On ‘Success’

By my standards, the (still only 50% complete) Salt in Wounds Kickstarter has been an overwhelming success; in 48 hours I’d raised more money than in my previous 16 years of writing & now approaching two weeks in it’s looking like I might end up raising more than my annual salary.

Put another way, I’ve always liked (and been steering my creative career towards) the ‘thousand true fans’ concept: basically, I think having an ongoing relationship with ~1000 people willing to give me a day’s wage for my creative work (~$100) every year is a much better and more sustainable model than trying to get 100000 people to give me a dollar. As I type these works, 468 people have given me an average of $58.34 a piece. Are these ‘true fans’? Not yet, many if not most are probably more into the concept than me as a creator. However, depending on how well I deliver this is a tremendous base on which to build the option of a full time creative career.

And I do say option because –perhaps for the first time in my life I’m not sure I would take the leap to being a full time creative (even with ample savings, even with a track record of similarly successful projects). I like my job. I like sick days and vacations and 401k matching funds. I’m not sure I’m willing to give that up, even with how much I like creating and getting paid to create. For now, both work; and it’s looking like my (potential) problems of the future will be due to abundance/freedom of choice rather than not having options.

I have jitters, worries that I won’t be able to deliver (I will). I feel some remnant fear that when the backers see what I deliver they’ll feel cheated (they won’t, they’re going to \*continue\* to love my work). I struggle to remind myself –even during this storm of money and attention- I can’t work all the time, I need space to relax and enjoy and do all the important work of being a father and husband and friend the kind of human I want to be. I have a tendency, in this highly charged moment, to search obsessively for my doom, why this isn’t going to work and why it will all be taken from me… the urge to pathologize seeking any purchase. Recently, when I had an argument with someone I loved I wondered if this was all too stressful for me to handle rather than (immediately) acknowledging that while the squabble wasn’t ideal, it was well within the ordinary range of my problems and issues and not evidence of a deep imbalance related to the ‘pride (or even just happiness) comes before a fall’ narrative that is buried deep within me.

Even with all those silly stress responses, this moment, for me, is a delight and a challenge and a promise and a problem that I’m relishing the opportunity to solve. I am so grateful to be given this gift of attention and pledges to pay me for my creative work; just as I was so grateful to fund the publication of my first novel for a thousand dollars, or have writing gigs that grew from $.005 to .$025 to $.20 a word payments.

While there is a ‘career planning’ part of my brain that is already running facts & figures and thinking about what comes next, while there is \*also\* that wilting part of me that wants to focus on past failures, my past scale, to bleed anxiety into this moment; the biggest part of me is simply thankful to be here, now. With that gratitude shaping what I do I want to honor this time and my current talents and these gifts by doing the best possible job. None of this defines me, all of it is merely where I am \*now\* (which will be so different in a year, in ten years, in forty years) but for now, I’m thankful and happy and inspired and ready to get to work.