

I have always been a casual fan of heavy metal. Especially the faster, louder subsets of it. Death. Thrash. Synth metal. One of the advantages Metal has over the gentler genres is if you are working with headphones on, you can actually hear it over the sound of the angle grinders you are using. I like to think the channel, with the giant swords and fire and destruction and so forth, has always lived up to having a heavy metal aesthetic to match the actual metals that are heavy that I work with. I tried to squeeze as much of this as I could into the episode of the TV show called "Hell's Hound", where I created a sword that splits into three called "Cerberus". The production crew found a band called "Hound of Hades" to play the part of the customers, which was pretty perfect.

In the 1889 book "The Golden Bough" James Frazer coined the term "Sympathetic Magic". You'd ritualistically imitate some outcome you wanted to achieve in the hopes of making it more likely to occur. Part of the theory was that ancient peoples were painting successful hunts on the sides of caves as a way of increasing the chances of the hunt going well. Same idea with Voodoo dolls. It's a similar species of weirdness to what can be found in "The Secret". Athletes are asked to visualize their successes before they happen etc etc. I don't believe in any sort of supernatural stuff myself, but if I did, you couldn't have asked for a larger, more elaborate ritual than the episode with Cerberus to summon Erik Lindmark out of the aether.

Erik, RIP, was the founder of Unique Leader Records and the lead guitarist for Deeds Of Flesh (do I need to tell you that Deeds Of Flesh is a metal band? You figured that out through context clues, right?). The mascot of Unique Leader is a sick ass horned demon with three eyes and a rotting face called "Alrekr". Erik wanted me to make a sword where the guard was formed of Alrekr's head and horns. Of course I jumped at the opportunity. The show had just recently ended, and I decided that instead of complaining that the show wasn't in the format I wanted, I could just make the show I wanted and post that to youtube, so I decided to give the "Bob Ross with Swords" experiment a go.

In retrospect, I should have been doing this years and years before I did, but there were some fairly stupid misunderstandings holding me back. Whenever I watch a youtube video about how to make or fix something, it's because I want to make or fix a thing. A lot of solutions to do with welding/grinding are pretty obvious to me already, so I tend not to watch those kinds of videos. I was, and still am, way more likely to watch a video about fixing a dryer or whatever (cause I want to fix my dryer). For youtube entertainment myself, I'll watch a compilation of people falling down or some science edutainment or a deep dive into some niche internet mystery. For years I had been receiving emails from people asking me to post a how-to on making a Buster Sword. I resisted strongly, theorizing that the video would be useless to anyone without access to a full welder/fabricator shop, and everything in it would be too obvious to someone who did work as a welder/fabricator.

I caved in late 2013, and in January of 2014, a full year before the show aired, I released "How a Buster Sword is Built". During its first month of being live it received 13k views, and generated a whopping \$17. I felt vindicated. People seemed to like the video, but the amount of time and effort it took to produce it was staggering compared to the shorter videos of me smashing stuff

to Heavy Metal music. It wasn't til months after it was uploaded that I noticed the trend. While the shorter videos tended to get a very intense burst of views once they went live, this tended to quickly taper down to nothing until a website would feature the video in an article about me. The 38 minute long Buster Sword video bucked this trend, chugging away in steady trickle, and by the time a year had elapsed, and the TV show was wrapping up, the build video had amassed 633k views and had generated about 900 bucks. Now, the amount of effort it took to make the video was still far in excess of 900 bucks, so it was still a failed experiment by that metric, but I could sort of see the shape of things to come in it.

I liked Erik and Unique Leader, and thought it might be good to produce something that would attract similar customers. The Buster Sword video proved I was wrong about the popularity of "How-to" video being linked to its utility. I would have realized that if I had remembered the appeal that led to hours of me watching "How's It Made". Do I need to know how a fluorescent tube is made? No. Would I like to spend 40 minutes watching machines make one? Yes. I decided to start filming every step of making the Alrekr sword.

My major technical innovation with Alrekr was that I had purchased a Pencil Grinder. The electric Die Grinder I had been using was large and clunky. I had set up the table for it, so I could use it to carve the edges of plates at 90 degrees delicately, but it was still too difficult to hold and perform delicate work with. A Pencil Grinder is like a dremel, the one I bought was air powered, to make it even slimmer. I could hold it like a chonky sharpie. The 1/4" carbide heads are like little iron files that spin. The face of Alrekr is all rotten flesh. Using layered plates and the pencil grinder I achieved a level of detail higher than any of my previous swords, with teeth inside a jaw peeking out between strips of ruined cheek.

Very soon after getting the pencil grinder I discovered the little steel splinters it leaves. Still my least favorite of all the workshop related danger dander. An angle grinder throws off a spark, the spark is a tiny piece of hot steel igniting as the ratio between its surface area, temperature and available oxygen collide. Grinder dust is nasty stuff too, but the biggest risk to life and limb it poses is inhaling it. The regular size die grinder, being more like a spinning electric file, throws off little shards of steel instead of sparks. They're bigger, and not quite hot enough to ignite (most of the time). I'm not sure why, but they also tend to be magnetized. I've noticed the Hardox plate tends to be slightly magnetic, maybe it passes that on to the shards being thrown off it. Being magnetic they tend to stand up and out on steel surfaces, so as your bare hand brushes across a surface they are all aligned like little pikemen, ready to bravely impale the monstrous being bearing down on them. The tiniest steel splinter has a way of making its presence felt in the most acute fashion. These days I carry a splinter kit in a tiny tin case with me everywhere, which consists of a pair of Xacto blades for digging, and a pair of tiny tweezers for grabbing (in pairs in case I drop one).

The Pencil Grinder makes splinters that are even smaller and more delicate than the regular Die Grinder. With the full sized Die Grinder I could usually wear gloves while using it, cause the work was not super fine. I had specifically got the Pencil Grinder for the purpose of doing delicate work. I learned it was the side of my hand (the part you karate chop with when you need to fight

ninjas) and the heel of my hand (the part of your palm you use to drive a thugs nose back into his brain while defending your pregnant wife outside a bar in Mobile Alabama, triggering a chain of events that leads you helping retake control of a plane full of convicts that has been hijacked by John Malcovich) that tended to get the worst of the splinters, so I taped those up with duct tape. It sort of worked? Since I've started using the regular die grinder and the pencil grinder more and more, it's basically become lethal to casually pick anything in the workshop up casually. Every tool needs to be looked at, and because of the magnetism, usually tapped off the side of a surface hard before you can trust holding it in your bare hand.

Once Alrekr was finished I started the laborious task of editing all the footage together. I asked Erik, since this sword was basically a promo for Unique Leader Records, could I have some tracks to go along with the visuals of me making the swords. This started a long relationship with a second guitarist in Deeds Of Flesh, Craig Peters, which is still going strong to this day. For the testing of the sword I made and wore huge metal wings. Cardboard inserts set into the wings and set on fire assured that I looked like a Balrog while swinging the blade at various targets, which were also on fire.

The video went live, and got about 100k views in its first month, at about \$1 per 1000 views, that meant the result made about \$100 during that first month in Google Adshare. People seemed to really like the video, but it still wasn't quite financially viable to spend my time filming every step of making a sword and then editing the result together.

Patreon is a "support the artist" type website. You sign up to give your favorite artist some money every month, Patreon takes a chunk and handles the logistics, and the artist gets a deposit into their account no fuss no muss. I'd been avoiding it for a bunch of reasons. I think the main one was confidence. I knew people liked my stuff, but that didn't mean I liked my stuff, and it seemed weird to me to set up this "support the artist" type of thing. It seemed like begging or something. The psychological hump that made me get over it was thinking of the long videos as a product I was making that needed to be paid for, just like the swords themselves. The video of me announcing I was starting a Patreon is still up there, and I think you can tell that I'm kinda embarrassed to be asking. I hate when artists hide their content behind a paywall, so I intended to upload the build videos one way or another, and AT MOST, the videos of me making the swords would only have a delayed release, not be locked up indefinitely, so really there was no need at all for a patient person to sponsor me.

I had realized early on that not everyone could afford a giant sword, and that while the Google Adshare money from youtube was neat, it was super unreliable. To that end I had tried setting up passive income with my T-shirts and miniature 3d printed versions of my swords. "Hey! If you give me a SMALL amount of money I will send you this thing!" Both had only lackluster results. I was incredibly surprised when the patreon took off like a rocket. "Hey, give me a small amount of money for NO REASON IN PARTICULAR!" turned out to be the absolute BEST passive income source. Explain that one, economists!

Now, before all of you rush out to set up your patreon accounts, I have a word of advice. I had been making youtube videos for eight years AND had been on American National TV before attempting the Patreon thing. Like a lot of the things in my life, I could have probably set up that account a few years before I actually did, I couldn't have set it up in 2007 after uploading the very first Buster Sword video I did and got the same results (Patreon didn't exist til 2013, but that's not the point I'm making). Also yes my therapist is talking to me about my confidence. It might seem weird to have to talk to a guy who basically runs an international cult of personality about his lack of confidence, but there you go.

Patreon was founded by Jack Conte, one half of the music duo Pomplamoose. He's a pleasant, hipster type dude, but like a lot of friendly hipster musicians he smiles way too much and I suspect doesn't know how to handle anything negative very well. I've attended "Creator Live Streams" for people like me on Patreon. I have no idea if these still happen but my guess is not. He'd invite some local artist friend of his to join him, "This is Jemily who does little paintings using paper straws and paint and a spinning paper disc" and everything would be super chill. A running chat on the side will invite people who have made Patreon accounts to ask questions, and here the "problem" of patreon is laid bare. Jack obviously wanted to talk about the creative process, patreon's features, etc etc, but in the running chat at the side there is only one question "How do I get more people to sign up for my Patreon?". Jack is too nice to answer this question.

Sometimes my Vineyard artist friends would ask me about Patreon cause hearing me describe it would inspire them to want one too. I get emails from young men who want to copy my model and set up a sword making Patreon and want advice. I tell them both the same thing: without already having a following, there is no real point, you have to focus on building up a following FIRST. Like, there is probably no harm in setting up a Patreon, but don't expect it to do a single thing until you have a large following. I have a Million subscribers on youtube these days, of those, only 1000 sponsor me on Patreon. That's a 0.1% conversion rate, and it's pretty good as these things go. The danger of Patreon is people growing disheartened by thinking it's a shortcut to making a living from your art. There's no shortcut. All Patreon ensures is that there's at least a finish line. That's more than you're promised in general by trying to make a career doing something creative.

Back to my moderate success. It seemed like I had landed on the winning formula; the cost of filming myself and then editing together the long videos was covered by patreon, so the youtube money almost didn't matter. Better yet, a strange synergy started to occur. Once I started uploading long build videos on the regular, my view numbers started to climb, almost to the point where I COULD rely on the Google adshare, until the adpocalypse occurred at least. At my peak Google was sending me about \$3k a month, that halved over a few short months and never really recovered. The Adpocalypse occurred for a few different reasons that might be too much of a derailment here to get into, but suffice to say I was really lucky I had established my Patreon by then.

Using the Patreon money I could experiment with longer, more elaborate builds. Every commission went extremely over budget, but that was fine, putting more detail into the swords

resulted in more elaborate videos, which my fanbase liked, which generated more income. I could send swords out to get professional coatings like Black Oxide or expensive and delicate Brass Coatings. I had an extremely complicated head for a mace called "Sunkeeper" professionally (robot arm) plasma cut through 1" thick Hardox. I shudder to think how much time it would have taken me to make the shape by hand. I have no idea how much getting it robo-cut cost. The cost didn't matter. I purchased a TIG welder.

Outside of a handful of sloppy TIG welds while working at Rynn's, I'd never been trained how to TIG weld, but I had learned to broken handedly Gas weld a million years ago in FÁS. Gas welding is one of the most primitive forms of welding, and the type that Hollywood usually shows when it has to portray a welder. You use an Oxy Acetylene torch to heat the steel to melting and introduce a rod of extra material that melts into the gap, and when it all cools you have a join. It's slow, the workpiece gets extremely hot, and works best on thin material. When people ask me what kind of welding class they should take, I always tell them to make sure the class includes at least Stick welding but also MIG, as a course that only teaches Gas welding is kinda obsolete.

IRONICALLY, it turns out the technique you use to Gas welding is very similar to TIG welding, which is one of the cleanest, tidiest, ways of joining steel together. Laser welding rigs have begun appearing in the home market, but for the moment, TIG welding is the best welding you can get in a home workshop. TIG stands for "Tungsten Inert Gas", unlike the Stick welding, where the electrical arc melting the steel is provided by the tip of the stick making contact with the workpiece and melting into place, and MIG welding, where a constantly fed wire is the thing that provides the arc and the welding material, in TIG welding, all the torch provides is the arc and the gas to shield the arc from the air. A tungsten electrode, like an old fashioned arc light, is tough enough to withstand the temperature involved in maintaining a constant arc, you hover this just over the surface of your material, making it molten at the point where the arc makes contact, while introducing a stick of material into this molten pool from the side with your other hand. The tricky part, unlike GAS welding, is to avoid making physical contact between the tip of the Tungsten electrode and the thing you are trying to weld, or the electrode and the stick of material you are introducing from the side. We're talking a few scant millimeters of a gap here. If the tungsten electrode gets molten steel on it it becomes very difficult very quickly to maintain a nice clean arc, so you take it out and sharpen it and try again. I'm still not a great TIG welder, but even with mediocre user a TIG welder can still still achieve tidier and more delicate joins than a skilled user with a MIG or Stick welder.

After the first year on Patreon I noticed a problem. It would be a few years before I would be formally diagnosed with ADHD, all I knew is I had to make constant deals with myself in order to get anything done. In any situation where my willpower was involved, I endeavored to remove it as a factor. In a failed attempt to get me to go to bed earlier I sealed a timer switch inside a box and connected it to my house's internet router, it was set to kill the internet between 2am and 4am. When that wasn't good enough I built a device from an 1/2" impact driver, a scissor jack, another timer switch, an emergency stop switch, and the most frightening wiring you ever saw for tilting my entire bed at 45 degrees at 10am every morning (the video was called "Mike's

Alarming Bed”, it’s featured on Canadian national television). As well as throwing me out of the bed it made a horrifying racket. I stopped using it the morning I woke up at noon in a kneeling position in front of my tilted bed (see diagram).

To this end I set up my Patreon so that I only got a payout from the people who signed up once I actually uploaded a video. The idea was this would incentivise me to get a video done every month. When I was doing the TV show I was putting out one sword per week, so I thought that I should be able to do one per month easy peasy. What I didn’t take into account was that a lot of those swords I made on the show were already half finished, and of course someone else was doing the filming and editing. But surely without the constant interruptions to film reaction shots and talking head bits it would be faster? I didn’t take into account how much time was “wasted” each day answering emails and babysitting social media posts. The first year of Patreon I generally did a lot of simpler swords, and just about managed to keep to the schedule of one per month. However, the twin urges I had, to take on more elaborate projects to move my own skill set forward, and to keep the content on the channel fresh and interesting, started to collide in an unsustainable fashion.

As I took on more and more complicated projects, the goal of getting a video out once per month became more and more remote. The resultant videos were generally well received, but it became a running joke of how infrequently I uploaded. When I originally made the Patreon I promised the videos would be “30+ minutes!”. It’s finally gotten to the stage where the weapons I make are baroque, can take upwards of 6 months to finish and result in videos that are 4 hours long (I generally don’t release the video until the sword is actually done). I started making smaller if not simpler weapons in between the longer ones to bridge the gaps, but this was time I was taking away from the main builds and was delaying their release even more. I did eventually swallow my pride and switch the Patreon from “per video” to “per month”. Most of my patreons were understanding, but I felt bad about doing it. I’ve started taking ADHD medication. I’m hopeful I can reach some sort of equilibrium moving forward, but I guess we’ll see. I’ve been eating into my sword making time lately writing a book, hopefully that turns out to be worthwhile. I guess we’ll see.