

# I Should Be Writing #391

January 30, 2018

**Mur:** [00:00:00] *I Should Be Writing* 391, I think. Yeah, sure let's say that. For the week of January 29th. Yes, I know it's not the week of January 29th.

**Theme Song:** [00:00:13] I should be writing. I should be working on my craft. I should be writing. I should be submitting my next draft. But I'm sitting watching Doctor Who.

**Mur:** [00:00:36] Hi there, welcome to *I Should Be Writing*, the podcast for wanna-be fiction writers. I'm your host, Mur Lafferty, and yes, I said this is last week's episode, and I know it's not last week, it's this week. Here's what happened: I know I always have an excuse when things go sideways, but I think this is a pretty good excuse. Last week I had a pretty bad migraine for a couple days, and I got some professional news that pretty much blew my mind. And no, I can't tell you what it is, unfortunately, because I would love to. Seriously, it ruined my brain for a couple of days, literally, and now I'm just trying to get back on the work that's late. So you're going to get two episodes of *I Should Be Writing* this week and two episodes of *Ditch Diggers*.

[00:01:34] But I want to talk a little bit about this week, what I've been up to, and how the mindset goes. Now first, I've been up to ... what can I talk about? I've been up to working on an outline, and working on some nonfiction requested by a magazine, and just trying to clear through email and one-shot projects so I can have my schedule clear for the upcoming busyness. And I realized most of the things I'm working on now I can't tell you. Like some of them are big special secrets and others are not big special secrets, I just don't know if I'm allowed to tell you or not. And it's best to err on the side of caution.

[00:02:26] So, I don't know how like everybody else I am, but when I get good news, my first reaction is to be startled. The second good news is either ... The second reaction is either, "No that can't be me." Or, "Well if it is me, then clearly this thing is not as cool as I originally thought it would be." The third reaction is closer to what I think it should ... It should be the first reaction, which is, "Oh my god, yay!" But then it sinks down, the fourth reaction being: "Someone is going to take this away from me. Someone's going to find out that there's been a huge mistake, and they're just going to take it away." And the fifth response, which in grief would be acceptance, for me it's, "I am so going to mess this up in some way or another."

[00:03:36] I wish I could ... it's one of those things where you feel like ... you see something on TV and you think, "This is the way things are." I know a lot of parents have this problem where because parenthood is so wonderful in media, all media we see, that if you ever have a moment of not feeling unconditional love for your kid or just wishing you could run away or anything like that, you are a bad parent. If you ever are relieved when a loved one dies, for whatever reason. Maybe you're relieved they're not in pain anymore. Maybe you're relieved because they were an absolute jerk to you your entire life. If you feel relieved when someone dies, you're a monster. There's a lot of things we say, "This is the correct way to respond to stuff and other things is not correct," which is not true. The way you feel is the way you feel.

[00:04:29] But, I still feel weird that my first reaction is not "Oh my god, yay!" The couple of people I have been able to tell, they do the "Oh my god, yay," and I just sit there embarrassed. Like, I don't know. Like I just got ... I just started puberty and I'm not sure what to do with all this extra flesh. That's a little weirder of a metaphor than I wanted. But tying this back to writing, remember that you may have this experience when you get your first sale, or your first award nomination, or you get an agent. You might get your first book offer and find something wrong with it. I don't mean the publisher is not a reputable publisher. I mean that it's ... say your advance is not what you expected it to be, or something like that. And your first response is not "Hooray!" but "Wait a minute. I don't know how I feel about this." But it's okay. Emotions are okay. We don't let ourselves experience them enough, and I think that's one reason why we might get ... we might have mental health issues because we don't allow ourselves to have honest reactions to things.

[00:06:03] I'm friends with Ursula Vernon, and she tells me every time she finishes a book she gets depressed. She doesn't have that feeling of, "Oh god, it's done! I've created this great thing!" It's, "Well, now it's done, and this is as good as it'll ever be, and I can't fix it, and the thing I've been working on is now over." And she gets depressed. So I've learned whenever she tells me she finishes a book to sympathize, because I know that's how she's feeling. She needs that. But if you're feeling anything, if you're feeling confident, if you're feeling good and confident about something, that's cool too.

[00:06:42] There's a line from the Garfunkel and Oates song called You're A Loser, and it's one of my favorite songs of all time. It's basically ... It takes my concept of "If you get a rejection that means you're a working writer because

working ... people who don't get rejections are usually people who are not trying.” But the line is “people stand can’t” ... I can't talk today! This is why I don't podcast very often. “People can't stand genius without an apology.” That hits me hard, because I keep thinking if things ever do go right for me, I just feel all, “I don't know how to react. This is weird. “

[00:07:32] Another thing I'm experiencing right now is my brain is creating mental blocks. Because I know logically that I can do the work that I have in front of me right now. I have a considerable amount of work to do this spring, and it's going to be hard, but I know I can do it. However, I'm looking at a whole bunch of little things that I need to finish before I can start on the big things, and I'm getting frozen. And I know, I know if I start working on them, these things will take half an hour to an hour. It will be pretty easy to bang out. It's not going to be a problem. But it's the weight of thinking about it that holds me down. And I know a lot of people let that weight sit on their shoulders and stop them from writing. Believe me, I know that me saying “it's okay to write crappy stuff” is hard to internalize. Okay, academically that's right. However, that's really hard to actually do. And I'm supposed to be able to do it with a first draft, you know? It's first draft, and I can write whatever I want. It doesn't matter, and I still get stuck. Because I'm supposed to write something good. That's all just mental blocks. Not even writer's block, just your brain slowing you down. It makes me sad to think about all the things that I have not done because my brain has slowed me down. The working part of my brain can do the job, I physically can do the job, but the emotions just hold you back. But as Eleanor says on *The Good Place*, “Feelings are dumb!” But of course, we discover that feelings are not entirely dumb. Sometimes your feelings let you know things. Sometimes you might not be coping with something as well as you thought.

[00:09:46] I was having nightmares a couple of weeks ago about something that I wasn't even aware was terribly important to me. But when I thought about it, I kind of realized what I'd been mulling over subconsciously, and my brain had been churning through things and had been working it out in these dreams. I probably just repressed it in my everyday life and didn't even know I was doing it. So yeah, feelings are dumb, but it's important to pay attention to them. Why are you sitting there feeling completely roadblocked when you sit down? Is it because you think you're writing crap? Is it because you're not going in the right direction in your story? Is it because you think that since you wrote a book that got unexpectedly good response, that the next time you sit down to write something original, it's going to be absolute crap? I'm speaking completely

hypothetically right now. (My internal narrator just looked at the camera and said, “She was not speaking hypothetically.”)

[00:10:58] I remember Paolo Bacigalupi once told me that his second book was hard because he did so well with *The Windup Girl* and won awards. And that was his first book, and he didn't know if it was a fluke, if he could do it again. I haven't talked about this in a while but, I'll reiterate here, if you get a disappointment, a rejection, a deal that you thought you had fell through, evisceration at your writers group, I think it's healthiest to give yourself a time limit to feel the petty, terrible feelings that you're going to feel. For me, it is videogames and red wine. I sit there, and I feel sorry for myself, and I nurse my little wounds. And the next day, I get up, and I go back to work. The same thing has to happen if something good happens. Because you may be focused a lot on stuff, or you may be focused on the new thing or just be really excited, and other things may leave your brain. So, good news happens, allow yourself time to celebrate. I like sushi. I like chocolate. (Not together.) Or a better bottle of red wine than my “sorry for myself” red wine.

[00:12:38] It's weird, I know that in this discussion I've gone from emotions that feel wrong to emotions that you need to ignore to emotions that you need to cater to. Really, I think that what we need to do is, respect how we're feeling and deal with it however works best for you. If you think it's an overwhelming feeling, then just give yourself a little bit of time to process it. Take time to yourself, take time with a loved one or a friend. Do what helps you mentally. You need to process this stuff, because if your feelings are just going all the way out of control, that is very hard to write around. If you need to write to process those feelings, that's cool too and will probably create some very powerful stuff. Just acknowledge your feelings, and whatever you're feeling is not wrong. The way you cope with your feelings, that's what's wrong. If something makes you angry, that's fine. If you lash out and hurt somebody else because you're angry, that's not fine. That's what I mean by that. If you're sad and want to give yourself a treat that makes you feel better, that's fine. If you drink to the point of blackout, that's not fine. So, feelings are okay, just pay attention to how you deal with them.

[00:14:06] Hey, did you know that *I Should Be Writing* has a sponsor now? *I Should Be Writing* is supported by Serial Box. It's called “the HBO of reading” by National Public Radio. Serial Box brings you gripping stories written by best-selling and award-winning teams of writers, with new episodes every week. They're the addictive new shows you can read or listen to. The Serial Box app lets you switch from listening to reading with a click. So join the plot with Serial

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[00:15:14] That's it for me now, because I got to go do stuff, and then I got to download this, and then I have to record another one. My website is at [murverse.com](http://murverse.com) and my email is [mightymur@gmail.com](mailto:mightymur@gmail.com). I'm on Twitter [@mightymur](https://twitter.com/mightymur). You can buy *Six Wakes* and *I Should Be Writing*. They're both out in bookstores and online. *Six Wakes* is my murder mystery in space that is nominated for the Philip K. Dick award. *I Should Be Writing* is the book that goes along with this podcast, and I highly recommend it because it's got some stuff that I say in here and some other stuff too. It's also a workbook with exercises and the like. It is awards season, so if you are an award voting person, consider *I Should Be Writing*, or *Six Wakes*, or the *Ditch Diggers* podcast I do with Matt for Fancast, or *Escape Pod* for Best Semiprozine. I do a lot of stuff and it's award season so one must shill one's stuff. But all in all, I got to remember my main focus is the words, because I should be writing and so should you. I'll see you next time.

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