How I’m Producing Salt in Wounds (2016 Post-Kickstarter)

I recently stumbled upon the concept of ‘technical debt.’ This idea (cribbed from software development) refers to all the shortcuts, hot fixes, and other inefficiencies and lingering unresolved (or half-resolved) problems that get worked around in order to meet a deadline. These issues represent a ‘debt’ that has to be reapid with ‘interest’… it ultimately ‘costs’ more to fix a problem than it would have cost to do it right in the first place… but as the deadline was onrushing the time scarcity was hitting harder earlier rather than later.

All creative projects have some form of this problem, for most creators their work is not so much ever finished as eventually ‘turned in.’

Now, with my Kickstarter having smashed through every stretch goal (and Salt in Wounds grows accordingly) I’ve been thinking about my process, about the technical debt I’ve accrued, and how I can avoid generating more. I’ve been reexamining how things are done with an eye to producing books with the knowledge that –in order to produce them in the timeframe I want- means I wil have to collaborate with more people on a deeper level than I’ve ever done before and so I need a deeper understanding or my process, a better ability to ‘show the blueprints’ and assign tasks months ahead in a such a way that they’ll all (mostly) fit together when I begin piecing everything together into the final books.

Here’s my updated process:

Step 1. Generate detailed outlines with Todos for each book.

In the past, I tended not to outline or only outline in broad strokes (the border between outlines and brainstorming being blurry). Now, as I write, edit, and manage a diverse team of writers, artists, editors and more scattered around the globe it is \*mandatory\* that I have a clear, easily communicated vision of what the ‘final’ product(s) will be, what specifically needs ot be done to make that happen, and when things re to complete by. This is especially important because –in many cases- both the art and descriptive text for a monster say will be produced concurrently by two separate parties, and both will have to match each other.

Step 2. Create a Style Guide

A style guide is simply a clear explanation of what I need/expect to be from my collaborators, in my case, this deals with how writers and designers should format text (flat text, no formatting, with ‘tags’ like [heading] [special] and so on where they think appropriate, for layout artists and others, it’s font types and colors, and so on).

Step 3. Wrangle Freelancers into a Group Communication Channel

For my previous projects, I ended up using a mix of email, text, and phone calls/in person meetings. Now, I’m switching to Ryver for a single repository of all communication/coordination. I feel \*a little\* bad about asking people to setup a new account/communication channel, but frankly, I need this level of coordination to keep myself sane (and any artist who doesn’t want to do so is free not to work on the project).

Step 4. Divy Up Assignments Including to Myself

Step 5. Work My Assignments

I’m not just product lead, I’m also a writer and so have assignments just like any freelancer. For me, my process is to first draft long hand and then do a typed draft.

Step 6: Back and Forth with the Freelancers

Every freelancer will have questions, and there will be at least one back and forth before a draft of theirs is ‘accepted.’

Step 7. Combine all Texts/Assignments into a Single Document.

Step 8 Collect Art

This is one of the steps I’m \*most\* looking forward to; I can’t wait to see Salt in Wounds spring to life visually due to the efforts of talented artists.

Step 9 Edit

At minimum, there’s going to be at least 2 layers of editing (substantive and copy). I’ll have to do some of this work, but mostly I’m going to rely on hiring outside editors to get to the level of quality I want.

Step 10 Layout

It’s time to make the words pretty, and the art pop!

Step 11 Hardcopy Proof

This is the very last chance to catch errors.

Step 12: Print/Digitally Publish

Hurray, the job is done! Now, back to whatever step I’m on with the \*other\* supplements.

Step \_: Schedule Time for Housekeeping

This is a ‘meta’ step, that doesn’t have a particular order, but I need to regularly put aside time (probably weekly) just to keep all the files straight, in the right place, and do all the digital administration work to keep things straight.

Obviously, the process is a little more complicated, now. This also includes a lot of research, and a thousand little substeps and business steps (researching my printer, accounting, communicating with backers). The wonderful thing however is that now, I have the funds necessary to pay some talented people to do a lot of this work for me; but –in order to be able to avail myself of that- I have to understand all the necessary steps, break down the process, and reassign as needed.