

ETUDE

This etude is designed to focus your writing energy and attention on the following:

- working your dialog-writing skills
- carrying out characterization – and especially the characterization of relationships between characters – through dialog
- allowing character motivation—in the form of either a shared need, or conflicting needs—to shape the dialog that takes place in the context of the relationship

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Take two six-sided dice.
2. Referring to the table titled *Part 1: Relationships*, roll the two dice.
3. Take the two results and use them to choose one specific character relationship for your characters. (One die determines the Category, the other determines the specific nature of the relationship. For example, if you roll a 6 and a 3, you can either choose **Criminal: Kidnapper / Kidnap Victim's Family Member** or **WTF?: Members of the Same Weird Sub-Branch of Humanity**.)
4. Proceed to *Part 2: Needs*. Roll your two dice again. In the same fashion as in Part 1, roll the dice to determine a shared need by both characters, or twice if you want to specify conflicting needs (one for each character).
5. Write your scene, conveying both the nature of the characters' relationship and their need or needs, without announcing either. Use as little expository text as possible: try to convey as much as you can through dialog alone. (Up to, and including, no exposition whatsoever, though you may include exposition if you feel it is necessary.)

Do not proceed to Step 6 until you have completed Step 5.

6. Now it's time to do the second half of the exercise: you will rewrite the same scene, but change the relationship between the characters significantly. Their needs will remain the same, but their relationship will be different.

Roll two six-sided dice, and choose a Relationship Category and Specific Relationship as you did before. If the relationship is the same (or similar) to what you've already written, roll again.

7. Rewrite your scene, this time using the relationship specified in your second roll. Again, do not announce the nature of the characters' relationship; one of the tricks you're trying to pull off here is to imply it strongly enough the reader will understand it immediately, while the characters are busy talking about something else.

Suggested Reading:

- "They're Made Out of Meat." Terry Bisson. Available on Terry Bisson's website: <http://www.terrybisson.com/page6/page6.html>
- *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. Manuel Puig. (Apparently, I haven't read it yet.)

PART 1: RELATIONSHIPS

1 PROFESSIONAL

- ▣ Instructor / Student
- ▣ Physician (what kind?) / Patient
- ▣ Lawyer / Client
- ▣ Colleagues in any context
- ▣ Hostile co-workers at the same crappy, unfulfilling McJob
- ▣ Executive / Underling

2 ROMANTIC

- ▣ Pathetic, one-sided infatuation
- ▣ Recently broken up partners/spouses
- ▣ Exes who still talk (etc.)
- ▣ Extramarital affair
- ▣ Couple who are once again "trying to make it work"
- ▣ Two characters in love with the same third person.

3. ILLICIT

- ▣ "Drug dealer" / Client
- ▣ Crime boss / Underling
- ▣ Criminal / Intended Victim
- ▣ Criminal / Past Victim
- ▣ Peers in same collapsing crime syndicate
- ▣ Kidnapper / Kidnap Victim's Family Member

4. LOCAL

- ▣ Went to high school together ages ago
- ▣ Play on the same sports team
- ▣ Local Hotshot / Local Nobody
- ▣ Acquaintances from the local dog park
- ▣ Kids play sports together
- ▣ Local Businessperson / Former Customer

5. FAMILIAL

- ▣ Parent & child who have never met before
- ▣ Distant cousins
- ▣ Siblings, estranged
- ▣ Ancestor / Descendant
- ▣ Step-parent / Step-child
- ▣ Parent / Child's friend (or child's love interest)

6. WTF?

- ▣ Fellow members of secret supernatural/SFnal organization
- ▣ Members of competing secret supernatural/SFnal organizations
- ▣ Members of the same weird sub-branch of human species
- ▣ From the same alien world/dimension, on the same mission
- ▣ Died in the same tragic event
- ▣ Prisoners in the same massive transportation vehicle

... IN A WRITING ETUDE...

NEEDS

1. TO GET OUT...

- ▣ ... of your parent's basement.
- ▣ ... of town.
- ▣ ... of this situation in one piece.
- ▣ ... of this goddamned relationship before it kills you.
- ▣ ... the habit of always saying yes to everyone's fucking requests.
- ▣ ... of the closet.

2. TO GET ...

- ▣ ... someone's approval.
- ▣ ... even with everyone who laughed at you.
- ▣ ... laid. Like, *NOW*.
- ▣ ... the go-ahead on this project, ASAP.
- ▣ ... even *more* power than you already have.
- ▣ ... out of this line of work before it's too late.

3. TO GET RICH...

- ▣ ... no matter who it kills.
- ▣ ... enough never to work again.
- ▣ ... enough that the law an never touch you.
- ▣ ... and finally get a date for real!
- ▣ ... and pay off that debt before things get *really* bad.
- ▣ ... and famous.

4. TO PROVE...

- ▣ ... who the real, natural leader of your organization is.
- ▣ ... once and for all that you are not a failure.
- ▣ ... that you know what you're talking about.
- ▣ ... 'em all wrong, and then kill 'em off slowly.
- ▣ ... what a loser someone else is, so you feel better about yourself.
- ▣ ... to yourself that you're good enough, and smart enough, and tough enough.

5. TO WIN...

- ▣ ... back someone's love.
- ▣ ... at something. Finally.
- ▣ ... back control of the organization.
- ▣ ... the ongoing battle of wills.
- ▣ ... someone over to your point of view.
- ▣ ... this pissing contest and rub the other person's face in it, *hard*.

6. TO DESTROY...

- ▣ ... your enemy/enemies.
- ▣ ... all evidence of your crimes.
- ▣ ... yourself.
- ▣ ... everyone who ever mocked you.
- ▣ ... the competition.
- ▣ ... this crappy world world.

... IN A WRITING ETUDE...