

April 2024

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**Destruction of
Creation**
A look at A.I. in Art

**Overthinking
Prince of
Persia**
Exploring a
Philosophy of
Time

2024 Creator Showcase

Highlighting E-Stew's Favorite Indie Creators 1



Letter from the Editor

Celebration of Creators

Coming from humble beginnings, my parents always told me that I could do anything that I set my mind to. As I got older and went from one terrible customer service job to the next, it felt like that was becoming less and less true. Thankfully, once I started working for Entertainment Stew, I became so much more fulfilled and passionate about my work. I was around like-minded individuals who uplifted me and supported my ideas. After being with them for over half a decade, we know how difficult it can be to grow a small business, which is why we thought it was a great idea to have this issue in the first place.

We at Entertainment Stew believe that people should be recognized for their good

work. Although we are more connected than ever before, it is easy to get lost in the sea of social media. Being a small business ourselves, we understand how one person viewing your projects and/or products can make all the difference, which is why, this April we decided to showcase very talented creators from all over the globe. As you check out each creator, you will understand why these fine people were chosen for our 2024 Indie Showcase. Surrounding myself with creative individuals keeps me motivated, and hopefully, they inspire you to follow your heart and focus on your passions this spring as well.

New Beginnings,
Sam
Editor-in-Chief



Table of Contents

The Philosophy of Time & Prince of Persia.....	6
Arrowhead Transforms Players Into Heroes.....	12
A.I. and It's Impact on Art.....	18
Creator Showcase: The Band 3.....	28
Creator Showcase: Kaze Illustrations.....	34
Creator Showcase: The Crafty Gamer.....	42
Creator Showcase: Walkscape.....	44
Creator Showcase: Cheeby Tea.....	50
Creator Showcase: Bred Frown Games.....	54
Creator Showcase: Merlin Munchies Coffee.....	58
Creator Showcae: Pyonkotchi.....	68

World of Vala



HEIR

of
Veleno Mansion

The Philosophy of Time & Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown



Derrick Jean-Baptiste
Staff Editor

The Metroidvania genre is becoming a trend these days. Between old franchises like Wonder Boy with Monster Boy and the Cursed Kingdom, Metroid with Metroid Dread, and now Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown, this previously niche genre is gaining popularity. Headed by the Ubisoft Montpellier team, clearly adept at 2D platform games (having developed just about all the main Rayman games, including most recently the excellent Rayman Legends), we had every right to have high expectations of this studio. Have they succeeded in making a good Metroidvania using this cult franchise? I think so, but as always, that is never our outlet's main focus. We attempt to think critically through a school of thought and apply it to our media.

Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown has been a perfect game for this endeavor due to its premise. Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown introduces a hero named Sargon, a

young member of a warrior clan named The Immortals. Sargon must travel to the cursed city of Mount Qaf to rescue the kidnapped Prince Ghassan. Within Mount Qaf the immortals find themselves trapped within the temple due to a time anomaly. Within this time anomaly, time no longer flows linearly like a river but instead, like a raging sea where all fates are intertwined. This time anomaly works as a setup for discussing two of the most interesting philosophies of time: Presentism & Eternalism.

Presentism is a theory in philosophy that says that the only events and objects that exist are those that exist in the present. So, only things that exist now, right now, really exist. It is a theory that focuses on the temporal present; that is, things existing in the present moment. It is not a theory concerned with whether things exist somewhere else. So long as that object or event which is spatially distant from us exists in the present moment, then it exists. If

we were to make a list of all the things that a Presentist believes exist and do not exist, in the list of things that do exist, we would have the Grand Canyon and the Taj Mahal; whereas in the list of things that do not exist we would have: Socrates and tomorrow's events.

The philosopher Ted Sider says, "Presentism is the doctrine that only the present is real... A presentist thinks that everything is present; more generally, that, necessarily, it is always true that everything is (then) present." With this definition, the past and future do not exist – they are not real! That is why Presentism is so mind-boggling because we are constantly thinking

about the past and planning for the future. But according to this theory, the past and future only exist subjectively – it is only the present that exists objectively (outside of our minds). Also, if we take a statement like "Newton exists", then this statement could only be true if it was said when Newton existed in the present, say in 1666. If we say that statement now, then it is false. When making statements about what exists, the truth of the statement depends on the context (when the statement was made).

Arthur Prior is another philosopher who argues that the present is real and the past and future unreal. He says that since it is necessarily true that only the present exists, then there is no point in referring to the present moment. Saying that something is "present" (e.g. "I am present in this room") adds no new information to the statement since all things that exist are present. If I exist in the room, then it follows that I must be present. So the statement should read: "I am in the room". "Present",



as a word, Prior argues, is redundant.

Buddhism also teaches that the present reality is the only reality and attaches supreme importance to it. As the Buddha says in the Bhaddekaratta Sutta: “You shouldn’t chase after the past or place expectations on the future. What is past is left behind. The future is as yet unreached. Whatever quality is present you clearly see right there, right there.” There are also Buddhist philosophers who have formulated a kind of Buddhist Presentism. One of them, Fyodor Shcherbatskoy, wrote: “Everything past is unreal, everything future is unreal, everything imagined, absent, mental... is unreal... Ultimately, real is only the present moment...”

There are problems with Presentism, however, such as, how the theory relates to the flow of time. If there are no events which are in the past or in the future, then how does time pass? Also, if past events are unreal, then what do photographs actually show? And what are



we referring to when we talk about past events? These issues have led some to prefer the Eternalist theory of time.

Eternalism contrasts with Presentism and is thought of as its opposite. Eternalism is the philosophical theory that says that all points in time are equally real. The past, the present, and the future are all real. In this sense, Socrates and tomorrow’s events exist right now, even if I cannot see them or interact with them. Many philosophers have adopted Eternalism because they argue that Presentism is contradicted by Einstein’s Special and General Theory of Relativity, whereas Eternalism agrees with it. As the philosopher of science Dean Rickles puts it: “the consensus among

philosophers seems to be that special and general relativity are incompatible with presentism.”

According to the Presentists, only the present exists. But this assumes that the present moment – the events occurring – will be the same for everyone, an idea that runs up against special relativity. Special relativity says that observers with different frames of reference (such as observers moving at different speeds) can have different perceptions of whether a pair of events happen at the same time or at different times. In addition, someone moving faster than someone else will experience ‘time passing’ slower than they do. The theory also says we have no reason to prefer one observer’s perception to another – both are correct. We, therefore, cannot say that there are a set of events simultaneously happening in the present. People’s ‘present’ – what exists – is different depending on their frame of reference.

In Einsteinian relativity, the ‘present’ is not something

that is an absolute element of reality. As Einstein himself said, “People like us, who believe in physics, know that the distinction between past, present, and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion”. Eternalism does not necessarily do away with the concepts of past and future but considers them more like directions – whether something is in the past or future depends entirely on your frame of reference. Eternalism also agrees with general relativity (Einstein’s theory of gravity) in which time becomes a dimension intertwined with the three dimensions of space. This is known as four-dimensional space-time. Time, therefore, becomes part of the physical structure of the universe and things in the past or future will eternally exist, so long as the structure of the universe eternally exists. Since distinctions between the past, present and future are illusory, we can think of all objects and events as being timeless or eternal.

Even though it seems like common sense that there is

a ‘flow of time’, this could just be a subjective illusion. The sense of this flow of time is extremely convincing, but it probably just reflects how our brains have evolved. If we did not make distinctions between the past, present, and future, perhaps this would hinder our ability to survive. In fact, looking to the past for lessons and planning for the future seems to be essential components of any survival strategy. Our brains are simply not equipped to perceive the true nature of time. Eternalism has also been described as the “Block Universe” theory since all of the points in space-time are fixed and unchanging. This theory does, however, have some controversial implications for free will. For example, if the future is fixed, then in what sense can I really make a conscious choice to do something?

But what does this have to do with the Prince of Persia? Just look at the story of the game, with every alternative time, as a “now”, each now exists by itself, and all other times in the temple, at every

point in time in-universe exist at the same time, overlapping each other and yet connected.

It really is an easy way to picture everything about eternalism, just an overlaid timeline with every possible story in it, the Void is the blank space between the space, and when someone messes with continuity, it is different from your regular time travel because modifying “now” doesn’t necessarily change the “now’s” around it as you deal with this philosophical process while you’re trying to save your Prince. Even if you fail, hey, one of your “nows” might be able to do it.



Helldivers 2: Arrowhead Transforms Players Into Heroes



Josander Ramos
Staff Writer

While playing the game, I took out a Bile Titan on my own after it wiped out my team. I had to fight my way through charging enemies to get to a rocket launcher I had summoned but got separated from. I got to it just in time to turn around and see the Bile Titan had now decided to come for me and was about to spew its acid. Instead of running, I held my ground and lodged the only rocket right between its eyes. The giant's head blew up, and its limp body crashed to the ground.

I felt like an action hero, more than in any game that has me play as an actual action hero.

I think a big part of this is because Arrowhead puts a lot of effort into making your character feel weak, so when you do something great, it feels earned. A lot of the time, when something awesome happens in a game, the glory is shared with the in-game character, the victory is due to our skill as a player, but also the superhuman abilities of our character. I



often end up thinking, “WOW, Kratos/Master Chief/Dante is a freaking bada-” instead of taking all of the credit. In *Helldivers 2*, it's different. The abilities of my character only seem slightly above those of a normal human being, so all of the credit goes to the play, not the character.

I say “seem” because *Helldivers* are, in fact, pretty strong characters; Arrowhead just does a lot to make them feel weak. Let's take a look at the different ways the developers have made you feel like a hero.

- From a lore perspective, *helldivers* are canon fodder. When a character dies, it does not respawn; another character is called in its place.
- There's a great rag doll

system in place that makes your character fly when hit with a strong attack or close to an explosion. Ragdolls are usually reserved for dead characters. Having your character rag doll while alive puts great emphasis on how weak it is.

- The threshold for fall damage is very low for regular human beings. Again, reminding you that you are no super hero.
- Helldivers have no special abilities; they can mostly only run and shoot. Their destructive power comes from weapons granted to them rather than their own innate skill. Sure, they can blow up half the map, but that is not their doing. The fact that these abilities also have friendly and self-damage shows that they don't even really control this power.
- There's a melee attack in the game, and it is mostly useless. Hitting anything with it other than the smallest

enemies will result in... nothing. You are not strong. There is one exception to this, though. If you hit other helldivers, they'll go flying because they are weak.

- You really cannot take much of a beating; 1-3 hits will usually take you out, amplifying the feeling of weakness. Thanks to a deep supply of heals, you are actually made very survivable, but again, that is an external factor, not an innate ability.
- Not only do you lose health easily, but you also get wounded by big hits. This plays a tiny role gameplay-wise; it's mostly just a reminder of





how weak you are.

Something that struck me while playing Helldivers 2 is that it includes a lot of mechanics, which, if mentioned in a vacuum, would cause many people to exclaim, “come on, it’s a video game, it’s supposed to be fun!” Obviously, Helldivers isn’t trying to be a simulator. It’s really a very “arcadey” game, and it’s quite a lot of fun if its sales and player count are anything to go off of.

The mechanics are intuitive. They make you think about the world as a place governed by basic physics and object permanence. As a result, you make more moment-to-moment decisions, and the game is effectively a slapstick

comedy.

Hostile and friction-inducing mechanics include:

- Friendly fire is enabled, no damage reduction whatsoever
- Bullets don’t teleport between magazines
- Your aim lags behind the camera, particularly with heavy weapons, and recoil throws it wildly off-center
- An injury system. Get shot in the arm, and your aim will suffer; in the leg, and you’ll limp; in the chest, and you’ll bleed. The damage you take seems heavily affected by where you get shot.
- Foliage will slow your character down significantly, and enemy corpses get in the way as well
- Reloading heavy weapons is a chore, but this can sometimes be alleviated with a second player reloading for you
- Explosions and diving from heights will turn your character into a

ragdoll, it's entirely possible to pinball between explosions to your death, and if you were holding a primed grenade, you'll drop it (sorry, team)

- In this state, you can drown in sufficiently deep puddles
- Rocket blast back is simulated and will lead to shenanigans
- Visibility is sometimes horrendous, which can affect the enemy and you. Good luck fighting when you can't see more than five meters in front of your face.

This is very similar to the Monster Hunter's approach to character builds. Both games introduce purposeful friction to basic actions, intended to make the player more deliberate in their engagement with the game.

There is a recognition in these choices that removing friction (friendly fire, loss of ammo on reload, sheathing weapons before using consumables, animation lock on most actions) creates games that can be played on auto-pilot if they don't

make attempts elsewhere to introduce engagement.

It's a philosophy I really appreciate. It does lead to the low-effort "why game so clunky" critique by the lazy, but that's inevitable. Stripping away the player-friendly aspects does wonders for you to actually plan ahead and consider what you are doing.

'If people start calling you a hero, that means they're about to let you die.'

Heroism is sacrifice, and sacrifice is slaughter. Glad that Arrowhead understood this.





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The Destruction of Creation: A.I. and it's impact on Art



Mia Paul
Staff Writer

There has been a long-standing debate among experts regarding the ability of artificial intelligence to create art. Some argue that due to the linear nature of art, machines cannot produce it. However, this opinion is highly controversial among those who possess knowledge in art and AI. Let's explain it in simpler terms.

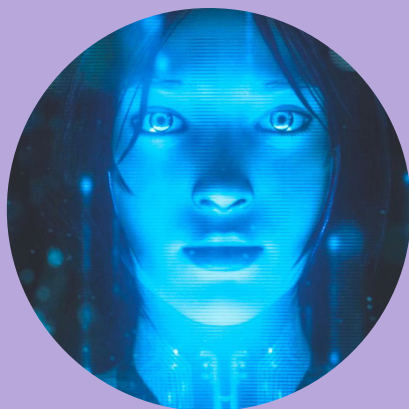
Art is a concept that describes two things. There is the apparent material thing, which is a piece of art. A canvas with paint on it. A sculpture of some kind. A scribbled drawing. A sonnet or piece of music. These are all things that qualify as art. Only a fool would deny that the material expression of art is linear: one thought causes another, and all of a work's influences are present in it, if not necessarily visible. One can easily trace the impact that specific events have on material artistic expression. Industrialization, which created a linear iteration in the West known

as modernism, or the forced opening of trade with Japan that shipped in ukiyo-e works and ushered in the Japonisme trend among French alcoholics. If artistic expression was not linear, the names of those who inspired future generations wouldn't attract such awe from art's practitioners. People are welcome to rewrite the history of the arts all they want, but the paintings are still signed by people that artists aspire to be.

Art is not merely a tangible product, but rather a language, a means of expression that has been with us since our earliest days of communication. Cave paintings predate the written word, and pictography remains a significant part of Chinese script, the oldest writing system known to us. Art has always been an intrinsic element of human beings, and we have gradually developed the means to express it. In earlier times, when language was the primary mode of artistic expression, this was often referred to as a divine spark.

However, in modern times, with the advancement of technology, this idea may have lost its significance. People who lack artistic talent are often the ones who belittle its significance. This may be why some people who worship machines are trying to diminish the importance of art.

Artificial intelligence is currently involved in over a hundred intellectual property disputes. These range from past Writers Guild of America strike to the question of whether AI-generated music can be considered as theft for using past creative outputs to create a “new” lifeless audio product. The question of art’s linear nature is central to this argument, as linearity is at the core of the debate. If AI is considered as nothing more than a tool, can it be compared to the invention of a paintbrush or a canvas? This is a false equivalence for several reasons, but the most prominent one is that none of these tools attempted to artificially replicate the human mind, which is the only place where linearity and artistic expression reside.



AI art is for dull people. More specifically, it is for the kind of dull person who thinks having an idea is the same as creating art. It’s for the capitalists of the world.

A piece of AI art is generated by typing an idea into a box and letting a computer fart out the median example of that idea, according to its massive data set, much of which was actual art and is now just statistical noise to be smoothed. Gone is the linearity of a mind’s influences over a lifetime, replaced by a monstrous amalgamation of every artwork ever made, reduced to binary and aped. AI art is cowardly because the person using it—who may even have the audacity to call themselves an artist—lacks

confidence in their ability to create without the crutch of consensus, autogenerated by an algorithm developed by the least artistic people who have ever lived.

As art moved away from its spiritual roots and became a part of the marketplace, the distinction between art as an artistic creation and art as a product started to blur. Nobody aspires to create a mere product. People are paid to produce goods or services, but art, which has been created for free since ancient times, is an inherent part of our evolution as a species. The attempts to commercialize and industrialize art, and now even use algorithms to make it, are an attack on creativity and a disservice to the casual consumer. It's not surprising that professors who teach the value of creativity are also sending their students to workshops that are essentially commercial factories for producing content. (Hello, Internships.)

Artificial intelligence (AI) has many useful applications in improving existing technologies such as web search. Therefore, arguing

about whether AI should or should not exist is a waste of time. Since the early days of the internet, piracy has been a feature rather than a bug, and it will continue to be so. As a result, it's become more important than ever for humans to exercise their unique trait of defeating the art generated by individuals who type their sub-Rick and Morty jokes into the box. This can be achieved through snobbery.

Snobbery stopped being cool sometime in the last decade, right around the time rampant optimism turned otherwise discerning critics into pariahs.

"Let people enjoy things" became an accepted counterpoint for anyone willing to stand up and loudly proclaim that a piece of art sucks, and the people who like it should be embarrassed. The machines have changed that. AI is going to give these annoying optimist the world they deserve by churning out efficient and lifeless blockbusters that are the median of the most popular culture shoved into the computer's gullet. The only defense one has against

this is to exercise the innate human instinct to cry out when presented with bland, redundant images and sounds.

Say that it sucks. Tell your friends that their AI art is stupid and boring. Ask them why they couldn't learn to draw it instead. Draw it yourself and tell them that what you made is better because by putting in the effort to create something with your own hands, you have already put some of yourself into it.

The subjectivity of the quality of individual works of art does not change the fact that the act of artistic expression itself is not subjective. It is, in fact, a very objective, well-defined process of synthesizing past influences, modern existence, emerging ideas, and the one-in-a-gazillion unique perspective that an individual human mind—hidden away from the droning monotony of the consensus—can add to make it something new. Synthesis, a linear act, is a uniquely human trait. With that in mind, one can very easily come to an immovable conclusion: Not

only is artificial intelligence incapable of creating art, but using it in any capacity to aid the creation of art is a pathetic act of surrender. The computer is capable only of memory, the lowest form of thought. A seagull can remember the face, and I'm better than a rat with wings.

You do not need to be a professional critic to know this truth or to recognize AI artists' attempts to defraud it. You just need a brain and a heart. Americans live in a cultural technocracy, which has served the art world poorly. Expert culture is useful for understanding scientific matters that genuinely require decades of studious commitment to a niche aspect of modern existence, like when to use a



vaccine or how to manage the flow of traffic in a city. It is less useful when it convinces hordes of people that an educated person is more qualified to tell the public which aspects of their culture do or do not have inherent value.

But art is humanity at its most innate. It's not about having the skills to properly assess an artist's precision, nor is it about having the schooling to know the difference between Baroque and Rococo influences. Instead, it's the feeling in the pit of the gut that reminds the viewer that they've seen the trick that the AI artist is trying to obscure and recognize the scam at its center.

Today, you can, in seconds, have the machine whip up a passable caricature of a Basquiat, a Sargent, a Degas. You can display and share it across any number of LCD screens. But have you ever held a hand-carved ukiyo-e board and looked at it up close? Have you seen the flaws in the line work that aren't cause for shame but celebration, because in the

Buddhist tradition, one is meant to embrace wabi-sabi, an untranslatable phrase that roughly means to find beauty in ephemera and imperfection? Have you felt the grain of the wood that had sat undisturbed for centuries before one devoted human sat and carved intricate messages of perseverance and faith and love and pain, or wondered how their hands ached while tracing the minuscule etchings with your fingertips? Have you marveled at the brightness of the blue—bluer than any pixels can capture—and wondered just how much one must care to preserve such beauty with such permanence? This art is not just better, though it is that. It's fundamentally different. It's human.



THE WORLD OF VALA WORLD BOOK

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Introducing the Creator Showcase: The importance of Creators Supporting Creators

If you don't support other Creators, then you are a hypocrite.

Harsh words, I know, but isn't it true? Our creators are always trying to find ways to get people to support us. That can take many shapes, i.e., making the best quality work we can and marketing it to the masses. How many times have we sent out a Facebook post or tweet asking for someone's support? We have all done it.

I was thinking about this as we worked on the Pre-Production for this issue, and I realized that I should support other Creators more often.

We need to stick together, and if we have

the audacity to ask others to support us, we should most definitely support others. It only makes sense.

It comes down to not always being a taker but also being a giver. We all have a tendency to ask for more than we give. This is all wrong and is probably a big reason why our "target audience" doesn't want to hear from us.

Case in point, if I post about my work and how people can get involved, it is hard to get engagement. If I post a funny video that I find on YouTube, I have no problem getting likes and comments. Funny how that works, huh?

It stems from

the simple human psychology that people want to do things that are beneficial for them. A funny video provides comic relief from a most likely stressful day. Our asking for someone to buy our work doesn't elicit the same response. "What is in it for me?" people will think when they are seeing what you have to say. It is just the way the world works.

To make the support of "Indie Creators" more prolific, we need to infiltrate the system from the inside out. When the average consumer sees our community building

itself up and sees how awesome some of our work can be, they will follow suit and start to buy the painting they want for their living room from a local artist instead of heading to Ikea and purchasing that 1 in a million mass-produced canvas.

A significant way that we can change this is to actually be the catalyst. If we Creators start investing in our community, we will see a change. We will begin seeing support. Always give more than you take.

If you have the audacity to ask for support, you should be giving it as well.



Join the Band 3 Bandwagon



1. How would you describe yourselves and your music?

Tré: We're 3 easy-going, passionate, crazy lil' musicians working hard to do what we love. We love making music, but we also have our other gigs we do to fund it! I'm a lighting director and an audio engineer (I co-produce, mix, and master most of our music with my good friend Anthony Brodeur), Jon is an RN (Registered Nurse), and Jasmine is an actor, teacher, dancer, photographer, singer, and plays with a ton of other bands as well! I'd describe our music as pop-rock influenced by the decades. I love almost all music, from Johnny Cash to Prince, Elton John to Green Day, and everything in between. I try to let it all influence the music we create.

2. How did the Band get Started?

Jasmine: I met Tré when we were filming a music video for our friend Emily Coupe. I still hadn't been in LA for too long at that point, and that was the first music video I had drilled for since moving here.

Tré reached out to me not long after about starting this new project, and we vibed so much from the short time we worked together that I knew I would want to work with him more! I love his style and the music he creates, and it is such a blast to play. Tré and Jon are the best bandmates and I'm so happy to jam out and have fun while we do it.

Jon: Tré and I have been best friends for years. He has always been doing a lot to better himself as a songwriter talent, I was working with him to help with some of the ancillary visually creative stuff for a while. And one day it just kinda clicked to be in this together, so I picked the bass back up and spent a couple weeks shaking off all the rust. Jaz is the resident badass and brings a lot of the energy that is just essential for our vibe.

Tré: I was releasing music as a solo artist for a while (after being in numerous other projects that died out), but in my heart, I always knew I wanted to be in a band. Like

Jon and Jaz said, it all clicked one day when I thought of the name “The Band 3.” It’s my favorite number, Tré is 3 in Spanish, and finding 2 other members that fit the vibe of the music I was creating; the stars just aligned, and I’m very grateful they did. I love playing with them!

3. How would you describe your Genre of music?

Jon: We play the field, we like to dabble in a little bit of everything. It’s hard to confine every song into one genre. There’s definitely some of that generational rock going back to the 80s and 90s but there’s some pop and some punk influence in there as well.

Tré: Punk n’ soul. We’ve got some really aggressive, in-your-face rock tracks, as well as some soft singer-songwriter ballads, all the way to dance-pop like Baby, but with an edge. To me, Punk n’ Soul captures that essence and all of our combined influences.



4. How would you describe your Genre of music?

Tré: I’d say the top 3 musicians that have influenced my style are Green Day, Prince, and Weezer. Green Day was the band that got me into punk rock. When I got into Prince, he was the pinnacle of everything I wanted to strive to be as an

artist, from his talent to his aesthetic. Everything about him. As I got older, Weezer helped me embrace my nerdiness, so I wasn't always trying to be the cool Prince-esque rock star, and I think that helped even me out and made me a more authentic artist. Those 3 make up the majority of my personal style, for sure.



5. What advice would you give to Aspiring Musicians based on your own Experiences?

Jon: Don't do music unless you can't live without it. And if you can't live without it, do everything you can to accommodate it, which may mean doing something else as a career so that you can fund your passion. Learn everything you can from anyone that you can. And above all know that dreams never die. I stepped away from music for nearly 10 years so I could become a nurse because I knew that I needed something lucrative. But the itch to play music was always in the back of my mind, and I didn't even know how sad I was until I picked it back up and remembered how happy music makes me.

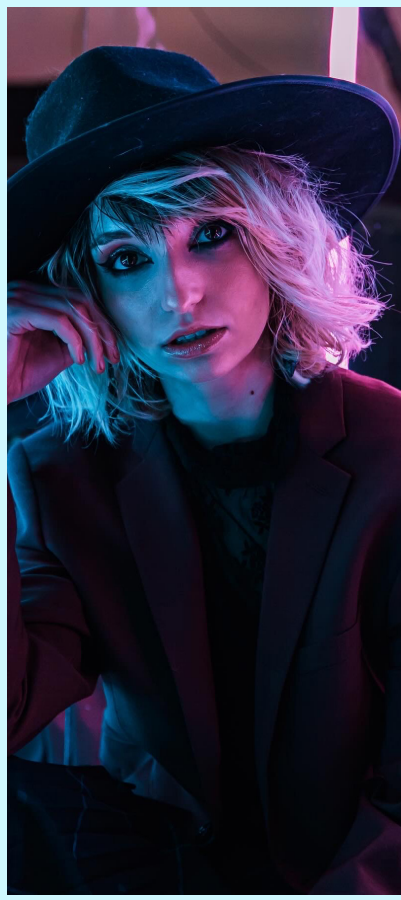
Tré: What Jon said. Some people need a break to figure themselves out, and that's okay. But if you're like me and feel like you've been doing it forever, keep going. I've been pursuing music nonstop since I picked up my

first instrument at 13. It's been 16 years, and I'm still always learning and getting better, from production to songwriting, to mixing and mastering. It's a never-ending journey, and it's one you will only continue to do if you can't live without it. If you can, I envy you because it's driven me absolutely crazy all my life haha. But I do love it, and I wouldn't trade it for the world.

6. What are some Dream Projects you hope to do in the Future?

Tre: I definitely want to write for film and television. Jon and I are actually taking Japanese classes, and I would love to write the opening theme for an anime one day. That'd be a dream come true, haha.

Jon: I'd love to work in video games in some capacity.



7. What are you Hoping people take away from your Music?

Tre: Good things come from difficult times. One of our most popular songs, ironically titled "Everything's Fine," was written during one of the darkest times in my life. Losing my best childhood friend and battling addiction, it was a whirlwind

of emotions I didn't know how to handle. But music has always been there for me. And that song really seems to connect with people. I'm way past that point in my life now, but I guess what I hope people take away is that the struggles you face become experiences you can use to help others. And, of course, not to take life too seriously. If it makes you feel good, then we've done our job and that makes me super happy as an artist.

Jon: I hope someone takes something that helps them get through some struggle. Maybe that's a message about getting knocked down and getting back up again, or understanding that sometimes we are our biggest obstacle to our own happiness and to be easier on yourself, or maybe it's just a funky little groove that rattles around in their head all day that takes their mind off the hard parts of life.

Jasmine: I hope people take away that even if you are lonely, having a bad day, or feeling lost, music and art

will always be there for you. On my worst days, listening to my favorite artists never fails to brighten me up or just to get back up and fight back. I hope that we can be that artist for those people, and I know I am that artist for my younger self.

Kaze Illustrations and Their Creations



1. Describe who you are and your Project.

I'm Lori, an artist and a storyteller. The project I'm currently working on is called Windswept, a slice-of-life school comedy. It started as a Webtoon and now has a comic dub available on YouTube.

2. What Inspired you to Convert your Comics into a Video format?

I've been a voice acting enthusiast for as long as I can remember and I think bringing actors on board helps bring the story to life. Plus I've always wondered what my characters would sound like!

3. How do you typically approach a new Project or Art Piece?

I always start by planning. How many panels do I need? How many of those panels need extra attention? What is the optimal text placement? These are just a few of the questions I ask myself before diving into any new project or illustration.

4. Can you walk us through your Creative Process?

Creative inspiration can happen anywhere, anytime, and I always need to be prepared for that moment. I have a backlog of ideas in a Google Doc that I've recorded over time, so when I need to sit down to write a new chapter, I have no shortage of inspiration. I mentioned this in a previous Stirring the Pot podcast, but I treat comic writing like screenwriting. Not only do I write what the characters are saying, but I also plan visual elements here too, like what action a character might be performing in that scene. This makes the storyboarding process go smoothly. While I storyboard, I plan where the text will go and make edits for clarity as necessary. Then it becomes my standard process for digital illustration: sketch, line, color, render as needed. Rinse and repeat.



5. Is it common to rewrite chapters you've written?

During the writing stage, I might combine some storylines or cut something out and save it for later, but I never completely rewrite something after the artwork has been completed. If I don't learn to live with what I've written, then I'll never get anything done!

6. What advice would you give to aspiring artists based on your own experiences?

Figure out what your own goals are as an artist—are you pursuing art as a hobby or are you trying to commercialize your work? If so, then what is your audience? Then plan—come up with a pathway to your goals based on what others have done. Study—read books and practice from real

life. Art may be a creative outlet but it is also academic. You'll be more satisfied with your progress if you have a game plan and don't wander about aimlessly.

7. What Skills are important for your Creative Process?

I cannot emphasize this enough—planning is the most important skill for my creative process. Having the ability to set goals and meet deadlines allows me to create to the best of my ability.

8. How did the Video Production process differ from your Comic-Making process?

I believe video production is way more complex than the comic making process. I'm no longer working on it solo—I have actors I rely on to meet deadlines to turn in their lines. I have a production schedule that allows the actors to see when I plan on completing and posting each video so that they have ample time to turn in their lines and make revisions if necessary. Creating the audio track is also another

beast—I have to mix it in a way that makes the tonal quality of each actor sound consistent, which is difficult when everyone is using different recording equipment in differing environments. Making the comic graphics move is easy for me since I am familiar with editing software, but it is still time consuming so I heavily lean on my production schedule to pace myself. It's similar to the comic making process but it is on a much more demanding scale.

9. What did you look for when choosing the Voice Cast?

When I opened auditions, I accepted all submissions regardless of experience. Though when it came to selecting the final voice cast, I looked for enthusiasm, ability to meet deadlines, and a willingness to participate—I recognize that's hard to find, especially since my project is not-for-profit and does not generate income for the actors. So despite it being unpaid, I selected actors who were eager to have fun

and gain experience. Those sorts of folks deliver the best performances, in my opinion.

10. Is it good to ask others for Advice?

It depends on who you're asking. Are you asking your friends, who may not have any interest in art? Or are you asking like-minded peers and mentors who are also striving to improve their artwork? I don't think it's necessarily a bad thing to receive feedback from people who will praise you, but there needs to be a healthy balance of people reviewing your work who will give you the feedback you need to improve.

11. Is constructive criticism a good or bad thing?

You can receive constructive criticism from well-meaning people, but unless they know what they're talking about it won't hold any weight. If you receive constructive criticism from a teacher or a peer who is studying art like you, it would be a good idea to listen and implement their suggestions. The goal

of constructive criticism is to lift up and improve your work, so if you heed the words of someone who cares about your growth as an artist then inevitably you will grow too.

12. How important is Peer Revising?

Peer revising is important because you get the opportunity to listen to other people's perspectives that you might have missed with your own work. It's a beautiful thing to be able to learn from your peers who are also learning art because you can learn from one another in ways that you wouldn't be able to learn on your own. I'm no longer in school, but I find myself learning so much from my friends who are also artists because we regularly give each other feedback.



13. How do you get yourself motivated?

I think about how the end result of my efforts will give me personal joy and fulfillment. Some people are motivated by popularity or money, and that's fine if that's necessary, but chasing those things for me has actually demotivated me into not producing art. Find what is most important to you and chase that. It'll be your best motivator.

14. Have you ever had an Art Disaster? How did you keep going on?

First you'd need to define an "art disaster," and to me that would be losing my work due to failing to save. I recently lost my work a few weeks back while I was lecturing a class on how to back up your files. Ironic, right? Thankfully, I had students who were paying attention during my lecture and asked me if I knew of any backup locations on my device. Sure enough, I checked the backup folder, and my artwork was there with all of the layers I needed. Unfortunately I've seen my share of lost files

from students who failed to save, and the way I teach them how to move on from their mistakes is to think about how they could improve on the work they lost and do it better the second time around. This prevents students from losing motivation and gives them an opportunity to create better art.

15. What are some other Dream Projects you hope to do in the future?

I would love to direct a fully animated series, or even an animated music video. I would also like to work on a live-action narrative film or series—I like just about anything that tells a story.

16. How do you navigate the balance between Artistic Expression and Commercial Viability?

I don't. (Lol). I'm incredibly blessed to be able to focus on the type of story I want to tell without worrying about whether it is marketable since I'm an independent creator who makes art for fun. I don't have to worry about whether my artwork will generate



income because I have a separate career that pays my bills. Sure, it would be nice to be able to gain traction with the masses, but then I'd have to change my approach to become appealing to a wider audience and that might affect the story I want to tell. Right now I'm happy creating what I want at the pace I want.

17. What advice would you give to Beginner Writers?

The best advice I would give to beginner writers is to write. Write every day about anything you can think of. What did you see? How did it make you feel? Answering questions like that on a daily basis will strengthen your communication skills and give you the tools you need to approach bigger projects.

18. What is the main thing you want people to take away from this project?

I want people to see how much fun it is for people to get together and create for the sake of creating. "Look at this thing I made with other people!" It's a fun thing to say! I love telling people about the things I've worked on and I want others to know that they have the ability to create too, if they try!

19. How do you hope your art impacts and connects with your audience?

I hope everyone who views my art gains a deeper appreciation for the connections they have with others. The main point of Windswept is that your life can be greatly improved by the interactions you have with other people. Life is more fun when you do it with friends and I want that to come through in my work.



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Critical Hits from “The Crafty Gamer.”



1. How would you describe yourself and your Business?

We are a family owned candle and hobby shop hybrid. We are avid tabletop gamers ranging from board games, to roleplaying games and card games.

2. What Inspired you to start your Business?

It started with a desire to create a more immersive experience at the table. A passion project turned into an etsy store to pay for our hobby, and now an actual store to play games in and share our hobby with many others.

3. What do you think of success in regard to your business? Freedom, Influence, Creative expression, Innovation, etc?

Innovation is a key indicator, but creative expression and passion are two factors that have really separated us from other candle makers. We think about the location and try our hardest to get a fragrance that sends you into that space.

4. Looking back on your journey, what progress are you Proud of?

Everything really, we started off in a kitchen and worked our way up to a brick and mortar store. We are grateful for the milestones we have hit in such a short amount of time.

5. What are future goals for your business?

We finalized our Fantasy Collection of scents and will be moving into other genres with over 60 new scents in the works.

6. What advice would you give someone who is thinking about starting a small business?

The little things improve over time, but the passion has to be direct and clear from day one. Money flows in and out of a business, but keeping the passion and knowing why you are doing what you do is just as important as to what you need to do to get there.

Welcome to Walkscape: Train like an Adventurer!



1. How would you describe your App?

WalkScape is an online role-playing game that is completely tied to fitness. It's basically like RuneScape, an old-school MMORPG combined with walking in real life. You create yourself a character and then have freedom to play as you like. You can start exploring the game's vast fantasy world, cut trees, mine minerals, meet NPCs and trade with them, and actions in the game are powered by walking in real life. So for instance, cutting down a birch tree might need you to walk 30 steps, or traveling to the next city could be 700 steps. By playing the game, your character progresses when you level up your nine different skills (woodcutting, mining, agility, cooking and so on) and becomes stronger when you craft or find yourself better items! Progression in the game usually means that you need to walk less steps for each action, or that you unlock new things to do in the game.

2. What inspired you to start your App?

My main inspiration for this game came when I was trying to find a game that would help me exercise more. I have ADHD, and find it difficult to motivate myself to exercise enough. I downloaded a bunch of games from app store, but all of them either required me to constantly be glued to the screen while walking, or had very predatory monetization schemes. This made me realize that I need to make my own game to fulfill what I see as a good exercise game. I first started the game just as my own hobby project, but it then started to gather a lot of interest online. Then I needed to start a company, and now I'm working on it full-time.

3. What is the main thing that you want people to take away from your App?

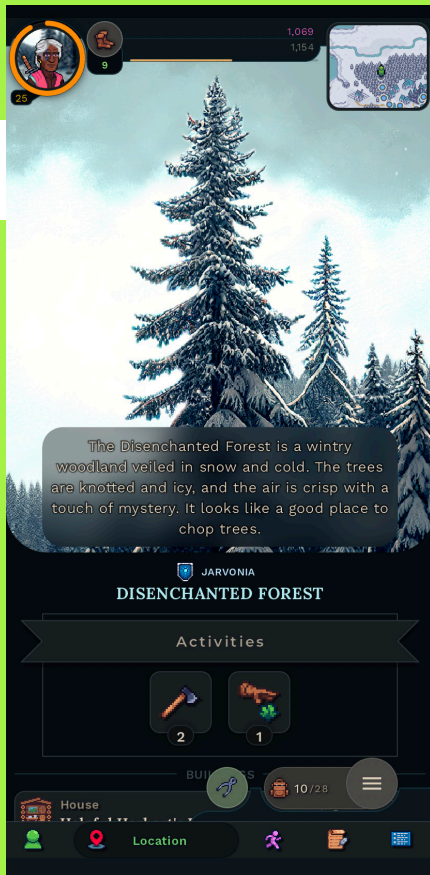
The game already has almost ten thousand players, even during its closed beta and the thing that makes me really happy is to hear from the

players themselves, how it's helping them. I've received dozens of testimonials from our early players who've been saying that it's made them healthier, and sparked a routine of walking a lot during their days. That's what the game's main purpose is: helping people to improve both their physical and mental health, while also being just a really fun game to play.

4. How do you see your App impacting or connecting with your audience?

We have a pretty sizeable community around the game on Discord and Reddit. Especially on Discord, I love to see our players sharing their walks, tips, and their journey towards more healthy lifestyle. It's also very positive community, which I really love. The impact that the game has on our players has been really positive, and I'm hoping that by developing it further the game will have a large effect on both the environment and health. Last year when the game wasn't released, we held a

community event on Earth Day where we asked people to do plogging and rewarded them based on how many bags they got. We managed to clean up more than 20,000 liters in one week, and these kind of impactful events are something I'm really keen on organizing.





5. What advice would you give to aspiring Creators based on your own experiences and learning?

Don't give up, don't trust investors and don't listen to industry veterans. When I started this project and was showing it at conventions to some industry veterans, many of them told me that

it's never going to succeed, I need to add some predatory monetization schemes to it to cover marketing costs because otherwise it would never have any players, and all kinds of other things. I didn't listen, and the game is already more successful than I could've ever believed. I have also turned down all investment offers, as I feel like taking investors would ultimately make this project more about making money and returns for them, when the goal of the project is to make people healthier. I've found out it's much better to listen to your community and people who actually play your game to make it better.

6. What skill is important for your creative process?

In my personal creative process, it's a lot of skills. Indie game development is something where you're most of the time responsible for everything: art, programming, marketing, business management and sound. I've been developing games as a hobby since I was just 10 years old, and have been doing it for fun throughout my life. It's a

really long process to become a solo game developer, but the thing I love about game development is that I can put all of my creativity and skills into it. What I consider important in my general creative process probably comes down to my ADHD a lot. When I do creative work, I get super hyper focused and my mind is always full of ideas. Hyper focusing is probably not too healthy, so I can't recommend it, but it's honestly where I can get a lot of creative things done, as I usually can't even sleep or eat while I'm working on something that I'm passionate about.

7. What are future goals for your app?

My future goal for the game is to finish it. The game has been released as a closed beta (meaning that you'll need to apply to get access) for two months now, and I've been adding a lot of things to it since. But there's a ton that is still missing: quests, dialogue, more content, more online features, and combat mechanic. These things are

also something people are really looking forward to, and I'm super excited about the future of the game. It's already very well received by the players, and this early in development that's a very good sign to myself. If you're interested on following the game's development progress or applying for the closed beta, you can sign up and apply at portal.walkscape.app! I write a development blog post every two weeks to our Portal.



STIRRING THE POT

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Spilling the Cheeby Tea



1. How would you describe yourself and your business?

I'm just a tea-loving anime fan who decided to turn my two passions into a business! Cheeby Tea is all about bringing together the cozy world of tea with the colorful universe of anime. It's not just about selling tea; it's about sharing my love for both anime and tea with fellow enthusiasts.

2. What inspired you to start Cheeby Tea?

I was inspired to start Cheeby Tea for a few reasons. Firstly, I've always loved the idea of being my own boss and creating something I'm truly passionate about. Secondly, as an avid convention-goer, I noticed a lack of tea vendors catering to anime fans, which sparked the idea of combining my love for anime with my love for tea. Lastly, seeing my dad successfully run his own business also inspired me to take the leap and pursue my entrepreneurial dreams.

3. What does your Creative Process look like?

My creative process is a mix of inspiration from both anime and the diverse flavors of tea. It typically starts with brainstorming sessions where I draw inspiration from my favorite anime series, characters, and themes. Once I taste test and approve a blend, have a vision for the character, I collaborate with our talented artist, Fleesveon, to bring these characters to life on our packaging.

4. How would you describe yourself and your business?

It has honestly changed very little. Selecting the tea flavor is very difficult. Since we are a small business, one tea is quite an investment. Once the blend is selected, the character is drawn on my computer with my personal drawing pad, sent to my artist, and finally to my packaging graphic designer! It takes a whole team for just one bag design, which can take up to 3 months.

5. What challenges have you overcome since starting Cheeby Tea?

Since launching Cheeby Tea, I've navigated through various challenges, from learning social media marketing to efficiently managing packing and shipping orders. However, one of the most daunting hurdles was entering the convention scene as a vendor with no prior experience. Learning the ropes, from securing booth space to crafting an appealing display, was a trial-and-error process. Yet, it proved immensely rewarding, allowing us to engage directly with customers and expand our reach in a vibrant and interactive setting.

6. What is the main thing that you want people to take away from your Product?

Above all, I want people to experience joy and delight when they engage with Cheeby Tea. Whether they're drinking our tea, admiring the artwork on our packaging, or interacting with us at conventions, I want them to feel a sense of excitement and connection to the anime community. Cheeby Tea isn't just about selling tea; it's about fostering a welcoming space where people can indulge in their passions, share experiences, and create lasting memories. Ultimately, I want our product to bring happiness and positivity into people's lives, leaving them eager to come back for more.



The image features a central stack of books with a title overlay. The books are arranged in a slightly irregular, vertical stack. The spines of the books are a warm, reddish-brown color, while the pages are a light, golden-yellow. The background is a vibrant, abstract pattern of horizontal lines in shades of blue, green, and yellow, creating a sense of depth and movement. The title 'TALES FROM THE WORLD OF VALA' is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font across the middle of the stack. Below the title, there is a smaller line of text: 'Follow Entertainment Stew for more info'.


TALES FROM
THE WORLD OF VALA

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Pixel Perfection with Bred Frown Games

The image shows the cover art for the game 'Crystal Story Awakening'. It features a character with blonde hair and a red and white outfit, holding a sword. The title 'CRYSTAL STORY' is written in a large, stylized, purple and white font, and 'AWAKENING' is written below it in a similar style. The background is dark with some glowing elements.

CRYSTAL STORY
AWAKENING

The image shows a pixel art character with red hair in pigtails and a white turtleneck. The character has a surprised or concerned expression. Below the character is a black speech bubble with white text.

Awaken, Young Knight!

1. How would you Describe Yourself and your Game?

I stepped into game development roughly five years ago. I had zero experience going in, aside from playing around with GameMaker in my teens and childhood. I took a break from it for over a decade before picking it back up at the tailend of 2018 and started working on Crystal Story. Before I did games, I made a webcomic with the same IP! I grew up around my uncle who played tons of RPGs. The titles I watched him play, then played myself as I grew older, inspired me to make a game that contained just about everything I liked in the SNES era.

2. What Inspired you to create this Game?

My uncle was just shy of 6 years older than me, and we spent a lot of time together, so he was much more like an older brother than an uncle to me. RPGs were pretty much the only genre he played, so I grew up watching him play Final Fantasy II (IV) and III (VI), The Legend of Zelda:

Link to the Past, EarthBound, as well as Secret of Mana, and tons of other RPGs on the SNES. Once I was old enough to read, he introduced me to Super Mario RPG, as well as EarthBound. I was playing pretty much all of the games he owned, despite not really knowing the context since I was so young. We both had a SNES growing up, so he'd let me borrow his games all the time, so pretty much if he played it, I played it. I grew up with the SNES and its titles, and that left a huge impression on me. That was the singular event that inspired me to create a game, and I wanted to make something that meshed together my favorite titles while looking like it came right out of a SNES.

3. How is your Personality reflected in your work?

I'm not quite sure the best way to answer this, but I try to take inspiration from everything around me that I feel would suit the game, and for the characters, I wrote them based on friends and family.



4. Why do you Create? What need does it satisfy?

I get more enjoyment from creation than I do from consumption of media, from what I've learned over the years. I'll play something, or read something, and think to myself: "Man, why aren't I making something cool like that?", and I try my hand at it. Undertale and Deltarune lit a fire inside me to really consider making a game, despite having no knowledge of programming or game design.

5. Can you walk us through your Creative Process?

It's very fluid, with some structure to it. Sometimes I will plan something out through sketching, or prototyping something in-

game, but will work it into a story outline after I'm happy with it so it will fit canonically. Since I work mostly solo, I really enjoy being able to design and test things out on-the-fly, make changes, and keep refining. Once I get hooked on an idea I'm working on, it's very hard for me to take a break!

6. What Skills are important for you during the Creative Process?

Since I work mostly solo, I've realized that the only thing I have to worry about is time. Yet time is the most valuable thing we have. I like to work hard and test out ideas quickly to see if they will work, or not, and move onto the next thing.

7. How do you keep yourself Motivated?

This is kinda a "life hack" that works for me, but may work for other folks. Basically, I take one large project and break it down into smaller pieces, then take those pieces and break them down into even smaller pieces! This makes a daunting task a lot easier since I'm less

focused (and overwhelmed) trying to make it to the end goal, and am more focused on taking things off of my project's to-do list, bit-by-bit.

8. How do you see your Game Impacting and connecting with your Audience?

I hope that the folks who have picked it up and have enjoyed it can see how much love I put into details, the presentation, and the gameplay.

9. What advice would you give to Aspiring Creators based on your own experiences?

My best bit of advice would be to do as much as you can

on your own with any project, and don't be scared to break it down into small chunks if it starts to feel overwhelming. Start small, but make something you want to make. Also the hardest part for me was just to get off my butt and get started!

10. What are Projects you hope to do in the Future?

More video games! More pixel art projects for other games!

7. What do you hope People take away from your game?

I can't answer this for you – what you take away from it is entirely up to you!



Merlin Munchies Conjures up Magical Coffee



1. How would you Describe Yourself and your Business?

Merlin's Munchies Coffee Company is a passion project that my wife, Marni, and I started organically. From the very moment that The Lord of The Rings hit theatres, my passion for fantasy and the world of wizards intensified. Marni can even confirm that in college, I used to fall asleep to "The Two Towers" every night. She would often wake up terrified during the battle of Helm's Deep, not knowing where she was... she always noted that I would be sleeping like a baby! At the same time that my love for wizards was growing, Marni was simultaneously falling in love with coffee. Fast-forward to the year 2021 and both of our passions collided to create our company! We choose to run Merlin's Munchies Coffee Company the same way we live our lives. We feel a work/life balance is extremely important for both the creative process, as well as overall fulfillment. If I had to describe us, I would say that we are two people who love to be around each other

in positive environments. Whether we're relaxing and streaming a series, or traveling for a convention, we realize that life is short and meant to be appreciated. After all; "All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us"- Gandalf

2. What inspired you to start Merlin's Munchies?

Before Merlin's Munchies Coffee Company, Marni and I were realtors. For over 6 years, we flipped around 15 houses. Renovating houses was nice in the sense that we were our own bosses. Creating homes out of outdated and often neglected spaces was fun, but once each house was sold, it took a lot of time, work, and stress to constantly find the next project. Putting in the work means everything, but you have to have passion as well, otherwise, what's the point? While flipping houses was something, it didn't bring the overall satisfaction that we knew we were capable of finding together. Every new endeavor begins as a

conversation. Eventually, our conversation grew legs and turned into something more. Before we knew it, the time-traveling, coffee-roasting wizard of the Multiverse was born!

3. Were your creative endeavors always your goal or did you find them by Coincidence?

Honestly, it was always our goal. We spent a lot of time on the creative process because it was going to be what made our brand stand out. We weren't exactly planning to make so many labels but kinda got carried away because it was such an incredible experience.

4. How do you typically approach a new project?

For a new project, it always seems like there are stages. First is just talking and dreaming about what it could be. In my opinion, this is one of the most exciting phases. I've always loved the quote by Walt Disney, "All your dreams can come true if you have the courage to pursue them". Once you have established, "Ok, this

is real and something we are actually going to pursue," the next phase begins and we basically turn into mad scientists. We like to think of it as the dream-to-reality (ish) phase. We always had our notepads out and were discussing the major issues that we needed to tackle, and then the smaller bullet points that were attached to the larger ones. Looking back, we'll cherish this time forever. We talk about it often and have also heard so many entrepreneurs share the same feelings. Embrace the dreaming phase of your business, because it's literally where you're bringing an idea to life. That's a powerful feeling and one that will always stay with you. After the mad scientist phase comes the organization phase. This is like when you have all your notes in school, but now you have to prep for your final exam. So you have to take out all your notes, go through them, and organize the 40 pages into a well-scripted 5 pages that are cohesive. Who do I need to call? What's the process of making a website? How

do I make labels, etc. After the organization phase is the execution phase, then there is the “welcome to the world phase” in which the business is launched. Presently we’re in the growth phase, which consists of us working to share our brand to the world. We have chosen to do this by traveling the country, doing shows, as well as online marketing. However, it can be different for everyone. The key is really to make your plan and stick to it. Consistency beats a flash in the pan any

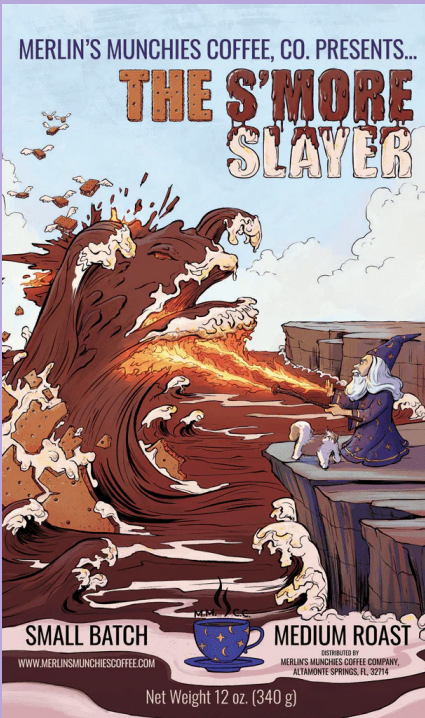
day of the week. The tortoise always wins the race, right?! Enjoy being the tortoise, because there really is beauty in the process. You’ll learn a lot about yourself that you never even knew was there.

5. Can you walk us through your creative process?

Similar to what we wrote above. We like to put it into stages. Dreaming Phase. Mad Scientist/Notes Phase. Organization Phase. Execution Phase. Growth Phase. Then hopefully, The Arrival phase!

6. What did your process look like when you first started compared to now?

Out of the gate, we basically started doing shows. We launched our company towards the end of 2022, but really started in February of 2023. Over the past year, we traveled to almost every state, and it’s been an amazing experience. Humbling really. We’ve met so many different people, and it’s reminded us that there are truly wonderful folks out there, despite all the challenges and negativity we see in the world. There is so much good



and kindness in day-to-day life, with day-to-day people. We're still relatively small, but we are starting to get our bearings under us and finding a balance between traveling and the social media aspect of it. So to answer this question, I would say that we are starting to focus on social media in 2024 compared to last year. We are currently working on a Facebook Group and Discord group that will talk about interesting things in the world of Quantum Physics, Science and the Universe. We plan to start writing blogs on our website and posting them in our groups, as well as fun questions to interact with everyone who has supported us over the last year. Lastly, we're working on a commercial. So a lot of intriguing things coming this year for Mr. Merlin!

7. What does the process of creating the different flavors of coffee look like for you?

We use a coffee bean that is specific to flavoring and roast it in our warehouse. Once roasted, the flavoring is added. All of our flavored

coffee is certified allergy-free, gluten-free, and sugar-free. We roast our beans with a secret that lies deep in the Multiverse!!! That's what keeps each cup so smooth!

8. What skills are important for your Creative Process?

I think it's fair to say that like anything, you need to believe in your process and believe in yourself. Then, put the time into executing your plan. Success (everyone's version of success is different) doesn't happen overnight. So I would



advise people to trust their process and enjoy the daily grind. Get lost in yourself, and soon you'll look up and realize you've achieved your goals. I would say don't have success be your motivator, enjoy your process. If you like what you're doing, then technically, you're already successful.

9. What challenges have you overcome since starting Merlin's Munchies?

We have had a lot of challenges! The biggest one I would say is not trying to solve everything in one day. As I mentioned above, it's a process. One of my favorite books (it got us motivated to start our own online business) is *12 Months to \$1 Million*, by Ryan Daniel Moran. I'll paraphrase one thing that has stuck with me that he said below;

When we are running our own business, it's easy to get overwhelmed with everything we need to do. Then, in turn, we get paralyzed. Whenever this happens people have a propensity to think big. The problem is, this makes us more paralyzed and then nothing

gets done. DON'T DO THIS! Do the opposite and go as small as possible. Focus on a bunch of little things, and then gain momentum. Your brain fog dissipates and all of a sudden you're getting things done.

I love this and have noticed it's been very helpful in keeping us even-keeled in our creative process. Stringing a bunch of little things together builds that much-needed momentum we're all looking for.

10. Is it good to ask others for advice?

This is a great question and kind of a complicated answer. I would say it depends. Nobody is going to believe in your product or business as much as you. In the same breath, I've found that everyone acts like a know-it-all! I would say if you are going to ask for advice, take it for what it is. If you have put in the time and believe in your system and what it can achieve, sometimes getting advice can disrupt that and make you rethink everything. On the flip side, sometimes someone's advice can give

you the positive push that you need. Have confidence in yourself, and take advice from people who you respect and respect you. They will know your worth as opposed to others who just want to hear themselves talk, then forget what they said 2 weeks later!

11. Is constructive criticism a good or bad thing?

I think that constructive criticism is a great thing. As long as there is respect and kindness, then it's good to hear things that can help you grow. Similar to above, I think it's important to keep your circles small when it comes to these things. Avoid the people who don't seem to care and surround yourself with people that make you feel good inside. When constructive criticism comes from a good person, you will know!

12. How important is peer revising?

I think it's important. It can help give direction on what is or isn't working. But just know that nothing happens overnight, and people can

be quick to judge in 2024. I think believing in yourself and your process is key, especially if you have a plan and work to make it real. Just saying you're going to do something, while not putting in the time, will never yield results. If you work hard, "luck" will always find you. Motivational quote time! "Luck Is What Happens When Preparation Meets Opportunity".

13. How do you get yourself motivated?

Personally, I played a lot of sports as a kid, and grew up loving Michael Jordan. (just like the rest of the world in the 90's)! The point that I am making here is, there are so many motivating tools that a person can use. Whether it's sports, a movie, a quote, or an inspiring story on social media. I would say use what works best for you. Additionally, I have noticed that a life balance helps with motivation. For example, right now we just wrapped up a successful show in Indianapolis. When we get home, we plan to veg out for a few days and

probably binge 3-5 series on Netflix. After a few days, the motivation seems to come back naturally because we love what we do. In my opinion, it boils down to this... Find your passion, then plan how to make that your life. The way the world is now, you can truly do anything you set your mind to.

14. When faced with a disaster how do you keep going on?

I love this question! You already see that I love Michael Jordan... No better time to drop another one of my favorite quotes. (Yes, I love quotes)

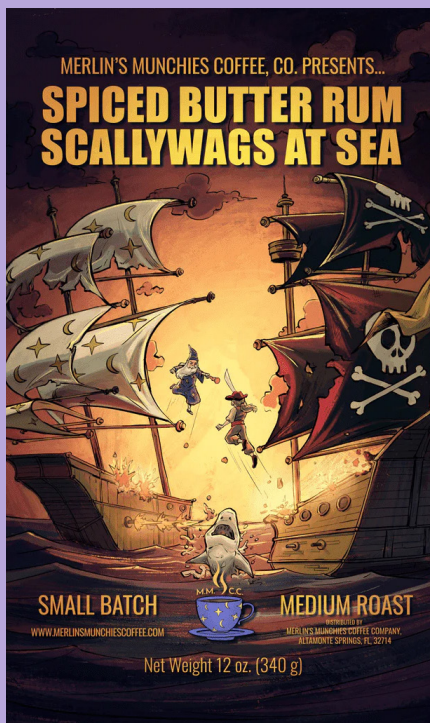
“I’ve missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I’ve lost almost 300 games. 26 times I’ve been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I’ve failed over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.”

Never be afraid of a disaster or failure. If you don’t fail in a business, that means you’re probably not really trying. Learn from your mistakes and conquer them. Don’t get

down on yourself when you mess up. In a strange way, I’ve always embraced/borderline enjoyed setbacks because they make you reassess your situation. Inevitably, you will learn from your mistakes and grow as a person (and a business).

15. What are some other dream projects you are hoping to do in the future?

I would have to say that nothing really comes to mind at the moment. We’re



open to so many things and whatever comes our way, we'll embrace. Honestly, it's just been great meeting people who love our coffee. We often get messages about how it's made their mornings so much better. Seeing repeat customers at shows who have also purchased online has been extremely rewarding. It means the world to us that we've been able to meet and share time with customers who have embraced our coffee and brand.

16. How do you navigate the balance between your craft and Commercial Viability?

This is a good question. Before starting a business, it's important to make an outline of what your margins are going to be. This needs to include what you are willing to pay to market your product. Fortunately for us, people have been pretty receptive so far. But you have to be willing to pivot if things aren't working out numbers-wise after a certain amount of time.

17. What advice would you give to Aspiring Creators in your field?



I would say to believe in your process. Put in the time and whatever you are doing, make sure it stands out. Make sure it's different from what the masses have done. People can tell whether or not you've put time and passion into something.

18. What is the main thing you want people to take away from your business?

When I was a kid, before school, I'd always start my day with a bowl of cereal. I'd mope down the stairs like a zombie, pour a bowl, and turn the cereal box around to the back. I'd get lost in whatever was there. Sometimes it was a maze, a scavenger hunt, or a crossword puzzle. Sometimes it was just a wacky picture with a lot going on. Regardless of what it was, it was always

intriguing to me. Even though I was too tired to speak to my mom or my brother, I was locked into the back of the cereal box, like my life depended on it! It was fun, and always gave my morning the “kick” it needed to get going. It wasn’t just because it was a maze, scavenger hunt, or crossword puzzle. It was because of the way it looked. For whatever reason, it brought a sense of joy to my day. We want adults to get that same feeling with our coffee. We’re all still that same kid who got lost in whatever it was we loved when we were little. Sometimes just a couple minutes a day of enjoying something as small as a bowl of cereal or a cup of coffee can totally shift your mindset in a positive direction. That’s our goal. With so much negativity in the world, why not try to balance the force with a cup of coffee?!?

19. How do you hope your craft impacts or connects with your audience?

Similar to the answer above, we want it to bring a positive experience to our audience’s mornings (or nights!). We

want our customers to sit down with their cup of coffee and not just drink it. We want them to enjoy the artwork while their coffee is brewing, sit down with it, and smile. The coffee itself is incredible, but seeing the labels and listening to the audiobook hopefully makes it more of an experience versus just some old cup of boring coffee.

20. How are your personality and dreams reflected in your product?

This product reflects us completely because we came up with everything. We love the wonders of the Universe and the lore of wizardry. We even included our Shih-Tzu, Yoshi, who joins Merlin on his adventures!! (His name is Mookie in Merlin’s world.) Combining all of our passions has been one of the most incredible things we’ve done in our lives. Doing it together makes it that much sweeter!

Take on an adventure "OneBit" at a time

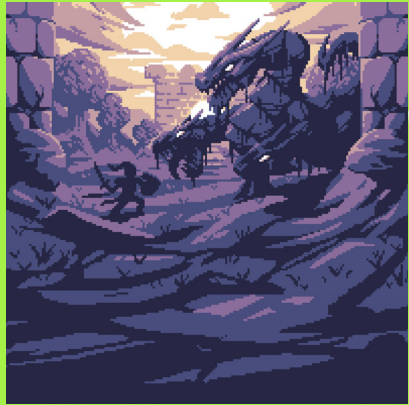


1. How would you describe Yourself and your Game?

I am a one man army kind of guy who takes risks and have been doing so for the past 4 years after I hurt my back from retail at the age of 28. My game, OneBit Adventure, is a testament to how I was able to crawl out of the normal 8-5 job to being a full-time indie developer. It has paved the way for my ambition and my skill set to be able to make a simple idea come to life and be praised for it.

2. What inspired you to Create this Game?

I've played a lot of scroller games with jetpack joyride being my top favorite, but always wondered if that mechanic can transition to roguelike elements such as games like Pixel Dungeon. There are plenty of endless dungeons, but I wanted to see how it would feel to combine that with a scroller and thus, OneBit Adventure was born.



3. How is your personality reflected in your work?

I'm very humble to be where I am and so I make the most out of it by remixing the ideas from the community. As players came, I went and read every feedback and gave it a try. I am also spontaneous in the fashion of trying new things since I've got nothing left to lose.

4. Why do you create? What need does it satisfy?

The desire to get that feedback of happiness from others. In my recent experience, I looked at the reviews and saw how players come back from years after a 1 star review now saying, "you actually added x feature!?! 5 stars". It shows the dedication

and commitment I've put through. I create because I want players to see what joy and memories I can create to escape the stressful world of today. It scratches that itch of an RPG game where you aren't given a specific goal, but rather you focus on you and your characters as well as how strong you can make them while going against impossible odds.

5. Can you walk us through your creative process?

Mostly looking at today's trend and going the opposite direction. The process is mainly finding older games that have that flair to it and sort of dreaming about how that would be made in today's age. What features was that game missing and how to better improve it.



6. What skills are important for you during the creative process?

Due diligence and the ability to envision the game before it is made. If I don't know what the end goal of a game is, I won't know where to begin and so by having that brainstormed and mapped out, it makes the process as easy as it can be.

7. How do you keep yourself motivated?

I dedicate time to play games and set a working schedule. A lot of people mistake full-time indie developers as having 24/7 time to play and make games without stress, but in fact, it is the opposite. After working on OneBit Adventure for a few years, my stress went up because I felt the need to work on the game whenever possible which took away family time and a lot of burnouts. After I had planned out a schedule and said, "No coding after 4pm" things became better and more efficient because I told my brain to cooldown. Like a car engine, you can't keep it running forever without a



pit stop. The game isn't going anywhere and the community understands this.

8. How do you see your game impacting and connecting with your audience?

I'm a dad of 2 daughters so it makes me happy to see comments like how OneBit is a perfect game for dads because you can play the game with one hand and hold the baby in the other. It has also been commonly praised for being a simple enough game to play on bus rides and able to be played on and off.

9. What advice would you give to aspiring creators based on your own experiences?

If you have an idea and think that it is impossible to make, you are probably right. Start off simple and don't be afraid

to look at different genres when researching and find what works best for your personality versus what is trending.

10. What are projects you hope to do in the future?

I hope to create OneBit Adventure 2 where I take OneBit and transform it into a 3d dungeon crawler. I also hope to bring Dungeon of Greed, which is going to be OneBit Adventure with multiplayer.

11. What do you hope people take away from your game?

Simplicity has a place in everyone's heart and I hope my game proves that complex features can be made for the masses. I don't mean that dumbed down games are better, but the idea and rule sets for playing them needs to be easy to digest before expanding the root of the game.

Banish your Nightmares! With Magical Warrior Diamond Heart!



1. How would you describe yourself and your Project?

Uuuhhh I'm not sure, Magical Warrior Diamond Heart is basically my passion project! At its core it's a love letter to everything I love about VNs and henshin heroes lol! A ragtag team transforms into legendary warriors and harnesses the power of love to save the world from the evil Nightmare Agency lol!

2. What inspired you to create your game?

I had been into visual novels for years at that point and had been interested in making one for a while. I had original characters I had been putting into a VN but I decided I really wanted to make a visual novel about magical girls. I can't remember exactly what made me decide to write it but I remember getting really into precure afterward lol.

3. Growing up, was there any magical girl media that inspired you?

My favorite magical girl series growing up was Tokyo Mew Mew. I used to draw TMM art nonstop, listen to the

music, watch videos about it, rewatching the sub and dub over and over. A teacher helped me get the manga and I read that thing nonstop. I had gotten into Mermaid Melody as well but Tokyo Mew Mew dominated my mind since Mew Mew Power first aired on 4kids.

4. In regards to race, sexuality, gender, etc, why was it important for you to create diverse characters?

When I first made the cast back when I was a senior in high school myself, I built them as the types of characters I wanted to date in otome games the most which included male and female love interests since many otome games were het-centric. Val herself wasn't originally black but I hated seeing how people would talk about how some colors didn't look "nice" on brown skin and it made me want to prove a point basically lmao. I was involved in SJ spaces a lot so I was taking in the conversations others would have as well. It was pretty easy for a black, queer, (undiagnosed)



neurodivergent person like me to empathize with these conversations. And when people tell me they connect with the cast it really makes me happy. Like, I think it's pretty cool to have a character like Val expressing that she finds autistic traits attractive or that one of the prettiest girls to her is a chubby indian girl. Not just having a diverse cast but a cast like this in a romance where those differences are meant to be charming.

5. Why is representation important for you?

Protagonists like Val weren't really common for me to see growing up, not black girls with these more quirky silly personalities, I often related more to these goofy

shojo protags like Ichigo and Lucia than the cool black girls that would be on tv when I was a kid. I was never that cool. I was a clumsy dweeb lmao! And for a romance game specifically, I really wanted a girl who was not just more bold but much more flirtatious and direct about her intentions and attractions to her love interests lmao! She says the kinds of things I would think, and I'm sure other romance game fans would be thinking, when pursuing their favorite characters.

6. Can you walk us through your creative process?

When I create a character usually I'll start with just brainstorming a design. and build the personality around

them. like for the main cast I doodled different love interests, the tall mature one, the petite cute one, the cool friendly guy, the cold smart guy, the nerdy friend, etc. Different traits evolved for them over time, Liam had a more sleek and neat design to him but now his hair is shaggy and growing out, he looks lazier but his fashion is still pretty formal which fits his perfect proper image that he still makes an effort to maintain. Diana had a much cuter style and was meant to originally share Val's clothes when she first takes a human form, but since I never got a moment to write a scene where she buys her own wardrobe, I just gave her a more boyish look from the start. for family members it depends on what I'm going for in their look. Alex's family is meant to all look like him, but I wanted him and Abby, who share a father, to pretty distinctly have traits that his mom entirely lacks since their father would be revealed in his route. Abby and Alex are way taller than their mom and they're the only of the kids who have blue eyes.

7. What steps do you take to ensure your world-building is fleshed out?

Fleshing out the world is a lot of fun, Magical Warrior Diamond Heart is set in the real world city of [DATA EXPUNGED] Illinois. I like to think of ways that the existence of fairies and magic would have changed how our world functions. It's the same world, just a bit different since little weirdos have been running around and causing mischief. Sophie and Ambers team up episode, which at the time of writing is not currently in the latest build yet, focuses on the cultural differences between Earth and Glimmer and how things changed. I also put a lot of thought into how magic can affect the characters and how they interact with the world. Sophie is one of the first characters who is shown being able to use some magic while not transformed, being able to see auras and create small amounts of ice. Alex is shown a few times to not be able to notice heat as much anymore. And once Liam uses his healing for the first time he uses it **CONSTANTLY**

afterward.

8. Is it good to ask others for advice?

I'm always bouncing ideas back and forth with my partner and my friends lol. I can be particularly proud and picky with my writing but it helps a lot to get feedback on some of my ideas, especially some of the more complex ideas that I've added in. Some aspects of the story, major ones even, were only added in because my partner suggested them lol.

9. How do you get yourself motivated?

One way I keep myself motivated is by taking breaks and rotating what tasks I work on. So instead of sprite work I might focus on code for the day, or I'll write a different episode. It also helps to set some smaller goals. Writing 10k is intimidating and it sucks when I can't reach it but writing even 200 words a day is something I can be proud of as someone with ADHD lol. I've had a lot of setbacks, I'm basically Problems Guy and something always manages to go wrong. But I push through

a lot of it since I love working on this. I have a lot of fun watching my friends react to the chapters and I just think of how much fun it'll be for them to see what else I've been cooking up.

10. What are some other dream projects you hope to do in the future?

In the future... I'm pretty attached to this universe and its characters, and one story I've wanted to do from the beginning was a prequel featuring the previous generation of Crystal Warriors as a companion to this one. I also have been really into the idea of working on a mecha AU version of the story with Liam as the protagonist lol.

11. What advice would you give to beginner writers?

Some advice I'd give to new writers is that your writing will improve with time! People who have played the previous demos have seen my style change over the years. And read more as well! Read more of your favorite genres, read a variety of stories with a variety of themes. If you're a

romance writer it's still a good idea to check out some horror or mystery as well! It'll only help you. And lastly... unless you're 10000000% confident, maybe even add another 500%, I would NOT try to make your first work be as big as mine. I'm only able to do this because I'm insane and these characters are everything to me. But I've seen many projects just slowly disappear because they were so big and the creator just lost interest over time lol.

12. What do you hope people will take away from this project?

One thing I hope people take away from the story is... You know, I just want people to have a lot of fun with it. The story gets pretty crazy at times, things get pretty serious but it's still a silly story running on the power of love. I want people to have fun and fall in love with this world and characters and maybe be inspired by it and seek out more henshin hero stories to fall in love with as well. I love magical girls, shojo romance, and visual novels, and I love shows like Aikatsu,

Ultraman and Kamen Rider, Godzilla films, and Gundam. I'd like for people to play through these stories and feel how much I love them through the characters and get some interest in trying out new stories as well. You know, like, a lot of people don't want to try out visual novels because they just don't get the point of a story-based novel game. A lot of people I encounter don't want to watch tokusatsu because it's live action. I don't expect to be able to get into all my niche nerdy interests, but I hope it encourages people to branch out and explore different types of stories. It's the same with having a diverse cast, I think. I love making people feel seen and I also want people to enjoy stories with characters that might be different from what they expect or are used to.

