THE STORY GRID GUILD
Writing Sprint for the week of April 13, 2020

Scene Assignment Type: A "Looking After the Kids" scene with third person omniscient time travel.

An example is a Scene from Taffy Brodesser-Akner's *Fleishman is in Trouble*.

Character Number One: Your protagonist is actively moving through a series of chores, tending to two children, one unsatisfiable teenager (**Character Two**) and one precocious middle-schooler (**Character Three**).

Character Number Four: The protagonist's spouse, inside of a recitation of a previous event.

Character Number Five: The protagonist's spouse's intermediary, someone who has been put up to convince the protagonist to adopt a particular behavior.

Analyzing the Scene:

You may find the prompt is enough to get you writing without having to sweat the story grid structural details.

But you may find it easier to flow into the writing process by outlining the scene before you start scribbling.

Whatever the case, follow this simple process.

If you are energized by the prompt…just start writing and follow whatever pops into your mind without any hesitation or second guessing.

If you are befuddled and need to think through an outline, head on down to the "analyzing the scene" and "five commandments" prompts below.

Answering these questions should start poking ideas out of you. Once you get excited about a particular idea…start writing. You don't have to answer all of the questions before you begin. Just use as many as you need to generate some sentences.

You may get stuck before you complete a first draft of the scene. If that's the case, go back to the questions below and work through them as long as it takes to get you writing again. Don't revise the previous material until you've put together a first draft. So, if you decide to change the inciting incident in order to solve the crisis, change it later after you've created the rest of the scene.

The key element here is to only outline and edit when you find yourself stuck. And when you're writing, don't break to outline or edit until you absolutely have to.

Here are our SG scene tools.

A STORY EVENT is an active change of life value for one or more characters as a result of conflict (one character's desires clash with another's).

A WORKING SCENE contains at least one Story Event. To determine a Scene's Story Event, answer the following four questions:

1. What are the characters doing? The narrator of the story (pick someone who has a second-party relationship with the protagonist) is outlining what has happened to a friend. The narrative device is akin to spending a long evening with someone who tells you the inside story about a mutual acquaintance and/or friend.

2. What is the essential action of what the characters are doing in this scene? Take each character and figure out what their object of desire is for this scene. What does the protagonist wish to accomplish? Who is your protagonist? That is, you should consider the intellectual feint that Brodesser-Akner employs in her novel. At one point in the book, the narrator says that "the only way to get someone to listen to a woman [is] to tell her story through a man," which is what the book in itself does. Brodesser-Akner brilliant employs the traditional and much lauded Philip Roth or John Updike-like narrative device. She presents the reader with the engaging and familiar privileged white male existential crisis narrative but with a twist.

What does the protagonist want? What does the antagonist (the spouse) want? What are they doing to get their desires met?

3. What life value has changed for one or more of the characters in the scene? Someone is going to "win" the scene. And one of the other people will lose the scene. That means that someone will get what they set out to achieve. The others will fail to get what they want. Evaluating the life value shift for all three characters will enable you to get a tight grip on the conflict.

4. Which life value should I highlight on my Story Grid Spreadsheet? Let's add all three characters' life value shifts to our spreadsheet for in-depth scene analysis. So, the protagonist would have a value shift from "win to lose" and the antagonist would have the opposite value shift "lose to win." Clearly considering the win/lose dynamics in a scene will home in on conflict. When you have three characters, think about all three of the interactions.

HOW THE SCENE ABIDES BY THE FIVE COMMANDMENTS OF STORYTELLING

Inciting Incident:

Choose an unexpected event to drop into the scene that will require the protagonist to actively process. In Brodesser-Akner's scene the unexpected event is the inquiry from the son… "Dad, what's the block universe?"

This drop-in unexpected event (a phere) is a tool to achieve the protagonist's scene desire (in this case to rationalize the protagonist's portrayal of his ex-wife as a selfish bitch) or an obstacle that prevents them from achieving their scene desire. The fact that the protagonist's desire is embedded in the narrative of the third person omniscient is the perfect way to set up the global payoff. That is the narrator (a female friend of the protagonist) has bought in to the male story to such a large degree that she repeats it as if it were the "truth."

Progressive Complication: After the unexpected event drops in, have at least two complications that threaten or encourages the goals of the protagonist. That is, they either make the likelihood of the goal to be realized lesser or greater than the prior beat/s. In this case we have the flashbacks to the protagonist's wife setting him up to get a more lucrative job and her seemingly manipulating him into upgrading his living standards.

Turning Point Progressive Complication:
Metabolizing the phere event will eventually lead to the value shift of the scene, which is the turning point progressive complication. The goal value state of the protagonist will be realized or not. In this case, the reader can't help but feel a growing antipathy toward the protagonist's spouse.

Crisis: With the value shift changing comes the crisis of the scene. What does the protagonist do in the face of not achieving their goal or getting it met? The crisis must boil down to a best bad choice or irreconcilable good. What does Toby do when faced with his crisis?

Climax: The protagonist acts out their crisis decision.

Resolution: The protagonist and the antagonist react to the new value state.