

Your character walks into a bar

Scenario

This is a completely unknown bar. Your character has never been there before. They have no idea what the neighborhood is like or who the clientele is or what they're like.

Questions

Write the answer to these questions. You don't have to use complete sentences. If possible, write the answers as part of a scene that may be in your finished story. As you write these snippets, always consider why your character makes these choices. What compels her to make this choice, as opposed to another? What is going on in her life or her past history that drives her to make these choices or take these actions? What colors her interpretation of the events?

What is she doing in that neighborhood?

Why did she go in that bar in particular?

Is she looking for something or someone? If so, what or who?

Is she comfortable going to a bar for a drink on occasion? On lots of occasions?

Does she avoid bars like the plague?

- Why?
- What would get her to go in this bar this time?

What does your character see when she walks up to the bar?

What is the neighborhood like?

What time of day?

What is the weather like?

What kind of vehicles are parked out front?

Does the bar look seedy or upscale from outside?

Is it the kind of place your character would feel comfortable walking into?

If not, why not? If it is, why?

Does your character see anyone walk into the bar?

What do those people look like?

How are they dressed?

What do they look like to your character?

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When your character sees them, does it make her hesitate to go into the bar?

Do they put her at ease? Why?

Do they make her uneasy? Why?

Does seeing some of the clientele go into the bar change the way she feels about going in the bar?
Why or why not?

What gets your character to go in the bar?

After your character steps inside, what does she see?

Is it dark?

What does it remind her of?

Is it a totally alien environment compared to the kind of place she normally frequents?

Does she feel right at home?

What does the bartender look like?

Is there more than one?

How are the people sitting at the bar dressed?

How does your character feel while she's getting her bearings?

What does the rest of the room look like?

Is the room thick with cigarette smoke?

What does that make your character think?

Is it another kind of smoke?

What does your character think about that?

Does it bring up any kind of memories for her?

Is it an annoyance?

Does it bring back good memories? Of what? Be specific.

Bad memories? Of what? Be specific.

What are the other people in the bar doing?

Is it loud? Is it the music or are people talking loudly? Arguing?

Is it quiet?

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Is there music playing?

- If so, what kind of music?
- Loud or low?
- Is it piped in or from a jukebox?
- What kind of jukebox?
- What's the title of what's playing right now?
- How does that fit in with your character's mood?
- What does it remind her of?
- What memory pops into her mind the moment she hears that music?
- Is it a good memory or a bad one?
- How does it make her feel? Why?

If there isn't any music, what sounds does your character hear?

Are there lots of tables for people to sit at or just a few booths along the walls with a big dance floor?

How does she go about finding the thing or person she came in to find?

Does she have to speak to the bartender?

What does she say to him?

Does the question come out right or is your character so uncomfortable she garbles her words?

What is the bartender's attitude toward your character?

- How does that make your character feel?
- What does she think?
- Does she get angry?
- Stressed?
- Relaxed?
- Feel safer?
- Feel less safe?

Does she have to speak to any of the customers?

- If so, who does she pick?
- What does that person look like?
- Why did she pick him or her?
- Does that person remind her of anyone?
- If she picked that customer because it felt safe, is her judgment correct?

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Does anything happen while she's in the bar?

- A fight?
- A drunk making a pass?
- Seeing an old flame?
- Her ex-spouse/partner?
- If so, how does she feel when she sees that person?
- Do they see her?
- Does she speak to them?
- If not, why not? If she does, why?

What one minor odd thing did she see while she was in the bar?

- Someone passing a note across a table
- A monkey on one of the tables
- A tattered old cat behind the bar
- A dwarf dealing cards at a back table

Does she find what she came in the bar for? If not, why not?

How does she feel when she leaves the bar? Why?

Finally

What does this experience bring up for your character? What specific memory or emotion? Does it change anything for your character?

Choices

Your character always has choices. What choices does she make at each junction and why?

Think of your current story

How can you use this in your story?

Next

Do this exercise for the each of your characters. It can be the same bar, but each character should have a different experience - different impressions, different memories, different attitudes.