EP 76 - A Creative Process: Part 2 - Scaffolding

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🤖 *AI Statement: All elements of this episode are products of the author, Chris Kreuter, made without any use of AI tools.*

> This is part 2 of a multi-part series about the creative process. We'll cover my thoughts on how this process applies to creating & publishing works, and how it applies to games, fiction writing, other creative endeavors, and our professional careers.

As always, the views expressed on this podcast are mine. What works for me isn't likely to work for you exactly the same way. The usefulness of these various pieces of advice will depend on your project, experience, tools, and more as I'll get into.

The goal of this series is to share my frameworks, mindsets, strategies, and experiences that have led me to this point of my creative journey. This is an ever-evolving process, as it should be for everyone.

SCAFFOLDING:

1. Fleshing out the ideas that stick.

2. Making preparations for a project: Creating structures & preparing tools to aid the production process.

3. Understanding the contexts your creative work may be received, both mentally & physically.

- Once you've got a general sense of your idea, it's time to start fleshing it out.

- By building a scaffold for the project, you're making preparations for putting in the work to bring it into reality.

- For me, scaffolding has three main goals:

  1. Exploring the idea further: Finding flaws and making additional connections to strengthen it

  2. Identifying the tools, processes, and/or people that will aid the production process

  3. Getting a better understanding of the time frame & resources (financial or otherwise) that I'll need to produce the project

- Scaffolding should be low stakes:

  ○ It's best done before any major commitments are made - *Is this a project I want to commit to?*

    ▪ Or in the words of Derek Sivers: *Hell Yeah or No*

  ○ This process helps you overcome internal resistance to turning an idea into reality: Fear, uncertainty, impostor syndrome

  ○ Breaks complex, larger projects into smaller, manageable chunks: Scenes, chapters, components, mechanics, processes

- Scaffolding can take many forms:
    - Compiling notes
    - Listing options
    - Sketching / outlining
    - Flow charting
    - Character & scene studies
    - Crafting inspiration boards
    - Creating & utilizing templates
    - Researching prior art (*has this been done before?*)
    - Setting up collaboration processes & tools.
    - Prototyping
    - Researching legal requirements (Ex: product safety testing)
    - Basic cost analyses (*is this project feasible?*)

- This phase looks very different depending on the type of project you're working on.
    - When writing novels, I spend far more time on this step than I would for crafting a podcast episode.
    - For games, carefully consider when, how, and where to layer worldbuilding & storytelling on top of the rules & tools of the game.
        - In the scaffolding step - it's more about understanding where the balance points lie, the overall experience you're hoping to achieve - Not every aspect of applying a story.
        - Too much focus on the story early may hamstring your ability to get the game mechanics dialed in first
        - But total focus on mechanics may result in a game that doesn't leave enough room for the worldbuilding you want to have

- **The greater complexity in your project, and the longer the time frame it will take to execute: The more time that should be spent on building out a wireframe for it.**

- Specific to games: Your idea, your product, doesn't always have to be the center of attention. Games can be applied to many mediums.
  - It's important to understand the medium your idea fits - so you can right-size the time and resources you'll put into it
- They can be:
  - Theming devices in fictional storytelling (Star Trek TNG "The Game")
  - They can be art: Temporary installations, Social messages (https://www.nakworks.com/projects/waiting-rooms)
  - Cultural anthropology (Senet)
  - Provide breakpoints/diversions within a larger story or game (Ex: Triple Triad card game in FF VIII)
  - Educational devices (MECC)
  - Community building tools (Dungeons & Dragons, World of Warcraft) - You're creating a framework for others to tell their stories
  - Therapeutic tools for the evaluation or treatment of emotional & developmental issues

    A Little SPOT Feelings Island Board Game and Book Set
    Welcome to Feelings Island!
    Dive into a world where imagination leaps off the pages and becomes a part of your play! In this unique adventure, we've
    https://www.dianealber.com/products/a-little-spot-feelings-island-board-game-and-book-set?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAiAqrG9BhAVEiwAaPu5zhM2OfSuKpo3FTptktgf666gySbV0Tos_aShaLGXzzwcneEV1lzCOxoCH0QQAvD_BwE

  - Immersive experiences like escape rooms, VR
  - Promotional branding tools

- In the scaffolding stage: Try to address as many lingering questions & define needs before the real work starts:

  - What are the financial & time budgets for the project? Is there a deadline?

  - Do you have the right tools & skillsets to complete all parts of the project?

  - Will you learn what you don't know how to use?

  - Is this project an opportunity to develop specific skills that can help in the future?

  - Do you have the funding and connections to outsource the parts you can't learn or don't have time to learn?

- **Two examples:**

  1. Board game prototyping & producing Epigo & Simpletons pushed me to learn Photoshop & Illustrator - skills that have paid countless dividends over the last 20 years. Despite it's critical success, it wasn't a financial one. I view Epigo as a relatively cheap & fun way to have learned a ton about graphic design, as well as many other skills: Sales, distribution, printing nuances, publishing, running convention booths, and more I'll get in to throughout this series.

  2. For the Rainy River Bees series - I wanted a specific look for the covers. Middle grade books benefit from high quality illustrations. Therefore, I decided to hire Jack Parra (who I met though board game projects) to illustrate the entire series. **Pay your artists!**

🗨️ Episode 76 Quote:

Today's quote is one of my all-time favorites from Charles Wagner's 1904 work *The Simple Life:*

> *"What is a good lamp? It is not the most elaborate, the finest wrought, that of the most precious metal. A good lamp is a lamp that gives good light."*