

Back to Basics: Baaaad Writing Advice

I Should Be Writing S18 Ep54

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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I wanted to do 12 Episode themed sections of podcasts and we're nearing the end of our very first one here on I should be writing season 18 Episode 54.

00:45

and Hi there. Welcome to I should be writing. This is the podcast for wannabe fiction writers. I'm your host Mur Lafferty. I live stream this show on Tuesday, Thursdays usually 3pm Eastern Time and then later, it gets polished up and updated and all shiny and put into our podcast feed which you can follow at murverse.com So check us out live or you can download the podcast whenever it is convenient for you.

But I'm gonna say something I don't normally do, which is, say my credentials because it matters. I started writing professionally in RPGs in 2002 ish, I think, with White Wolf RPGs. And then I started selling short stories and then I self-published some stuff via podcast. And then I started publishing novels traditionally in 2013. And as of October, I will have had six books out, including a Star Wars novelization, a Hugo and Nebula nominated book and a Minecraft novelization -- original story in the Minecraft universe. I'm saying all this because any jerk can give out writing advice. And they often do. And it's funny because when I started this podcast, I did not have a lot. I still had, I did have the RPG experience. But I didn't have the fiction experience. But I was selling it as a newbie talking to other newbies. Let's get through this together kind of concept.

I listened to something very maddening this weekend, and I wanted to address it here. But first, I'll say what I've been up to. I've been actually writing and I mentioned last week that I'm writing a bunch of crap, just to get it out of the way. And I did that again. Yesterday, I was writing something that I know can be longer, but I'm trying to put it into like a 2500 word short story. And I like where it's going. And I like my characters. But I was just sitting there today going I can't I can't tie this up in 1000 more words, I don't even know what the main conflict of the story is yet. Because I miss envisioned it as a bigger project. And then I you know, took a break, took a shower, got some food, and then I sat back down and I was actually thinking about folding clothes. But then I thought one of those very weird things where you think one phrase and then you've got something. So after writing like 1000 words in one short story that I don't think is going to be a very successful short story because it needs to be something

longer. I actually got down the first draft of a nice little short thing that's very weird, but it's a transcription from a woman about how she's auditioning for a reality show, mainly to get away from her dog who's famous. I need to work on a logline. It's a little weird but yeah, I wrote it the beginning, middle and end it's all done so I am that felt good. Because that's another thing that's been on my list of things I have to do but I can't think of anything to do for it kind of thing this summer. And maybe it's maybe It's bad that it took me so long to think of it. But I don't care. I'm calling it a win. I don't have anything under a hard deadline right now. So I'm just playing around

05:15

Question: do you ever outline a book from start to finish prior to writing? Well, I have to now, this is something that pro writers don't talk a lot about. But your first book needs to be sold on spec, which means you have to write the whole thing, because they need to know like it plenty of people can start a story. But you've got to stick the landing. And you've got to know that you can write 80,000 words, a lot of people fizzle out at like 20 or 30. So that's why your first book has to be finished. After that, you're technically a pro. And the publisher wants an outline for your next book, because you don't have to write the book from beginning to end because they know you can do that. So suddenly, I found myself in a position of hating outlining. And then suddenly, it's a vital part of my job, it's in my contract right now. Part of my contract is I will get paid a portion of my advance once I deliver the next outline for the next book. So have I ever outlined a book from beginning to end? Yes, have I followed that outline? Kind of. I'm a discovery writer. And my best ideas come literally in the middle of writing, if they don't come at the outline stage. So I think one of the few things that stayed true the second time around in the story was the general conflicts and the general characters, but all of the details. Not really, that those all changed. So yeah, I hate outlining. But it's becoming more and more vital. Because if you write for a living, you don't want to be writing for writing a book that you don't have guaranteed that someone's going to pay you for. Because that's wasted time. And granted, I'm thinking perhaps I will be better off if I did that because I have found in the past that sometimes my the story that I imagined from the outline that I turn in is not the same story that my editor agent imagines from the outline I turn in. And that could suck so if you just hand them the manuscript, they can't say they envision something else. On the other hand, that's writing an entire book without any guarantee that they'll buy it, which is roug.

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I'm gonna take a quick look at chat. Headspace Valkyrie stairs in my 20,000 Messy draft. I don't know what you mean. Yes, I know. I like discovery writer better than pantsner Yes, Piper Molina, good to see you. Um I also like to under Bob likes the term gardener that's interesting. Gardener as opposed to architect Hey, preemie um I gave my credentials for the first time in forever which felt awkward and weird, but it fits. And I complained about my week so far, which has been another trip to the vet plus a estimate for expensive AC unit replacement so that's pretty much it. Panther brings undue attention to my crotch area. Yeah. Fair. Short story writing process, write a few paragraphs of an idea hated abandoned it come back two months later and sometimes. Yeah, yeah. So. So yeah, I wrote a short story. I wrote part of a bad short story today and then the entirety of another short story, so I'm pretty happy with that. I will probably lengthen it on edits. But for now, I'm I'm happy with it.

Let's get the good news. I'm going to say my good news is my migraine went away. Finally, I'm going to see the physical therapist later on today. So hopefully they'll be able to fix any remaining problems I have. But overall I'm feeling a lot better. I believe KayKimmy mentioned something about dental work going well, so congratulations.

10:36

Oh, Anna says I suppose that also explains why we won't see another shambling guide anytime soon. The publisher determined not to continue that series. And yes, oh, I see what you made about the the writing on spec thing. Yeah, I'm, I could, I could Self Publish. But when projects come up that I'll get paid for versus projects that I won't get paid for. The ones that pay me are always going to be the precedent and I don't know if I could go back to that world. I honestly don't. Like that's a mindset I haven't been in in almost eight years.

11:21

Hey, devo spice. Good to see you. Divo spice is going to be at Worldcon. We should be in touch. I've been trying to make connections with people. It's like, oh, my agent cancelled and my editors go into Dragon Con. So I'm like, Oh, look at all that networking. I get to do Worldcon. All right, cool. Kristianwriting has three new rejections to her personal congratulations and a short story coming out this week. That's amazing. We will hit those three for you. Fantastic. Shards says my good news is there nothing wrong with my computer and my handle the strain muscles? Not anything serious? That's great. Two rejections since last stream from under Pope--congratulations. And a flash pic fiction piece written.

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So happy that the projection counters working? Let's see. Yeah, congratulations, folks. That's great. Hey, I've got a couple of pitches in to some people so I might get to join Team rejection to in the future.

12:48

I joined Team rejection in the podcast sense when I applied for a grant and didn't get it. Just to keep me humble, right. So yeah, if you have any good news, you want to spread, including rejections. Because rejections mean you're working writer, and that's why we celebrate them here. You can come and say them in the chat when it's live. Or you can email me at mightymur@gmail.com. And tell me whatever your good news is, we'd love to talk about it on the show.

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So I've mentioned this before. There was a new social media thing that launched last year and I just don't think it's found its footing yet. It's called Wisdom. And I tried it out and several of you guys were very sporting and made accounts to come see me there. Think of it like Twitch in without video. But with people able to join you so someone can say hey, I want to join your conversation and pop on in. In theory, it seemed like a good idea. What they tried to do is why it's called wisdom is it was encouraging expoerts to make content on the site. But It turned out to be a lot of religious and spiritual people. I'm being very careful not to judge--such content is not for me. But when you load up the app and see who's live more often than not it's going to be people talking about religion

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there wasn't a lot of writing stuff. I tried to do a couple of live chats and I allowed strangers on to talk to me and I don't know if it's because it is outside the sort of geek sphere. But I felt very awkward because I was talking to people who were self-publishing only for money, they wouldn't even tell me their pen name, because they were just like, "romance sells the best. So I write romance for money." And I'm like, Okay, that's great. You don't want us to promote you, okay, sure. And somebody wanted to take my, I tried to go vague with my topic. But then she took it in a completely different direction when I was trying to talk about NaNoWriMo. And I'm just not good at confrontation or dominating a conversation or anything like that. So it makes me a little nervous to just invite people in. I did find it really useful when I planned on having guests. So Valerie and I did a couple of talks, which was a lot of fun. So anyway, I just realized that I'm not going to find my audience there. There are no geeks hanging out there. And so I got off. And then every once in a while someone in marketing contacts me says, hey, you need to come check out wisdom, it's changed, has grown, is awesome. So I did, and I found people talking about writing. So I was I was interested to listen to. And one woman talked about bad self-publishing advice. Which she went on this thing saying, "and this woman spent \$1,000. And, and they didn't even tell her what she needed, like a title page. And then you put your name below the title page. And then the next page is copyright..." And I feel like that episode of Schitts Creek where David just says, "You're just describing shopping, you're just describing what shopping is?" That that's all you're doing. And I don't even know what her advice was. Because it was just mainly I kind of zoned out when she started talking about page one should be this and page two should be this. And then she's like, after your introduction. Then comes your book. I'm like, lady, that's the hard part. Why? Why are you taking so much time on the things that are there, tons of templates everywhere, online, all you got to do is search.

So then I found another guy. And this one was the one that I just I just started hate listening really early in and I couldn't stop. And I did bother the people in discord with my rants. I was walking and I stopped walking so I could go to discord and rant about this advice. And it just made me sad. Because I have the weird feeling of because I have been doing this for 17 years. I kind of feel like well, people have already heard what I have to say no, not everybody--there lots and lots of people who still need to hear this stuff. Because anybody can get on the internet and say here's some running advice. And this guy I mean, the first red flag was him talking about Stephen King, and the movies he's written. Now I know Stephen King has worked on films, but he's a novelist and a short story writer. And then Hollywood buys the rights to his films and he might help out with that but he doesn't come up with he doesn't sit around and brainstorm screenplays so that was the first red flag. The second red flag was him talking about Tom Hanks, but he met Tom Cruise. And he just kept going with that talking about how good Tom Hanks was in Legend. And yeah, it was and then he started getting into advice on on how he was right in that every character should have their own voice. But he's like I'm working on like a

19:40

poem slash short story.0

Oh, dog with cone is here. Hello. Sorry, dog distraction so.

So he said he wanted to write a poem slash short story where there were no dialogue tags at all. And his dialogue was going to be so unique that every character, you would be able to tell what they said.

20:11

I'm like, not a screenplay. He was talking about the mediums, the media of books, comics, screen, movies and television as if they're interchangeable, is if his one advice on dialogue is blanket advice. And the good thing about this guy was that he gave me many ideas for shows. In fact, he gave me the entire idea for the next 12 episode. session I'm doing, which is going to be about myths. But the guy kind of tucked himself around and I don't know if this guy's ever - I think he self published a children's book. And he was bragging about a screenplay, but then he admitted he hadn't finished it yet. And then he, but he was saying, you know, when you're writing dialogue, don't put your politics in there because people know. And there was a woman who wrote Miss Marvel, who put her politics, no, put herself in there, put herself in the story, and everybody hated it. And she got fired.

And I'm like, Wait, are you talking about the comic or the TV show? What do you mean, put herself in there? Was she a Muslim woman writing about a Muslim woman? Or a Muslim girl? Did she make a comic book writer save the day instead of Kamala? Did she put her name in? I mean, how do you put yourself into a story? How do you do that? But no, this guy's just like, Nah, she put herself with a story. Ms. Marvel sucks. And then he says, oh, but there is one way you should put yourself in the story. And then he described how he did it, of course. But then he says you want to take just imagine what you would do in that situation. If you're writing about Superman or Wonder Woman, imagine what you would do with these powers. I'm like, Dude, if you have if you're lucky enough to write Superman or Wonder Woman, you better freakin know what Superman or wonder woman would do? No one cares what you would do. You have to come up with different characters than just yourself. And I was just I was angry. But also, it hurt. Knowing that this guy was presenting this as writing advice. Like the suggestion that you shouldn't need dialogue tags. Well, dialogue tags are good. Because not everybody says I know I've talked about how if you take like Sex in the City or Buffy the Vampire Slayer script and strip all the names out you should be able to tell usually what character saying what. But that's again, that's the medium of television. It doesn't quite work that way in fiction. Oh, and when the guy would talk about movies, he would say you know you you got to remember that the actors are going to be putting their own thing in there. And you're just there your your script is to tell the actors what to do it I'm like, Have you ever heard of a director cause you're gonna get really nasty surprise if you ever managed to sell a script so it just I don't even I hit this is this is a ranting episode. I suppose. What I really am trying to do is tell you guys that. There's if there's advice that you question, question. Look for somebody else. Ask an Expert. Don't just take one person's advice, as gospel. I have said and I'll say it again, said many times. There's one writing piece of writing advice that you have to follow. And everything else I say is negotiable. You got to write you got to keep writing. That's it. That's it. Oh, this guy also said something that was like the thing that Ray Bradbury put in Zen and the Art of Writing that made me stop writing for years. And that was you should know your character so well that they talk to you in your head. That is just like second nature. And I'm like no Oh, not everybody's brain works like that. I love it when people say that

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their characters speak in their head, I am jealous, frankly. Nathan Lowell, a good friend of mine who wrote a lot of podcast novels, he said that his story would play out like a movie in his head, and he would just write really fast to keep up, which is how he had 10,000 word days. My brain doesn't work like that either. And that's okay. It's okay to sit there and think about what your character is going to say. And then write it down and then possibly edit it later. That is a perfectly viable way to write if your characters are speaking to you, and you can think of a good story to tell about them. Great. More power to you write it that way. But that is not the only way to do it. And if you can't do it that way, that doesn't mean you're not cut out to be a writer. Please trust me. Pretty sure I've published more than this guy, and I still haven't had a character speak to me.

I imagine there's a lot of bad writing advice on the internet. Like most advice. Yeah, that's, that's, that's the thing. It just feels weird. I guess, selfishly for me, because I am. I have been talking for 17 years on this subject. And I feel like man, I'm just clearly I've said everything that needs to be said. But clearly, there are people who need to hear it. So I need to say it again. Anyway, what Premee had said earlier was there are people who say they can't read as they write, or they can't read, but they still want to be a writer, but they don't want their writing polluted or contaminated. Or they don't want to copy anybody else. And I can tell you, from personal experience that if you've ever read a book that that's going to be carved into your subconscious. And if it's a favorite book that you've read more than once it's going to affect your writing. It is even subconsciously trust me. And all you got to do is hope if people make comparisons, they're favorable.

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Reading while you write is vital. It helps you get new ideas. It helps you keep up with what what, what's being published. Now, granted, it's not the best thing to write to the market. But it's good to know that unless you've got a kick ass idea for a cyberpunk novel. It's gonna be a hard sell. I'm sorry. It's just not very hot right now. And I think urban fantasy might be slowly on the way out too. you write what you love. But you need to know what's being published. And then there's the styles. You know, I find it I find it difficult to read classic literature, I have a degree in it. And I find it difficult to read classic literature. Because the style is not to my taste. A lot of almost everybody in my generation seems to love Jane Eyre and Pride and Prejudice and I've never gotten into them, ever. I feel like I'm missing something. I had a friend who like would carry around a copy of Wuthering Heights. And no, he wasn't a poet, a poet who was or guy in your MFA. He really did love the book that much. I tried to read it.

So styles change as time changes. So you need to be reading and also I'm sorry, if you expect other people to read your books, but you don't have it in you to read somebody else's, you're an ***hole. That's just the way it is. So um, that's pretty much all I have. That's right. I'm going back to the bar con now. So I'm going to stop the main podcast right now and then we're gonna hang out on Twitch a little bit longer and chat.

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So thank you for listening and see you next time. Until then, you should be writing.

And remember, we can't do this without you. Thanks for your support.

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