

I Should Be Writing #390

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Mur: [00:00:00] Hi there, welcome to *I Should Be Writing*: the podcast for wanna-be fiction writers. I'm your host Mur Lafferty, and I already recorded this today, but it was in the car. I like recording in the car, like thinking in the car, like talking in the car, and then I get home and I look at the audio, and I'm like, "I don't want to give this to you, because the audio is crap because you can hear all the car stuff in the background." Maybe if I got a better mic, I don't know. But so, I'm re-doing this. Of course, now the dogs are in the background. I can't win.

[00:01:08] But, what I've been up to is we got a ... went to ConFusion last weekend. Had a really great time with other writers and some editors and some agents, and there were fun panels. I did a reading of something I had just written, which is kind of scary, but awesome. It went over well, anyway. And now I'm home working on a variety of big deadlines and small. I'm working on my new novel, and that's going pretty well. But I've got other more important deadlines, which of course is why it's easy for me to work on the novel, because my brain is a jerk.

[00:01:44] So I get a lot of emails from people who are concerned about things like ... anything from agent hunting, to getting a pseudonym, to where and how to market their book. And the punchline is they haven't even written anything yet. So I want to talk a little bit about the timeline around books, when to expect certain things.

[00:02:16] So first, step one: write the book. I know that sounds crazy because you are starry eyed and excited about your new writing career, and you want nothing more than to get moving. But, to use a metaphor, you really shouldn't be making dinner reservations when the car has no gas. Dinner reservations or hotel reservations, anything, you shouldn't be planning anything about your trip if your car has no gas. Because you won't go anywhere without the gas in the car. Can you make the reservations? Sure. But you can't get there, and people will wonder why you've been wasting your time when you really should be putting gas in the car. Actually, reservations is a bad metaphor. Let's say get ... start a journey. You can't journey to a fancy restaurant. You're thinking about the food, you're thinking about who you're going to see there, but you have no gas in the car. There is the metaphor. You want to write your book, and yes, it's fun to look online and see where everybody else is in their career and want to be where they

are, but I promise you, they're all looking at someone else in their career and wanting to be where they are because that's the nature of the beast.

[00:03:33] So just focus on your own work. Start the story. Finish the story. The only other thing you should be doing right now is working on your online platform, because it's never too early to do that. And by doing that, you talk to people online, you talk to authors, you talk to editors. And by talking to them, I mean you're talk ... you're contacting them about things that interest them. There's so much online, especially for people who are self-promoting. It's all about me, me, me, and if you are nobody to me, and I don't mean you're like a little person who is insignificant, I just mean I have no idea who you are, and your first communication with me is, "Hey! Buy my book!" I'm going to think, well, words that I don't say on this show, but I say on the other show. Not kind words about you. But if you get on Twitter and you think, "Hey, Mur! Read your book. I liked it." "Hey, that was a cool podcast." "Hey, I heard you mention that you're going to this convention. I love that city. Try this restaurant." Or, "I'll be at the convention. Can I come by and say hi?" I mean, that's all giving. Before you take from anyone, you should give. That's how a lot of this networking goes. So get online, talk to people, it's worth it. But also write your novel. Don't spend so much time building your platform that you don't write your novel.

[00:04:55] So next, what's next? When you're done with your book, step away. Step away from the book, just step away. Take some time off. Relax. Enjoy yourself. Treat yourself to something, could be a movie, could be some food, nice bottle of wine, something you've been denying yourself. Just treat yourself to something. Stay away for a week to a month, and then when you're done, go back to it and figure out what you're going to do with it. And by figuring it out, I mean make plans on editing. I talk about revision in other shows ... other podcasts, and I'll probably cover it again in the future, but that's not what this is about, so I won't go too deeply into it. But revise it.

[00:05:46] When you're done with that, then you can start doing your agent hunt. And you can go to AgentQuery.com. You can go to ... You can look in your favorite authors' acknowledgments, look in books that are like yours, look in those acknowledgments and find who the people's agents are. And then start working on your query. Do research about them. Don't put down the other author's work. Don't say, "I know you represent Jim Butcher, but I'm so much better than him, you really should represent me." Because, the agent likes Jim Butcher, because it's Jim Butcher's agent. So the agent's not going to be very happy with you talking crap about his client. So many people try this sort of insult

marketing that, “You know that very famous person? I'm so much better than they are, and they suck, so you really, really should choose me.”

[00:06:47] I'm sorry, I didn't want to do the car noise and now we got the dog noise. Can't win. So, be kind. Contact editors ... or agents. Notice there's nowhere in here that I'm saying that you should spend time worrying about your marketing, your cover, your pseudonym, none of that. When it comes to those things, I could give basic advice on it, but really, you need to write the book, and you need to get yourself some representation. And then your agent will be better to advise you, because your agent will help you make the decision based on your specific situation, your specific book, your specific genre. Everybody's got a different reason for wanting a pseudonym.

[00:07:35] A lot of people think they know better when it comes to covers. Oh my God, authors have so many opinions with regards to covers. And I have too. I've been guilty of it, but your publisher will have a marketing department, and cover designers, and people whose job it is to know exactly how to use fonts and drop shadows and art to best sell a book. And now you're all thinking of books you know that have had crappy covers, and yes, they exist. But think of the books you have that you picked up just because of the cover. Think of the books you have where the cover doesn't really depict something that happens in the story, but is related enough to make you happy you got it, make you happy that you chose it based on the cover. So many authors think they can design a cover, which is really insulting to graphic designers because it's just like people telling us that, “Oh, it must be easy to write a book, cause it's just like telling a story, right? Just like talking. I can use words.” And when you're hearing this, you're just sitting there really wanting to gnaw your arm off to get out of the conversation. So it's the same with graphic designers. They have their job, you have yours.

[00:08:50] The weird thing about publishing is you have to ... you create this thing, and then you have to put it in the hands of other people. And then, they make most of the money off of it. But I can promise you, I've known ... discovered from hybrid publishing, that having a publisher behind your book will make you sell more. Other people will disagree with me because they've had better self-publishing experiences or worse traditional publishing experiences. Your mileage may vary.

[00:09:21] When you get the publisher, and that's your agent's job, that's hard for me to remember. I keep thinking, “Oh, I'm going to see this editor at a Con!” My

agent's just like, "Go hang out with them. Be pleasant." I'm like, "Should I talk about any project?" She's like, "No, that's my job." Like, "Ohhh right. Okay." My job is to be charming. Her job is to sell the actual project. Got it. And it's hard, after schmoozing and networking at Cons for years, it's hard remembering that no, someone ... that's in someone else's hands right now.

[00:09:52] I'll talk about this on another show, but just basically, when you are searching for an agent, think about it ... it's not exactly like a marriage, but it's enough like a marriage because you don't necessarily want to go for the first person who catches your eye who likes you back. You want to go for somebody who is ... shares your same interest, shares your same values, who has an invest ... is in it for the long haul to help out your career, who you can work with, and who's into you and your stuff. So, it's a tough thing, it's ... I can't imagine any new author turning down representation, but I keep hoping someone does if they have the gut feeling that it's not for them. Because I've been there, and I knew the advice, and I still went against it. Of course I took other people's advice. Probably not the best thing to do.

[00:10:44] I think all of these concerns, messing up your timeline, worrying about your pseudonym before you write Chapter One, is just another way our brains try to procrastinate. I could write my novel, but I'm going to think about what the best pseudonym for me is. I could polish the first half of the novel that I know has some issues, or I could do an agent hunt. Know that if you do that, they may show up. They may turn out to be interested, and then you don't have anything polished to show them. You can do your research on agents early, you can do research on publishers early, but if you're doing it at the expense of writing time, that's where things fall apart. So write the book.

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something for you. If you like romance, they've got something for you. If you like spy, they've got something for you. If you like geek girls, I mean, there's a whole bunch of stuff over there. So check it out

[00:12:36] If you'd like to get in touch with me, you can find me at murverse.com or mightymur@gmail.com or on Twitter [@mightymur](https://twitter.com/mightymur). I have many other projects going on, besides podcasts. I have a podcast for business ... authors on a business side with Matt Wallace called [Ditch Diggers](#). I have a science-fiction space murder mystery called [Six Wakes](#). I have a version of this podcast in a book called, wait for it, [I Should Be Writing](#) that came out this year. And I co-edit [Escape Pod](#) with Divya Breed, which is free science-fiction every week. So there's a lot of stuff going around that I got my fingers in. Check them out, but only do it after you've hit your word count, because you should be writing.

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