaps keep players focused on their own strategy, rather than trying to chase everyone else's chips around the table. Which player gets what handicap is not important—they are entirely equal.

While all the involved players have declared their ability and their commitments and all handicaps are assigned, the croupier will reveal how many chips he has spent on each contest. After that, the croupier will start the wheel spinning. Bidding may not start before the ball bounces—any chip placed on the layout before then is forfeited and added to the croupier's bank. Participating players do not have to bid any chips at all, choosing to ride entirely on the grace of Lady Luck, but may not bid more than their maximum. Until the ball stops bouncing, anyone may change their bids, or even remove them from the table entirely. Afterwards, all they can do is collect their winnings and wave goodbye to the chips they lost. The croupier collects all losing chips and adds them to his bank.

"Handicap?" Allison is worried. "Does that mean Darren has the advantage over me?"

"No, no," Bill reassures her. "I read this in the book earlier. The handicap just makes sure that everyone gets a different number without spinning the wheel a lot of times."

"Oh. Okay. I'll take it then."

Charles counts out some chips and puts the two lucky number bets on the table, one on Heather's 13, and one on Trevor's 5. He then gives them each an extra chip for their Style, to add to the five chips they each took out of the bank. "Okay. You're going up against the road as an obstacle, and against each other." He reveals his spending. "The road is worth four chips. Start bidding now." And with that, he spins the wheel.

Allison starts to complain, but Charles cuts her off. "Time's wasting." She sticks her tongue out at him and starts placing chips. Darren's already got a chip on the square bet {32,33,35,36}, and he put his style chip on the outside bet "3rd 12." Allison tosses one each on red and black, and then puts one of her own chips on the 3rd 12. Darren considers his four remaining chips and puts them on the 4-Line {4,5,6} and the 10-Line {10,11,12}, two apiece. Allison bites her lip, worries, then recklessly tosses her other three chips on the 3rd 12.

Charles quirks an eyebrow at these very risky bids—especially Darren's. Allison worries at his expression, and moves to change her chips, but then the ball stops bouncing. "No more bids," Charles says. Allison gives him a dirty look as the wheel slows down and everyone can see where it ended—on the double zero. Everyone groans.

"This table's rigged," Bill says jokingly.

"Okay, so... Darren wins nothing," Charles says, "that means I add all seven of his chips to my bank."

"And Allison has that handicap," Darren grumps, "so her number is 27."

Allison stops fretting. "Wait, how?"

"The handicap, remember? You get to count one over from the double zero, clockwise."

"Oooooooooohhhh."

Bill laughs. "And you thought Darren would have an advantage over you?"

"Allison, you get a chip for your bid on red, and... wow, you get eight more chips for your bid on the third twelve; four chips, with a two chip return on each one. Add the

five chips that are on the table, and your take is fourteen chips total.” Charles collects the two chips Allison didn’t win and adds them to his bank. He spent four, and got nine back—not a bad deal, really.

A player’s **take** is central to conflict resolution—it is that pool of chips determines the results of the protagonist’s efforts. The take is comprised of the winnings, plus the chips that remained on the table after the bidding was complete. Players allocate the chips in their **take** amongst the various contests in the conflict in order, starting with the character that won the highest number of chips, and continuing to the lowest. With a tie, compare the facets used, adjusted for Life—the higher goes first. If things remain tied, go from left to right across the table, from the croupier.

Whenever two or more characters pit their chips against one another, it is called a **contest**. When two or more characters choose to cooperate in a single contest against a third opponent, they may add their chips together on one side of the contest. This includes assisting supporting characters (by adding chips from a protagonist’s take to their static values). Note that two characters can quite easily cooperate on one contest, yet work at odds on another, all within the same conflict. It is very possible for a character to manage to win many contests, and still manage to lose the whole conflict.

Unlike contests with supporting characters, anyone in a contest with an *obstacle* must defeat it separately—a player may add chips to help another individual only by reducing the number of chips he has available to help himself. Cooperation is still possible, but in the end each contest must succeed on its own merits, and cannot be affected by any other contest with the same obstacle.

After distributing all the chips, compare the final values in each contest. The highest stack of chips wins the contest, thwarting every other participant’s preferred outcome. Ties go to the player, but are narrated by the croupier regardless of who won or who the participants are. Ties are marginal victories—the contest may not be fully resolved, especially if it’s against a major supporting character. The croupier is encouraged to include new complications, or otherwise interrupt the contest, as long as the protagonist still appears to come out on top.

“Man, I’m hosed.” Darren buries his head in his hands.

“Yeah, you are.” Charles laughs. “But with what you bid, you could have hit maybe half the board and it would worked out the same way. You got to cover your ass, man. Look at what Allison did—she at least gave herself some sort of fallback position with her red/black bids. She got lucky with 12 of her chips, but she would have gotten at least two. Of course, I would have put two on each, so I’d at least have four chips to win the road. So you both took pretty big risks.”

Allison smiles a winning smile at the boys as she distributes her chips. First, she takes the time to defeat the road—tossing in five, since although she only needs to meet it, she wants to beat it so she can do the narration. “Well, my skillful driving gets me safely through a rough turn, the same turn that leaves poor Travis...”

“Trevor,” Darren says.

“Oh, Trevor. Okay. The same HAIRPIN turn that leaves Trevor out of control.” Now she has nine more chips to play around with, and Darren can’t really do much to stop her.

“You know,” Darren says hopefully, “you could do something to help me.”

“Could I?”

“Yeah,” Charles says, “you could use some of your chips to help him out of this predicament. Or if you want to really be mean, you can use some of your points to help the road, making his penalty all the greater.”

“Oh...well, I don’t want to do that. I think I’ll help him. I saw him lose control, and managed to nudge him back on the road before anything horrible happened – I’m only

tying that one, though, so Charles can add in some complications if he wants. That's four chips for helping him. Five left."

"Well," Bill says, chuckling, "not that it really matters, but the other six, of course, are used to best him in the race, leaving him in the dust."

"It matters," Charles says helpfully, "it can affect humbling."

"I was hoping you'd forget that part," Darren groans.

"Humbling?" Allison perks up—if Darren doesn't want her to know about it, she definitely wants to learn.

The winner of each contest in a conflict can **humble** the loser(s), up to the margin of difference between the winner and the loser(s), at the discretion of the winner. Humbling a protagonist can reduce facets, styles, or factions on a 1:1 basis, but returns an equal number of chips to the character's bank (bypassing their take). Humbling can reduce *any* facet as long as the narrator can justify it in his actions and results, but cannot actually kill the protagonist. Styles may only be removed if the related facet has already been humbled to zero. Factions can only be humbled if the winner and loser are part of the same faction. Any Life used in the conflict can also be reduced through humbling at the same five to one ratio by which they were purchased; this returns five chips.

Humbling supporting characters is only slightly different—they have no facets, but their appraisal value can be reduced instead. Their factions can also only be removed if the winner is part of the same faction. If the appraisal of a supporting character is humbled to zero, they may be written out of the story entirely if the narrator desires, through either death or other means. Humbling can be interpreted as physical wounds, but in the Fastlane, you can grind a person down to nothing without ever laying a hand on them. Obstacles cannot be humbled. Humbling supporting characters gives extra chips to the croupier's bank.

In certain situations, humbling can collect a favor from the loser, at the same 1:1 ratio as humbling facets. Unlike facet reduction, humbling for favors does not give chips to the opposing player's bank, at least not immediately. Protagonists can create entirely new supporting characters this way, narrating them into existence, then humbling favors out of them. Both protagonists and supporting characters may be beholden this way, but only if their player agrees the character would allow it. This can be a gamble—after all, any character can shirk favors at any time (see **favors** below). As in character creation, each new favor that a supporting character owes or collects increases their appraisal value appropriately.

Finally, humbling can sometimes be used to reduce a favor the defeated character has collected, if the situation is appropriate—this does not reduce the appraisal value of supporting characters, however, nor does it return any chips. Sometimes a little sweet-talking, or a little muscle, can get someone to agree that you don't owe them anything anymore, even if you really do.

If two or more characters cooperate in a particular contest *and win the contest*, the one who contributed the most chips can choose to humble any character who contributed less chips, using margin of difference between their contributions. In this case only, the result of humbling cannot reduce attributes—it must be either a new favor, or a reduction of an appropriate favor. In other words, "I did something for you, now you can do something for me." Of course, this new favor can be **drifted** in a later scene.

"Yeah. Like, now that Heather has helped Trevor, she can get him to owe her a favor. A nine-point favor, in fact, since that's how many chips she can put into helping him, above and beyond the zero chips he managed to put in himself. Alternatively, you can reduce his facets, if you want, by up to nine points. Or some combination of the two."

"Or," Darren says hopefully, "you could choose not to humble me at all. It's not required."

"No, no," Allison says with a glint in her eyes, "I like that idea. You now owe me a nine-point favor."

"Okay," Charles says, "narrate it."

Allison bites her lip. "So Heather pulls up alongside Trevor, and he gets a bit too dis-

tracted looking at her... Assets... that he loses control going around a hairpin turn. Heather pulls back slightly, nudging his Jaguar with her Porsche in just the right way, helping him stabilize instead of careen over the edge. As he slows to a stop, she roars around him and leaves him in the dust, his mouth hanging open, wondering who the hell that woman was, and knowing that he owes her big-time."

"Perfect," Charles says, amidst sounds of general agreement.

"Sounds kind of like a movie scene," Bill says as Darren and Allison both write down the new favor. "Cool."

Charles also writes the new favor down on his master list, sets aside the nine chips he just won for a little later. "Darren, remember you put Trevor's Life on the line, so it's going down by one."

"What?! It's at zero now!"

"You've still got Movie-Making, right? You're not out of the game yet." He claps his hands. "Scene change time! It's your turn, Bill. Allison, Darren, decide how you want to spend your take and I'll get back to you. Oh, sorry Darren, you didn't have any winnings." Darren grumbles some more while Allison gleefully looks over her character sheet.

"Also, Darren, Trevor's Assets is down one. So is Heather's Nerve."

"Huh?" Allison is confused.

Darren explains. "Every time you use a facet, it drops by one. Living in the fast lane takes its toll."

"Well, that sucks," Allison says, but brings her Nerve down.

"Finally," Bill says, "it's my turn." It's obvious he's joking—the exchange between Heather and Trevor didn't take too long. "What've you got for me, Chuck?"

As the example suggests, the winner in any particular contest narrates that victory—Allison won every contest, so she got to narrate everything that happened. The player may do this any way he sees fit, as long as it does not intrude on the narration of any unresolved contest and does not kill any character unless the rules allow it. They may even introduce new characters, or bring in existing ones (and may humble these new characters as well). Other players may participate in this narration, especially if their characters are involved, but the winner is the final director of that contest. The contest on which the largest single stack of chips was spent should be narrated first, then going on down the line. It is the total effort, not the margin of victory, that is important in this case.

When multiple characters cooperate, the one who contributed the most chips gets to narrate—on a tie, they must decide amongst themselves. Conversely, in a true stalemate, where no one stack of chips is better than any other, there is no victor—and thus no definitive narration by either side (though if two opposing players tie, yet defeat a third, they still get to narrate that victory). Stalemated contests either carry over to a new conflict immediately, or the scene ends with the contest unresolved.

Sometimes, the chips in your take are not enough. Maybe your facet is simply too low for you to put enough effort into it, maybe your Life was threatened, or maybe you just had a bad spin. But there are times that you *want* to win, or at least break even so you can have another chance. So you push yourself harder, and maybe burn yourself out. After distributing their take amongst the various contests, players have the option to change the outcome for their characters. However, changing fate comes at a price.

For every point by which a player reduces their protagonist's facets, factions, or collected favors, or for every style they choose to remove, they get a "phantom chip" that can be added to any contest. This is known as **burning**, and does not increase the take—all phantom chips are discarded afterwards. Supporting characters can also burn their appraisal value or favors. Protagonists can also burn any Life, getting five "phantom chips" for each point burned.

All burning must be explained appropriately in the narration, even if it turns out to be insufficient for victory—explain how the character has taxed his Nerve, or expended his Assets, or reduced his appraisal, or what the favors he called in were all about, and what they accomplished. The croupier is the final judge

on whether a particular narration is sufficient, and thus whether a particular burn is allowed.

While chips from the take are distributed in a particular order, burning may last until all participants are satisfied or have completely burned themselves down.

"Well, while this morning race is happening outside of town, Luc's waking up with a pounding hangover. He's in one of the resort's swank rooms—obviously, he managed to score with one of the guests. In fact, she's in the bed beside him. Gorgeous redhead with curves in all the right places. She stretches awake and turns to face you. 'Hello, Handsome,' she says."

"What's her name?"

"You can't remember."

"Go Luc," Darren says. Allison just rolls her eyes.

"Crap. Um, 'Hello, beautiful.'"

"She pulls you close and plants a kiss right on your lips. 'Enough with the talking. C'me're and help wake me up.'"

"Like Luc's going to say no."

"All righty. Luc and this girl are getting all down and dirty... and then someone opens the door to the bedroom. It's Ronnie."

"No way. I want to have a chance to have heard that."

"Okay, Bill. But it'll be Sobriety. Sure you want to risk it?"

Bill looks down at Luc's paltry Sobriety of one. "That's what this game is all about, right?"

"You got a style?"

"I've left Sobriety open, but Luc doesn't really strike me as the perceptive type." Something occurs to him. "But he is paranoid. There's my style."

"Works for me. Let's get this ball rolling. I don't think this is related close enough to Dangerous Women that your Life should come into play."

"Right," Bill says. "That's what I was thinking."

Charles gives Bill a chip to add to the one chip he can use from his bank. He places another chip on the #17, Bill's lucky number. "Okay, it's a big suite, and you're otherwise occupied... let's say it's worth three."

"Three? Okay. I can work with three," Bill says as the ball starts bouncing. He's already got a game plan—one on the second dozen, one on the second column. If they both come up, he'll get six chips, but he's still got a better than 50% chance of having at least one come up, netting him three. And if his lucky number comes up, he'll win all three bids.

The ball bounces and stops... on 5. One more number over, and it would have been Luc's lucky day. Instead, he only gets three chips in his take—two in winnings, plus the one left on the table in the 2nd column spot. Charles collects two chips—not as profitable for him as Bill's venture. "You tied."

"Not for long. I'm burning for chips."

"What are you burning?"

Bill looks Luc over. "Hmmm. People, I think. Jumping out of bed is probably going to hurt his reputation, at least with this woman, unless he can smooth it over."

"Works for me. Your People is now a two. But I'm going to have Ronnie burn his appraisal—just one chip. You're tied again."

Allison laughs. "Good job, Bill."

Bill looks over Luc's sheet. "Um, can I burn off this favor from Heather?"

Charles looks at him. "Can you justify it?"

Bill sighs. "Dammit, no. She's out racing right now. I could pledge a favor to this

girl... but do I want to get rid of some chips? Well, I'll deal with the tie unless Ronnie burns for a win."

"Should've picked a few more favors," Darren says.

"Hey, none of you picked very many, Darren—your bragging rights are empty and meaningless. Anyway, Ronnie and Luc tie, which means I can't narrate the clean victory. Here's what happens instead—Ronnie opens the door to the suite, not the bedroom. Luc thinks he hears something and starts to pull away from the girl. He says 'did you hear something?' just before Ronnie calls out, 'Kristina, honey, you awake yet?'" A look of horror slowly dawns on Bill's face. Charles smiles as he continues. "The redhead you're screwing doesn't even miss a beat as she calls out, 'I'm in the bedroom, Daddy!' and pulls you close to her once more. Scene change."

"What?!" Bill's face is red. "You're evil!"

"Hey, he hasn't found you yet! That's an acceptable stalemate. You can sort out that little snafu later. It's Darren's turn now. Oh yeah, and your Sobriety is down to zero, too."

Sometimes, a protagonist wants an all-or-nothing solution, and knows that burning isn't the right solution. In that case, the protagonist may choose to amass chips over several related conflicts, until a high enough value is reached, and then burst out and humble a character, or a set of characters, all at once. This is entirely allowed within the rules, and is known as **speculation**. Speculation is appropriate in such cases as – taking careful aim before sniping...setting off a bomb that will kill everyone (speculation works as the fuse, creating dramatic tension)...hacking through a difficult security system...performing ritual magic...pretty much any long term project.

Each separate conflict involved in a speculation may have a different difficulties (sometimes zero), use different facets, have different complications as other contests are introduced...but as long as the speculation continues uninterrupted, the chips can be amassed for a larger result. However, if the speculation is abandoned for another task during a conflict, or if any conflict fails to add any chips to the speculation, the entire amassed pile is lost, unused. Otherwise, chips from speculation works exactly as above, although the take itself is handled immediately per the rules below.

After each round of conflicts or scenes is over and narrated, everyone is allowed to spend their winnings on character improvement before the next round begins (the rest of the take is automatically returned to the bank). Protagonists can spend winnings to raise facets and factions at the same one-for-one ratio that they had in character creation, and their players may purchase additional styles for their protagonists if so desired. New factions may not be added this way—but see **character drift** below.

This is the only time the overall facets of a character's may increase. Increases are only allowed if the player can narrate an acceptable in-game reason for the change related to the conflict or its resolution, one that the croupier and other players are willing to accept. It can be a good idea to keep at least some chips aside to return to the bank, as an empty bank usually leads to an ineffectual character, or at least a frustrated one. Finally, if the player can justify it, winnings can be used to reduce favors that their protagonist owes others. All character improvements must be justified in the narration.

Winnings can be used to raise a Life, but only if the Life was used in the conflict. In addition, if the character succeeded in a relevant conflict despite having a Life **threatened**, that Life's value is raised by one. On the other hand, if a character's Life was **on the line**, and didn't manage to at least break even in the appropriate contest(s), reduce the Life by one. These rules apply separately to each Life used in the conflict. In all other cases, the character's Life values remain the same.

Every supporting character that collected a favor, or had one collected, may raise their appraisal values as appropriate, using the same rules that applied in character creation. In addition, the croupier may spend as many chips as desired from his bank to further increase the appraisal values of any supporting character, if they so choose, regardless of whether or not that supporting character was actually involved in the conflict. Unlike protagonists, the croupier does not need to justify his spending—he is herding resources for an entire setting, not simply one character. Once again, make sure to keep some chips aside to return to the bank.

Finally, every protagonist who participated in the conflict has the facet they used reduced by one, although never below zero. Living in the fast lane takes its toll regardless of the outcome, and even playing it safe with bets won't stop a protagonist from sliding towards rock bottom.

After a round of conflicts is completed, and the winnings are spent, any character who has no Life score with a value greater than zero has **burned out**. The next conflict of that character must take him out of the game, one way or another. Bear in mind this doesn't necessarily mean death. See the character drift section for more details.

"Hey, before you get back to Darren," Allison says, "can I tell you how I spent my winnings?"

"Yeah, sure, I almost forgot about that! I've got some of my own to work out." Charles looks at his stack of eleven chips. "And Bill, you can decide how you're spending yours too."

"I put all my winnings back in the bank," Darren says, his voice overly morose.

"What winnings?" Allison grins. Darren sticks his tongue out at her. "Hey, at least you didn't burn out immediately. Anyway, I've put one in my bank—plus the five chips I didn't lose. Of the eight left, I tossed three into Nerve, kicking it up to six, two into Guile, kicking it up to eight, two into Sobriety, kicking it up to five, and one into People. I figure the exhilaration gave her quite the burst of self-confidence."

"Makes sense. Bill?"

"I'm buying my People back up to three, and my Sobriety back up to one."

"Okay, so your bank even?" Charles likes keeping track of these things.

Allison asks, "Are you doing anything with your chips, Charles?"

"Well, I got a total of nine, and I'm not going to spend any more than that right now. Ronnie's appraisal dropped in that little contest, down to fifteen—I'm going to raise it back up by one, and give him the style of 'family' to boot." Charles grins as Bill groans, thinking he knows what's in store when they return to that scene. "Three more I'm putting into the Aspen Sheriff, Gabriel Modesto—that's an elected position, so I'm saying he's the politician that Trevor had Claude photograph. Two are going into his appraisal, which is now four, and he also has the new style of 'holds grudges'." Charles' bank is now 41 chips – overall, he's down one, but he's sure he can make that up later.

"Uh-oh," Darren says. "I knew I should have turned that tie into a win."

"Got that right," Charles answers. "As Trevor pulls to a complete stop, watching the hot woman in the black Porsche fly off down the road, he sees flashing red lights come up behind him. Shortly thereafter, Sheriff Modesto steps out of the cab and starts walking towards him. What're you going to do?"

Favors and Factions

There are quite a few squeaky wheels in the high life, and obligation is the grease that keeps them spinning. Through the unspoken rules of debt and compensation, high-rollers trade away bits and pieces of their souls. In return, they get a brief taste of true human connection, and establish a rough pecking order amongst themselves. Those who learn the value of favors often go far, while those who keep to themselves burn out sooner, rather than later. Remember: you first have to give if you want to receive.

Characters can use favors they have collected in one of four manners. First, collected favors can be burned along with facets in the latter stages of conflict resolution, which was described above. The second manner—drifting favors—is described in the next section. A third manner can be used to humble characters outside of conflicts: for each point called in, the player can reduce his victim's facets, appraisal values, even their other collected favors, or remove styles. Of course, as with other forms of humbling, this immediately adds chips to the humbled player's bank. In addition, this requires a properly constructed scene. The victim cannot use a conflict to resist or otherwise avoid this humbling, but can choose to **shirk** the favor instead (see below).

Finally, characters can **call in** favors, assuming it makes sense in the context of a narration. They may cash in as many points as they choose, up to the value of the favor, and if they really feel they need more, they can choose to **OWE** additional chips as well. When the first appropriate conflict shows its face, the debtor gets a number of chips equal to the value of the favor (but not any additional chips for new favors pledged), which must be used immediately and appropriately in the conflict. Later related conflicts will require them to bid at least the same number of chips, of possible. This only applies to protagonists—the croupier is rewarded in a different manner, described above.

If a character is ever unable to complete a task he has pledged for whatever reason after collecting the chips (including belated instances of **passing the buck** or paying **interest**, see below), he must give up a number of chips from his bank equal to the favor, and the favor is reinstated at its old numerical level—plus interest (see below). Players unable to pay these chips are sometimes forgiven, but other times simply humbled. Note that if a favor is somehow solved without a single conflict, the protagonist earns the chips upon completion of the favor. The croupier should never allow that to happen.

Since players get to keep any winnings they might receive, bidding additional chips over the favor-required minimum is encouraged for protagonists—the favor just sets the minimum, not the maximum (that's set by the facet the character brings to the table). Additional chips can easily mean additional winnings, which are always a useful thing to have. The croupier, on the other hand, simply gets to spend less chips from his bank.

While paying off a favor can be beneficial, as it is a source of chips, sometimes a character might not be willing to do so, or might be unable. There are a number of ways around this. First off, they can **pass the buck**—handing off the request to other people who owe them (or pledging other people new favors). Characters do not get any chips when passing the buck, but the favor is still considered paid off, barring shirking or other such ilk. (As opposed to a player calling in favors to **HELP**, but still participating in the resolution).

On the other hand, perhaps the character doesn't want to give up his hard-earned favors. In this case, they can choose to offer **interest**, increasing the owed favor value by one. The character calling in the favor chooses whether they accept the interest—if they don't accept it, and the debtor does not choose another course of action, he is considered to have **shirked** the character owing the favor. Interest does *not* increase a supporting character's appraisal.

Any character can choose to shirk a favor at any time, simply erasing it from their sheet. Bear in mind, though, shirking gives a number of chips equal to the value of the favor to the person they owe (or the croupier, in the case of supporting characters). Favors can only be shirked in wholes, even if only part of a favor had been called in. Burning bridges is never cheap, and seldom easy. On the other hand, if a supporting character is written out of the game, all their favors go with them, without penalty.

Collecting new favors is simple—just do something for someone else, and make sure they are grateful for it. Favors are often collected through conflicts, either through humbling or through burning, and can also be collected through character drift, as covered in the next section. This works both ways—protagonists and secondary characters are equally susceptible to favors. Other times, a person can come to you and ask you for a favor in advance—if you perform it, they will owe you one in return. The value of this favor should be decided through out-of-game negotiation.

Factions are similar to favors, but longer lasting. Any time a protagonist calls in a favor through a faction, their associated Faction value goes down by one. On the other hand, whenever they perform a favor for a fellow faction member and the faction value is at least one, their associated Faction goes up by one (in addition to the chips they collect). The downside to factions is that there is a penalty when opposing a fellow faction member in a conflict—this reduces the Faction value of the protagonist by one for each **contest** in which there was opposition, within each conflict. Finally, in addition to the gift of chips to the aggrieved party, **shirking** a faction-favor when asked also reduces a Faction by one (passing the buck neither raises or lowers the Faction). Collecting a favor from a fellow faction member through humbling also reduces the Faction by one. Unlike other favors, factions may only be **called in** (either normally or by **passing the buck**), and may not be used in any of the other manners noted above.

Character Drift

In Fastlane, characters are fluid things. Over the past few sections, it has been clear how often things are expected to change, and how little stability the characters (and players!) really have. Winnings improve things, humbling and burning reduce them, and favors are traded through thick and thin. Even Life, the anchor for most characters, can yo-yo in its own manner, and styles can be burned or taken away.

If You Don't Have a Wheel ...

For those of you who do not own a roulette wheel, please consider getting one for this game. The smallest ones are very inexpensive, and while they do not have the sheer versatility of dice, they are a wonderful diversion at parties, and add considerably to the atmosphere of any Fastlane game. If you are unable or unwilling to purchase a wheel, or simply don't have one handy, don't fret! There is an alternative, and all you need are this book, and six-sided dice of two different colors, preferably enough for each player (including the croupier) to have two. Everyone has six sided dice!

The first method generates odds roughly equal to the European roulette wheel. Handicaps work slightly differently than in standard Fastlane—the problem here is not whether two players will get different numbers, but when they will get the zero. The first player's handicap is one, not zero, and from there, it counts up to six. Simultaneously, the croupier and all players will roll two six-sided dice, each of two different colors. If the croupier rolls doubles with a digit equal to a player's handicap, then the final value of that character is zero. Otherwise, the player looks at the table provided on the character sheet, using the lighter die to compare against the rows, and the darker die to compare against the columns. The result is the number that determines payoffs, just as if it had come up on the wheel.

The second method generates odds that simulate the American roulette wheel, doubling the chances of a zero. In this method, handicaps must be set during character creation, like Lucky Numbers, and do not change over time. Choose any two different numbers between one and six—doubles are forbidden, and no two characters should have the same set of numbers. If the croupier rolls the two numbers listed, it is a zero if the lighter die was the smaller, or a double zero if the darker die was the smaller. Otherwise, like the first method, the player simply compares his dice against the same table, on the character sheet, and determines the result.

In both cases, since rolling the dice takes significantly less time than spinning the wheel, bids should be placed prior to the roll, rather than during. A time limit of sixty seconds is a good rule of thumb, to keep the same pace.

However, sometimes players want more control. Sometimes, things happen in a game that requires change. By spending chips out of their bank, players can **drift** points from one facet to another, or from a favor to a facet, or vice versa – or even to another protagonist's facets. This must be explained in a scene, and costs the player one chip per facet or collected favor reduced, regardless of how much they were changed (or how many facets or favors were increased). This is also the only time a faction can be added to a character – one chip to get it at zero, plus additional chips to drift points in from other facets or favors.

In other words, you get to spend two chips to reduce your Sobriety and Assets to increase your People by throwing a huge party. Spend a chip to buy down your Guile and buy a new Favor at the party. Spend a chip, pledge a new favor to the crime boss, and drift those chips into your other facets. This is a powerful tool for players to create new scenes—use it wisely, and use it often. One chip *can* also change a style, but may not remove it, move it between facets, or add another one. It can move a style to the same facet of a different protagonist.

But what about Life? Life is important—it defines who the characters really are, and *why* they are. By spending one chip, a player can change the focus of a zero-point Life, exchanging one thing for another. More importantly, if a player wants his character to invest in his Life, or believes the character has found a new Life, he should tell the croupier. A special scene will be framed where the character will do something appropriate—romance the woman he loves, spend time working on his martial arts, studying his academic passion, drinking himself into a stupor, whatever is appropriate.

Devoting this much time to one thing in Fastlane is costly, however—each of the character's facets must be immediately reduced by one. However, one of the character's Life values is raised by one, or a new Life is added with a value of one—something that is always worthwhile. Life, quite literally, signifies the protagonist's reasons for living. No matter what, only one point of Life can be added per scene invested.

Burning Out

If all a protagonist's Lives are zero, that character has **burned out**. The unfortunate wretch is to be removed from the game, one way or another, in their very next conflict. The player and the croupier are encouraged to collaborate to make this final conflict suitably dramatic and appropriate for the character.

Burnout can happen in a variety of ways. A character might simply drop out of the high life and join the drudgery of normal life. Another might stay in the fast lane as a secondary character, becoming one of the hangers-on whose fire has gone out. Some could die, one way or another, gasping out some dying words, sacrificing themselves for a noble cause or to feed their own hungers. Finally, and only if in the last conflict he manages to regain at least a point of Life, the wretch might regain redemption, bow out of the high life, and live happily ever after, at least as far as Fastlane is concerned.

This choice is up to the player—he should feel free to burn as much of the character as possible to achieve his character's goals, as the blaze of glory is one of the things Fastlane is all about. Afterwards, any chips remaining in their bank becomes their new appraisal value, assuming their character did not die—if they did die, the chips are added to the croupier's bank and can be used immediately to create new characters. The player may create a new character using the same number of chips used at the start of the game—usually 36.

Adding and Removing Players

Adding a new character to a Fastlane group is very simple. Just give the croupier additional chips equal to what the new player is given, and allow the croupier to spend *any* amount of his bank creating new characters in response to the new protagonist's Lives, Favors, Factions, and so on. Generally speaking, the new player should be given the same number of chips that all the other players got at the start of the game. If they take over an existing secondary character, just let it happen, and don't bother to balance any existing favors, only any new favors the player imagines.

If a player leaves is no longer able to play in the group, removing their protagonist is even simpler. Simply ignore them if it is a temporary hiatus, the croupier playing them (including bidding from their bank) if absolutely necessary; if it is a permanent departure, treat the character as though it has **burned out**.

Setting the Stage

Many things that might be considered important in other games are just flash and glitz in Fastlane. You don't need rules for advanced technology to run "Fastlane in space"—it's all a matter of Assets and how you use them. Specific things may be a Life, a secondary character, or even just a style, and there's nothing stopping them from being all three. Same with fantasy settings—magic is just another tool, and there's no harm in letting it just be color (or even, in some cases, a secondary character with its own agenda and influence). After all, what's important in Fastlane is the high-rolling lifestyle, not the props, and for all that it's neat, both magic and technology are just props in service to the attitude.

Still, sometimes some tweaks to the rules can be made to help encourage certain worldviews—just moving to the European wheel from the American one can have a strong impact on the gameplay. Perhaps in your fantasy game, wizards require training—thus, in order to use magic in a conflict, a protagonist needs to have magic-use as a Life. Maybe you want a game with a strong emphasis on friction between groups, so you require your protagonists to be a member of two Factions, at least one of them not having another protagonist as a member (and at least one of them having another protagonist as a member).

One group wants to do a "hero and sidekicks" game, so they give one protagonist 72 chips while the rest take the standard 36. In another game, the players are supposed to feel ground under the thumb of a powerful figure—so the group decides that each protagonist owes a single 100 point favor to some individual or corporation that doesn't get to be balanced out with collected favors. There are a million ways to change the rules, and a million reasons to change them. Don't hesitate to change them if you see the need, but remember to use them, and keep in mind the ramifications of any change or restriction before choosing to use it.

A lot of people who have heard of this game consider the roulette wheel and immediately think casinos and gambling, Las Vegas or Monte Carlo, glitz and glamour in the modern day. There's nothing wrong with that—it's simple and easily grasped, and a hell of a lot of fun to boot. But don't let those initial impressions blind you to other possibilities. Decadence and dissipation can fit into any setting, and have been around since time began, and will be until the universe itself collapses and time comes to an end.

Here are just a few of the many possibilities for a Fastlane game, arranged in alphabetical order by title.

Bar Time—Psychics on the town in modern day, they can occasionally see the future, but never more than ten or fifteen minutes. This doesn't make it very useful in most situations, apart from gambling—so you can find them at horse tracks, in casinos, anywhere only a few minutes can make a difference. Sometimes you can figure out who they are, but usually you can't. All the protagonists have this relatively minor power, which manifests as a Life that is involved one way or another in *every* conflict they're in, no matter what. And when you have the kinds of winning streaks Bartimers have, trouble seems to want to find you.

Dungeoneers—Almost every roleplayer has at least heard of the dungeon crawl, where a group of well-armed individuals venture to a distant location, usually underground, to face monsters and traps in search of treasure. Well, in **Dungeoneers** it is turned around—the protagonists are one of many inhabitants of a massive dungeon, dealing with each other, forming alliances and waging war while protecting their home from the predation of vile "adventurers" from above. Things like gold and silver are important to these adventurers, but not to the dungeoneers. To make this even more twisted and political, have the dungeoneers in league with the people in the nearby town, who live off the adventurer trade as they come through, buy supplies, and head into the dungeon to die. The town, of course, rewards the dungeon dwellers handsomely for playing their part.

Last Call—An asteroid the size of Alaska is about to hit the Earth, and there's no way to stop it—the protagonists have weeks, maybe even just days to live. It looms heavy in the sky at night, already close enough to be larger than a star, looping around the Earth like a drunken fish until it finally falls down. For dramatic purposes, the rock will fall at the same moment the first protagonist reaches **burnout**—so one character's fall will spell the death for everything, and the final conflict will come in the last breath of Earth. Don't go out with a whisper—go out with a bang!

Rome Burns—What better period of history is there for the ultimate in decadence than the latter days of the Roman Empire (or alternatively, the last days of the Byzantine Empire)? Let the players be Senators, or perhaps advisors to the Emperor, jockeying for position and trying to keep the Holy Empire together despite the shoddy management and the incursions of the barbarians. Or for a different twist, make them all slaves in the household of a powerful man (perhaps another protagonist with more chips?).

Sin System—The planet Vega IV is a newly colonized planet, barely sixty years old, covered with massive plantations worked by the indentured. During the last war, Vega was occupied by the Empire's forces, and became a hotbed of smuggling and corruption that only got worse once the war was over. A major cargo port, thanks mainly to the war effort, a mix of military personnel, plantation owners, and the growing presence of the bustling space dock colonize Vega IV. As the criminal elements consolidate their power, Vega IV is quickly gaining the reputation of being a dirty planet, a perfect place for decadence and corruption.

Snow Blind—The sample setting from the examples in the premeditation section, this is Hollywood's version of Aspen. Backstabbing movie makers pull the strings for jealous politicians and illicit deals are made in smoky rooms and hidden booths, the jet-set winter on the slopes and the dinette set serve them in the bars, there are dangerous women (and men!) everywhere you turn and fast cars zoom down the snow-dusted roads while skiers race on down the mountains. Snow Blind is the perfect setting if you don't have the time to create a protagonist of your own—Luc, Heather and Travis are already complete and ready to play.

Tin Gods—The protagonists are gods amongst men, and men amongst gods, in any time and place from a standard fantasy world, to the far future, or even the modern day. The group begins by creating a pantheon of gods in the Greek style, full of incest, intrigue and ire. Each protagonist is then defined as a demigod, the offspring of one of these gods with a mortal (usually but not always a female)—and must have at least one favor connecting them to a god, one to a mortal, and one to another demigod (this last can be another protagonist). More powerful than their human counterparts, but less powerful than their immortal forebears, these Tin Gods are embroiled in political tugs of war with both men and gods, using and abusing their power. A demigod's life rarely ends well, so why not use the power at your command to do whatever you want? Your next breath might be your last!

Zombie Jamboree—The dead walk, and every day that goes by, more people join them—you don't even have to die at the hands of a zombie, just die. Nobody really knows why—cosmic radiation? government experiment? magic spells?—and you in particular don't really care. The world's coming to an end, and while the government is trying to research some sort of cure, it's probably not going to come in time. So why not live it up in the time you have left? Party all day and all night, keeping a shotgun close by for when the zombies come—and they will. These zombies are very dangerous—they are treated as single supporting character that starts off with an appraisal value of 36 (or whatever the protagonists get), and always burn their way to a victory. In addition, every chip the croupier spends to set difficulties on any conflict gets immediately added to the zombie's appraisal, even if the zombies were brought down to zero and killed. In other words, sooner or later, the dead will win. It's only a matter of time.

Several Fastlane supplements are planned, being small chunks of settings, scenarios, rules tweaks, and other role-playing material. If you have an idea for a Fastlane supplement, send it in—and you might write your own! See the Twisted Confessions website for more details.

Backroom Deals

Croupier's Tips

- ◆ Props, the environment, special effects, the only times these matter is when they show up in Lives or styles, and even then it's not very much. Fastlane is a game about people, attitudes, and relationships—everything else is just there as support, and flash.
- ◆ Regardless of where and when it might be set, Fastlane is not meant to be a game where downtime comes cheaply. Almost every scene set should have some sort of conflict, preferably involving the protagonist's Lives, factions, and favors in some manner.
- ◆ Keep the action going. If things start to drag, have favors called in, fights break out, invent vendettas or mistaken identities, or just have a couple guys burst in and try to kill everyone in the room. Figure out why later.
- ◆ In scenes where conflict does not happen, lay the groundwork for future conflicts—overheard gossip, favors being asked, and so on. Remember that even a social call can turn into a conflict, when people are out to injure a reputation or negotiate a deal—**People** is a facet too!
- ◆ Listen to the player's ideas—they have the power to suggest and set scenes through character drift, and when they narrate a victorious conflict, what they say can ruin whatever plans you might have. This is on purpose! The croupier is supposed to have to think on his feet, just like the rest of the players. Don't hesitate to throw your plans out the window—roll with the punches, keep things moving, introduce new complications.
- ◆ Be smart with your bank spending. On average, you will collect half the chips from any player's bid—keep that in mind when setting the difficulties for conflicts. Throw too few chips on the table and the protagonists will never be challenged, but throw too many and you will eventually run out.
- ◆ Set up conflicts where the difficulties are tiny, to give your bank a chance to refresh, and the protagonists a chance to shine.
- ◆ The more players in a conflict, the better for your bank, especially if you can get them in opposition.
- ◆ Spend chips on gut instinct, the size of your bank, and how important a task is **RIGHT NOW**. The same obstacle or task could be ten chips in one conflict, and only two in another. That's okay. Difficulty is as fluid as anything else in the Fastlane, based on dramatic necessity and the fever of the moment, not ever anything objective.
- ◆ Don't worry too much about what the difficulty *should* be—just set it and let it ride. Remember that even if you don't spend a chip, a player needs to win a single chip to do more than just break even.
- ◆ Don't overdo complications on ties – make them only as important as the contest itself.
- ◆ If a supporting character is meant to be important, give him a high appraisal value and some styles instead of tossing chips about like they were candy—appraisal lasts longer, and styles keep your spending down.
- ◆ Don't be afraid to burn a supporting character's appraisal in close contests—that's why it's there.
- ◆ If the appraisal of a supporting character increases, remember that is a sign that they *are* becoming more important to the story, and that you should somehow showcase them in later scenes.
- ◆ Lucky numbers are a devastating presence when they come up—thirty-six chips are both an unstoppable force, and an immovable object. Let your players enjoy it, and remember to enjoy it yourself.

Optional Rule: Distributed Authority

The standard game of Fastlane has a single croupier who acts as an arbiter of the rules, sets the scenes, and plays the antagonist to the other players' protagonists. The setting is his character, and the combined appraisals of the supporting characters are his facets. The resources of his bank are dedicated to one thing—opposing the protagonists. The croupier plays a very useful role in many Fastlane games. But he isn't, strictly, necessary.

Distributed authority allows everyone at the table to have a protagonist. It does so by rotating the croupier's duties from one player to the next. Under distributed authority, player's bank does double duty,

first working for their protagonist, and then for the supporting characters. Distributed authority necessitates several changes from the base rules. First, players should be given more chips in their initial bank, as they are required to spend chips on supporting characters as well. A suggested number is double the standard, or 72 chips – this effectively take the # of chips that would be in the croupier's bank, and divides it amongst the participants. Each player must create their own supporting characters in response to the Lives they choose for their protagonist, spending chips as if they were their own croupier. They may collaborate with other players, pooling their chips on certain appraisals, or they may work separately. A mix of both is generally the best choice. All supporting characters are added to the master sheet.

The player with the most chips left in his bank acts as croupier in the first scene of the game. On a tie, decide it however you wish. The first scene framed should be for the player to the immediate left of the croupier. After each conflict is completed, the lowest bidder/spender in that conflict becomes (or remains) the croupier, and remains so until their responsibility changes again – this counts only chips spent from the bank. If a player wants his protagonist in a scene while he is playing the role of the croupier, the protagonist may be played just like any other supporting character. However, a player may not improve their protagonist in any way through the spending of chips while they are acting as croupier.

Whenever the croupier duties change hands, the new croupier must start the next scene with the protagonist of the former croupier, then continue to the right around the table. Winnings can be spent on character improvement every time the croupier duties change hands, or after a complete round of scenes for all players. When a new player joins a distributed authority game, he gets the same number of initial chips as everyone else (usually 72), and after creating a new protagonist and supporting characters, immediately becomes the new croupier.

Aaron, Beth, and Cyndi pick up a copy of Fastlane. They look over the rules and decide to play a single game using the sample characters at the beginning of the book – but none of them wants to be the croupier. “That’s okay,” Cyndi says, “we can use the Distributed Authority rules. They’re in the back.”

“That’s perfect,” Aaron says, “one character for each of us.”

“We’ll need to split up the chips in the croupier’s bank, though – that seems the most fair. Forty gives us 13 chips each, with one left over.”

“Let’s give that to whoever starts off as croupier,” Beth chimes in. “They’ll need it.”

Aaron looks the rules and characters over. “Luc starts with the most chips, so whoever plays him will be the first croupier.”

“You do it,” both of the girls say simultaneously.

Aaron laughs. “Okay, Luc sounds like a neat character anyway, and it’s not like I’ll be croupier forever. There’s only one girl, though, which one of you is going to play her?”

“I don’t mind playing a guy, so Cyndi can take the girl.”

“Okay, so I’m Heather, Aaron’s Luc, and you’re Trevor?”

Beth smiles. “Yeah. So we each take our banks and add 13, and Aaron gets an additional one.” Beth’s bank rises to 23, Cyndi’s to 25, and Aaron’s to 27.

“Anyone want to add any new NPCs, or change your characters any?” Nobody does, so Aaron continues. “I think I’m going to take a note from this Charlie guy in the example. The first scene will open with Heather driving down the road, and she immediately sees a blue Jaguar up ahead of her, obviously giving her car a run for the money.”

“Well,” Cyndi says, “no way am I passing up this opportunity. Vroom vroom.”

“Trevor’s definitely up to the challenge. He slows down enough to let Heather come up beside him, then after a moment admiring her curves, guns his engine.”

“Pig! Admiring her curves indeed!” Cyndi snorts. “Okay, well I think Bill had a good idea going, so I’m going to use his Assets, with the Jaguar style, and using Speed to get an extra chip. That’s five chips from my bank, and one extra for the style.”

"I'm going a different route. Instead of Nerve, I'm using Heather's Guile, with the style of cunning. She's got a few tricks up her sleeve. Do I have to use Flashy Cars?"

"Yeah," Aaron says after checking the rules, "it's definitely in play."

"In that case, I'll threaten it. Play it safe, y'know? So that leaves me with five, or six with the style."

"Alright, and Beth your handicap is one."

"Done deal," Cyndi says, impatient to get on with it. "Let's go."

Aaron puts the lucky number bets on Heather's 13 and Trevor's 5, and then reveals he's spending four chips on the road, just as much as Charlie did. The wheel is spun. Beth puts two chips on Red, two on Black, and one each on the first and third columns. Cyndi, meanwhile, puts one on each of High and Low, then tosses two on the third column, and two on the third dozen. She crosses her fingers as the ball bounces to a stop... on 17.

"Well," Cyndi says, "that sucked. At least my Life didn't go down." All she managed to win was one chip from High – making her total take 2. Meanwhile, Beth can't believe it – her first spin, and she got her lucky number, thanks to the handicap. Five is red, so in addition to the 35 chips from the lucky number, Beth also gets two chips for her Red bet. That's 38 in winnings, plus the three chips on the board gives her a total take of 41.

Aaron collects the remaining chips: six from Cyndi's losses, and four more from Beth's losses – giving him a net earnings of six. Not too shabby. Cyndi is surprised. "Looks like the croupier job isn't all bad. Maybe I should gun for the position next."

Aaron only spent four chips, while both the girls bid five from their bank, so he remains the croupier. That means that Luc is safe, for the time being. He racks his brain for the next scene while the girls debate how they'll distribute their take, and then spend their winnings.

Glossary

appraisal—A method of ranking the potential importance of secondary characters; the higher the appraisal, the more story-power the character can command.

bank—The name for the chips that a player has at his command.

burning—The act of reducing character traits in return for a shot at victory.

burnout—Burnout can only happen to protagonists, and is a specific set of conditions that leads to removal of the character from the game. The player must make a new character.

character—Any entity in the story, either protagonist or secondary character.

chips—Best represented by actual poker chips, chips are the resources that a player controls on behalf of their protagonist, or that the croupier controls on behalf of the secondary characters.

column—A type of roulette bet that pays two to one and requires the roulette layout—bets can be placed on any of the first, second, or third columns.

conflict—Any story event that requires arbitration through the use of the roulette wheel. Conflicts are opportunities for both gain and for loss, and are integral to the telling of any story.

contest—A contest is a particular goal to be won within a conflict. Some conflicts have only one contest, others have many.

croupier—Player in charge of secondary characters, setting scenes, and conflict resolution.

distributed authority—A set of optional rules where the croupier's authority is distributed and traded amongst all the players.

dozen—A type of roulette bet that pays two to one. It can be placed on the first dozen, second dozen, or third dozen.

drift—Characters in Fastlane are not stable, and drift is the method by which a player can control how his protagonist changes

even money—A type of Roulette bet that pays one to one. The even money bets are red, black, odd, even, high, and low.

facet—Broad categorizations of a protagonist's aptitudes and abilities at a particular moment in time. Supporting characters only have an appraisal instead.

faction—Groups that characters can belong to, where any member can call upon the assistance of any other member.

favor—The main currency of life in the fast lane, favors are a mechanical representation of who a character owes, and how much that character owes them.

handicap—A simple method of determining multiple results from a single spin of the roulette wheel, to allow for players to face off against each other with only a single spin.

humble—Winning a contest in Fastlane allows the winner to humble the loser, which can involve reducing character traits, or collecting a new favor. Winners are never required to humble losers.

interest—If a character cannot pay back a collected favor when it is called in, they can choose to owe interest on the favor.

Life—Life defines what is important to a protagonist; what keeps them going; their reasons to live. Supporting characters don't have Lives of their own.

lucky number—Every protagonist has a lucky number, which is an additional straight bet on every contest in which they participate. This gives Lady Luck a chance to reward them, even when the chips are down.

obstacle—An obstacle is a type of supporting character that does not last from conflict to conflict, or scene to scene. It needs to be bested separately by each participant, and cannot be humbled.

pass the buck—Instead of paying off a favor, characters can choose to call in their own favors to help pay them off.

player—A player is any participant in a Fastlane game, be they croupier or protagonists.

protagonist—The main characters in Fastlane, each player other than the croupier plays a single protagonist.

put on the line—One of two choices that a player can make when one of their protagonist's Lives comes into play. This option raises their effective facet rating, but if the character loses the contest, the Life put on the line drops by one.

shirk—As an alternative to paying off favors or passing the buck, a character can choose to shirk a favor, removing it entirely. This is seldom recommended, as individuals don't take kindly to shirked favors.

sixianne—Also known as a double line, the sixianne is a bid on any six adjacent numbers on a roulette layout. Pays five to one.

speculation—a technique players can use to increase the effectiveness of an action by combining the results of contests over several conflicts

split—A bid on any two adjacent numbers on a roulette layout. Pays 17 to one.

square—A bid on any four adjacent numbers on a roulette layout. Pays 8 to 1.

straight—A bid on exactly one number. Pays 35 to one.

street—Also known as a line bet, a bid on any three adjacent numbers on a roulette layout. Pays 11 to 1.

style—A particular focus of a character that gives an advantage when it comes into play.

supporting character—All the entities in the story that are not considered protagonists, and who the protagonists can struggle against. A supporting character can be an individual, a group, a personality trait, an item, the environment, or whatever else the story needs.

take—The take is the total number of chips a player collects after a contest, comprised of *winnings* (q.v.) and the chips that were left on the layout.

threaten—One of two choices that a player can make when one of their protagonist's Lives comes into play. This option lowers their effective facet rating, but if the character wins the contest, the Life threatened goes up by one.

winnings—All the chips that a player wins after a bid—this does not include the chips the player actually bid.

Name: _____ Chips in the bank: _____
Player: _____ Lucky Number: _____

Fastlane

FACETS	STYLES
People: ○○○○○○○○○○○○○○	_____
Assets: ○○○○○○○○○○○○○○	_____
Nerve: ○○○○○○○○○○○○○○	_____
Guile: ○○○○○○○○○○○○○○	_____
Sobriety: ○○○○○○○○○○○○○○	_____

	RATING		RATING
_____	is my life.	_____	is my life.
_____	is my life.	_____	is my life.
_____	is my life.	_____	is my life.
_____	is my life.	_____	is my life.
_____	is my life.	_____	is my life.
_____	is my life.	_____	is my life.

FAVORS

Who I owe:	Working
I owe _____ a ____ point favor.	_____
I owe _____ a ____ point favor.	_____
I owe _____ a ____ point favor.	_____
I owe _____ a ____ point favor.	_____
I owe _____ a ____ point favor.	_____
I owe _____ a ____ point favor.	_____
I owe _____ a ____ point favor.	_____

Who owes me:

_____ owes me a ____ point favor. _____

_____ owes me a ____ point favor. _____

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_____ owes me a ____ point favor. _____

_____ owes me a ____ point favor. _____

DICE / ROULETTE CHART

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	1R	2B	14R	4B	25R	6B
2	8B	7R	10B	19R	11B	32R
3	3R	13B	16R	15B	27R	17B
4	20B	9R	22B	21R	24B	34R
5	5R	26B	18R	28B	30R	29B
6	31B	12R	33B	23R	35B	36R

Handicap: _____

FACTIONS

Master Favor Record



Chips in the bank:_____

Favor: _____ owes _____ a ____ point favor Working: _____

Favor: _____ owes _____ a ____ point favor Working: _____

Favor: _____ owes _____ a ____ point favor Working: _____

Favor: _____ owes _____ a ____ point favor Working: _____

Favor: _____ owes _____ a ____ point favor Working: _____

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Favor: _____ owes _____ a ____ point favor Working: _____

Favor: _____ owes _____ a ____ point favor Working: _____

Favor: _____ owes _____ a ____ point favor Working: _____

Favor: _____ owes _____ a ____ point favor Working: _____

Supporting Character List

fastlane[illegible]

Fastlane

		0		00	
1 to 18	1st 12	1	2	3	
		4	5	6	
		7	8	9	
		10	11	12	
EVEN	2nd 12	13	14	15	
		16	17	18	
		19	20	21	
		22	23	24	
 	3rd 12	25	26	27	
		28	29	30	
		31	32	33	
		34	35	36	
ODD	19 to 36				
19 to 36					
		2:1	2:1	2:1	