

**THE STORY GRID GUILD**  
**Writing Sprint for the week of April 27, 2020**

**Scene Assignment Type:** A “Dinner with a Friend” scene with third person omniscient narration.

**The Example is from *Zero Dark Thirty* directed by Kathryn Bigelow written by Mark Boal. Here the filmmakers choose to innovate a typical story scene by dropping in an unexpected violent event into the intimacy. Gross external force upends an intimate talk.**

**Character Number One:** Your protagonist is putting forward their “Code 1.0” behavioral system to someone they are unsure of as “ally” or “frenemy.” They are using the intellectual prowess to protect themselves. The way they do that is to out-argue the person across the table.

**Character Number Two:** This character is an “unknown” to the protagonist. Are they earnestly interested in the protagonist? Or are they using emotional manipulation in order to undermine the protagonist’s mission (in this case the protagonist wants to prove herself and be the decisive factor behind the hunt for Bin Laden). So, character number two is actively putting forth emotional lifelines to the protagonist, but we’re not quite sure if they are for real or not.

**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?** Two people are breaking away from the intensity of war and surveillance to try and have a calm and peaceful meal together.
- 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? What does the protagonist want? Who is/are the antagonist/s? What does the antagonist want? What are everyone you put on stage 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 other will fail to get what they want. Evaluating the life value shift for your characters will enable you to get a tight grip on the conflict. The protagonist (the Jessica Chastain character) wants to figure out if her dining companion (Jennifer Ehle) is someone she can trust/confide in or if she's just another person in her life she has to manage.
- 4. Which life value should I highlight on my Story Grid Spreadsheet?** Clearly considering the win/lose dynamics in a scene will home in on conflict. When you have a scene like this that is interrupted in medias res by a gross external event (a bomb) it's important to set up resolution of the "who wins/loses" just before the drop-in of major distraction. What's remarkable here in this work is that the set-up is very strong and we think that the Jennifer Ehle character is authentic in her concern and someone the Jessica Chastain character should trust...but we don't know that for "real" until after the bomb when she heroically leads Chastain out of the mess.

**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 this case, Chastain has to deal with the intrusive search of her and her car before she can even arrive at the restaurant.

The drop-in unexpected event (a phere) is a tool to achieve the protagonist's scene desire or an obstacle that prevents them from achieving their scene desire. In this case, the search raises Chastain's defenses and makes her more suspicious. It's an obstacle for her. It delays her ability to suss out the true character of her co-worker.

**Progressive Complication:** After the unexpected event drops in, have at least two complications that threaten or encourages the goals of the protagonist. Chastain arrives to the dinner, making excuses and complaining about why she is late, and Ehle gently reminds her that they'd agreed to leave the absurdity and chaos of their jobs back at the office. This is taken up as a tool by Chastain. She levels out and begins to engage. Then Ehle asks about her sex life...and she shuts down again (folding her arms over herself).

**Turning Point Progressive Complication:**

The bomb goes off, which changes the entire value at stake of the scene. It immediately moves from "connection...will these two get closer or further apart?" to "life...will these two survive?"

**Crisis:** Do we go this way? Or that way? Chastain makes the crisis choice.

**Climax:** Both characters enact the choice, but Chastain's leadership is a dead end until Ehle takes control and leads them to safety.

**Resolution:** The filmmakers drop in news coverage of the event to ground the fiction in nonfiction, which raises the stakes of this scene and the entire story itself to an even higher level.