

Delicious Conflict Parfait

I Should Be Writing S17 Ep19

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKER

Mur Lafferty

Mur 0:00

This is I Should Be Writing Season 17 Episode 19. Welcome to I Should Be Writing. This is the podcast for wannabe fiction writers. I'm your host, Mur Lafferty. And I am streaming live on Twitch right now and this will go into the RSS feed soon. Hello Katwood and Underpope. Good to see people. Hey Sarcasmatron5000. Welcome. So it's been a bad brain day. Been a little tough to get focused. And there's nothing wrong. It's not like anything bad has happened or I'm worried about anything, it's just when you change your work habits, it takes a little while to get used to it. And I've been both productive and exercising for a couple of days and today my body and brain are just like, no, I don't think so. So, I did not a lot of stuff this morning and of course, about an hour before I streamed it was time to get down and start writing. So that's when I got writing done which is why I'm running late because I wanted to finish the scene which I didn't do. But I liked the direction I was taking the scene, and it gave me the idea for the show so win-win. Hey Billyboy. Work proceeds on the book. It's going steady. I'm pretty happy with it. A little scared about shifting some parts of the book around.

Mur 2:13

That's always scary because if you bring up something for the first time in chapter four and then you realize chapter four needs to be chapter 10, you need to remember A, you have to bring it up somewhere else for the first time and B, you have to take out the here's the first mention of this thing in chapter 10. And those are little continuity things that I'm always worried about missing. But I think for the overall structure of the book it's going to help. So long as myself and editors catch those little inconsistencies. What I wanted to talk about today was the delicious, delicious conflict parfait. And that is because... I will admit it. I'm a professional author and I still have the desire to be nice to my people. I want to create nice people and I want to be nice to them because I'm nice. That does not make good fiction. I don't think we should be as sadistic as some storytellers. There are a lot of men in storytelling who believe that if a couple is happy, then there's nothing interesting that can happen to them. And I know this is why J Michael Straczynski did a run out of Spider Man books a while back. 15 years, something like that. And they were pretty good. They were different. Made some people angry because of course anytime you change anything about Spider Man, it makes people angry. But at the end when he's happy with Mary Jane, the bigwigs decided, this is not, he can't be happy because then there's no conflict. So he had to, I think erase memories or change the past or some sort of retcon. And Joss Whedon does the same thing. Anytime a couple gets together and they're happy, you know one of them

is going to die and it's usually going to be the love interest. Sometimes he'd kill off a regular character but more often the love interest.

Mur 4:42

There have been stories such as, I'm thinking mostly of TV shows, Friends, Mad About You, Brooklyn nine nine, who make happy couples and still managed to tell stories with plenty of conflict. And the conflict doesn't have to be infidelity or something. You can create conflict more than, will they or won't they get together and someone cheated on somebody else. It's possible. But I think it's like throwing a sexual assault in somebody's history to either to explain why they're damaged or why they're evil. It's easy and a lot of people go that way. I don't recommend it, by the way. So what you need to do is think about different kinds of conflict. Actually, one of the problems of doing this show about storytelling is I don't want to spoil things but a lot of times, there needs to be spoilers to talk about detailed plot things. So I apologize. I started reading this thriller of Lucy Foley, I believe. She wrote The Hunting Party and The Guest List. And unfortunately what I've learned about a lot of thrillers is they really like to kill women. And a great deal of the authors are women. And they really like to put sexual assault in there and they really like to put, you know even better if she's pregnant and died. And these are just, they're becoming cliché and boring. I was very happy to find that when women were angry with a man in Lucy Foley's books, it did not have to do with that. It did have to do with a relationship that went wrong. A sexual relationship that went wrong, but the very blatant obvious thing was not there.

Mur 7:11

A woman was on a pretty serious track to go into politics, but her boyfriend took nudes of her and put them on the internet and ruined her career. And that's terrible. That's good conflict. That's interesting. Another conflict was just a woman got just strung along and kind of used and dumped by an older man. And then was invited to his wedding so she didn't like that very much. But it's still doesn't go to the easy, blatantly evil thing that frankly is hard for a lot of people to read for personal reasons. I do not mean this to start out like a talk on "Don't just leap to sexual assault as conflict". It just kind of went that way so I apologize since I didn't put any content warnings up but I'm moving away from that now. The point is that you can find conflict in a lot of places. And I think when we're organically telling stories, it's easy. But sometimes when you think, I have to put conflict here, your brain, and by your brain I mean my brain, let's just be 100% honest, freezes. So, I am wanting to talk about the conflict parfait because I've talked about conflict on two levels before but I just realized it's got to go deeper. I really love Lucy Foley. I love her structure. That's something that I'd like to talk about at some point. She does a very different mystery structure than anybody else does and pulls it off. It's not just a novelty. It's not a novelty like memento. It actually works. It's easiest to use... This a podcast about writing books but it's easiest to use television and movies because more people have seen those.

Mur 9:17

So we'll start out with a disaster movie. The disaster is obviously the conflict. But the writers always put in some sort of personal conflict of the hero. The guy in Die Hard had been estranged from his wife. Yeah, it's like a B plot. Because otherwise your hero comes to work all happy and ready to go and when the disaster strikes, they are on. And that's, you want your heroes to be up to the task but it's much more interesting if they're upset about a fight they've had with a loved one. They're upset because their parents just threw them out or disinherited them. They're upset that their kid's into drugs. Something is in the back of their mind always kind of there going, "Okay, once you save the world, you're still going to have to deal with that problem with your wife." And again, people go to the easy thing and have like an ex wife and a young son, usually. That they're estranged from but still love. And they'll get together at

the end of the disaster. Completely going off topic because I just said I was going to talk about movies and TV but I just realized, a book that does this well is going a level deeper, which is the Dresden Files. Because no matter what personal conflicts Dresden has with the various regular characters in the series, and despite whatever the big conflict is in the A plot, he's also got the problem that because he's so good with magic, technology doesn't work around him. So he's got this crappy car. He can't have a modern car with all the computers. So he drives an old... What does he drive? A beetle? I can't remember. Granted I lost interest in those books, but the setup was very clever. On the base level he's broke. He has an old car that breaks down all the time and he can't get a new one, even if he got flush with cash. And he's got a skull in his basement that sasses at him. But these are things that can lead to bigger things.

Mur 11:48

I really am a podcaster that has been doing this for a long time and I can usually say sentences better than that. If you just have somebody going against the big bad, we don't have an idea of who they are. Once you throw in the B plot you know that... A common one for old mysteries was the alcoholic. A common one for Midsomer Murders, at least the first Barnaby, is he was so married to the job that he walked out, literally sometimes, walked out on his wife and daughter when news of a homicide came up. He walked out of his daughter's play once. That was a bad, bad look. And that causes conflict. And there's another way to have a happy marriage with conflict without infidelity or something obvious like that. I was thinking of this because today I had a scene with a spacewalk. And I've got somebody who is more impulsive and doesn't plan a lot. And she decided since she couldn't reach something, she would disconnect her oxygen line. The oxygen line was tethered to an alien ship. And first it was just going to be a spacewalk with not much happening except for the goal she was trying to complete in that scene. But then I thought if she makes a stupid decision and runs out of oxygen, the people on the ship are gonna be pissed at her and worried. And that's going to show part of the relationship. And when you move from worried to angry with somebody, that usually means that's indicative of a deeper feeling. If you move from worried to God you're stupid, that is a less deep feeling. That's a friendship/acquaintance feeling. But the parent is the one who's worried sick and then grounds their kid in a rage.

Mur 13:51

And I realized that was a way, besides the fact that it shows her impulsiveness, but it also shows, it's going to show the relationship with the person on the ship, and how he reacts to her decision. And this was all just me putting in conflict about her running out of air. And I do have an email sent to a friend of mine to tell me how long she can last in a spacesuit without air. Hopefully I'll hear from her soon so I can fine tune that scene. It just made me realize that I have a bad habit of writing scenes where the big bad is the only focus. And sometimes I'll throw in some character to character conflict but it's when you get into the also my car's a piece of crap. Also, my mother calls me in the middle of the night. And that feels like those things can just be little dots of conflict but they ripple out into affecting other things. Your mother calls you frequently in the middle of the night, you're not going to be very awake the next day. Your car breaks down, you may not be on time for something. It's these little things. You've had the day where you woke up late and then your car broke down and things went wrong, over and over again after that. And so you need to remember to do that to your characters. Give them a hangnail they can't stop thinking about, and then they have to cut some lemons. Oh God. Take that metaphor literally or metaphorically. Or for want of a nail you could say. Because you fight with your wife, you're going to do worse at work. Because you've got a hangnail, you didn't cut up the things for your lunch very well so

your lunch wasn't satisfying and you were hungry in the afternoon. These things, they all ripple out and they affect the story and affect the life of the person.

Mur 16:00

Which is why when people get injured in stories, and then move on as if that was just, that was last scene. The injury was the problem last scene. The injury isn't a problem anymore. And I know I'm not a warrior, and I know I'm kind of a wimp, but I gotta tell you, if I have a broken toe or a cut on my right thumb, the dominant thumb, I'm going to be thinking about it a lot, simply because anything I touch with my thumb is going to make my thumb hurt. When people just get stabbed and then the next scene they're just having a conversation. I don't want people to obsess about it, but you've got to acknowledge injuries and illnesses. More than a lot of people do. This is why they want, you know all these, these books and advice things tell you come up with your extensive backstory and what your characters like and what they don't like and what their phobias are and who their ex-boyfriends and girlfriends, and folks are. And all the people, how they feel about their parents, and all of this, because it could come up later. In a larger or smaller way. And then if people find out, like on a reread that you've mentioned that early on, they're gonna think you're brilliant. And you don't have to put all of that into your story, but if you know it, then you think, "Oh, this is where I could put that phobia". But when you work on your character backstory, what you're doing is you're kind of seeding the conflict soil. I've used too many conflict metaphors here. I should go back to the parfait. You're adding levels to the parfait. That's what I mean. When you're thinking about conflict, think about the very little things, and then how they affect the larger things and then how they affect the larger, larger things. The aching tooth, the upset stomach, the bad night's sleep. Any new parent will tell you that a bad night's sleep can also color your entire day.

Mur 18:16

So I think that's all I have to say on that subject. I'm going to open it up to chat talking now. If you're listening on the RSS feed, and you want to hear the continuance of the conversation, please check out patreon.com/mightymur and then you'll get the full episodes as they streamed on Twitch. And also I forgot to mention I am raising money for the Trevor Project, which helps LGBT youth, whether their problems are suicide, or being kicked out of their house, or homelessness, anything like that. And this is a charity I feel very strongly about, so I wanted to help raise some money for them. So I'm doing that. That link is in the chat and I'll put it in the show notes. This podcast streams twice on Twitch and YouTube. Although we don't get a lot of YouTube viewers. Twitch and YouTube on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Right now, it's 3pm on Tuesdays and 11:30 on Thursdays, but that might shift a little bit. I just haven't decided yet. Monday, I do an Ask Me Anything where we just sit and hang out and Wednesdays I do gaming. Currently I'm doing an unarmed cat in Skyrim, or I'm playing Stardew Valley with my kid. If you think of anything you want to ask me and you're not able to come to the live stream, please email mightymur@gmail.com. And you can see the blog and show notes to this episode at miverse.com. If you would like to get this early, and you can't make the live stream, you can support on Patreon. [Patreon.com/mightymur](https://patreon.com/mightymur) and get it at least several hours earlier. That's the worst it's gotten is several hours earlier but usually it's a day or two. As I said, I am supporting the Trevor Project so if you would like to support my fundraising goals, that is in the chat and will be in the show notes. And on Twitter, I am mightymur. On Twitch I'm mightymur. On YouTube, I'm Mur Lafferty and Instagram, which I have started neglecting again and I should get back to that, is mightymur2. Thank you for listening. Thank you for coming by the live stream. Thank you for chatting. Thank you for lurking. I'm just very grateful that I have people here that want to hear me talk about writing, even after all these years. So, I hope I see you guys in the future. And until then, you should be writing.

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