

THE STORY GRID GUILD
Writing Sprint for the week of May 11, 2020

Scene Assignment Type: A “Stranger Knocks at the Door” scene with third person omniscient narration.

The Example is from *No Country For Old Men* Coen Brothers’ film adaptation of Cormac McCarthy’s novel.

Character Number One: Your protagonist is going through a standard daily operation. Perhaps they are working at the DMV, perhaps they are a waiter, a book editor, whatever you choose. What’s important is that they’ve had a socially agreed upon interaction with other human beings over and over again. And this scene will be another of these interactions.

Character Number Two: This is the stranger. What the stranger does will be completely unexpected to character number one. At every beat turn, character number one will try a tool from her toolbox to get the seemingly agreed upon interaction back on track, only to be stymied by Character Number Two.

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?** A well practiced and socially "automatic" transaction is taking place between two people.
- 2. What is the essential action of what the characters are doing in this scene?** One person is paying for their gas and peanuts at a gas station while the other is playing "friendly customer service representative."
- 3. What life value has changed for one or more of the characters in the scene?** Someone is going to "win" the scene. And someone will lose. That means that someone will get what they set out to achieve. The other will fail to get what they want. Does the buyer win? Or does the teller win?
- 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. What's amazing about this scene is the call-out of the very thin fabric of civility that prevents absolute chaos. Anton Chigurh is the purest form of "Phere," an unexpected and random force that completely derails human beings.

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, the gas station owner must contend with the living embodiment of Phere.

Progressive Complication: After the unexpected event drops in, have at least two complications that threaten or encourages the goals of the protagonist. The attendant uses "words" that usually get him out of sticky situations to no avail. He then says he has to close up shop. To no avail.

Turning Point Progressive Complication:

“What’s the most you ever lost on a coin toss?”

Chigurh is the rebuttal to Albert Einstein’s famous quote “God does not play dice with the universe.” He’s the living embodiment of a single ideological interpretation of quantum mechanics. If everything is made up of elemental particles that we cannot measure as they are everywhere and nowhere simultaneously (a gross simplification of QM) then there are no universal structural physical “laws.” If there are no physical laws, then there are no meta-physical laws (universal morality)... And the only thing we can rely upon is randomness, uncertainty. Thus, when faced with a dilemma, in this case an irritating check out person at a gas station, Chigurh flips a coin to settle the crisis.

Crisis: Does the attendant call the flip? It’s a straight out of game theory dilemma... If he refuses to call the coin, it’s clear by the interaction that there is a greater than 50% chance that Chigurh will kill him for his insolence. If he does call it, he has a 50% chance of dying anyway. Calling it has the best probability for survival. When life boils down to math like this...we lose meaning...life becomes “one thing.”

Climax: He calls heads.

Resolution: The random universe allows him to live.