

[Transcript] Lex Fridman Podcast / #369 - Paul Rosolie: Amazon Jungle, Uncontacted Tribes, Anacondas, and Ayahuasca

The following is a conversation with Paul Rosely, a conservationist, explorer, author, filmmaker, and real life Tarzan.

Since for much of the past 17 years, Paul has lived deep in the Amazon rainforest, protecting endangered species and trees from poachers, loggers, and foreign nations funding them.

He is the founder of Jungle Keepers, which today protects over 50,000 acres of threatened habitat.

And Paul is one of the most incredible human beings I've ever met.

I hope to travel with him in the Amazon jungle one day, because in his eyes, I saw a truth that can only be discovered directly by spending time among the immensity and power of nature at its purest.

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This episode is brought to you by Aid Sleep and it's new pod three mattress.

There's few things I enjoy in life more than a great power nap.

I take a sip of coffee, I get some caffeine in my body, and then when the feeling of just kind of jadedness, of tiredness, if you think of motivation as an ocean, the thing that comes to mind is that it's not just about what covers that motivation or the surface waves.

I think of the desire to nap with the surface waves and the nap itself is a way to bring calm to the waters.

It's a way to let the storm pass.

I just took a nap before this and you perhaps can tell in my voice, the energy of a thousand butterflies.

I don't know why it shows butterflies, but I did.

I don't know why it shows a thousand, but it's a distributed system with emergent behavior, I'm sure.

Although the flocking behavior I'm aware of is mostly for birds.

I wonder if butterflies flock.

They seem more independent.

They seem too beautiful to flock.

Does beauty prevent you from cooperating?

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Is there a threshold beyond which you're too beautiful to cooperate with others? And the definition of beauty, of course, is species dependent, unless we're talking about butterflies, in which case they're just beautiful, beautiful to other species as well, at least to humans.

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This episode is also brought to you by BetterHelp spelled H-E-L-P help. I've been going through some rough times mentally.

I just took a nap, so I'm feeling pretty good.

But this last year, and I just tweeted about this, has been really rough.

I had some really low points.

It's probably not the right place to talk about such low points here, as I sit alone in a dark hotel room, all the lights off, because you know how hotel rooms are, there's no overhead lights, it's just a lamp, and nobody knows how to turn that lamp on.

So it's mostly darkness with little hints of light from a lamp.

From a lamp that's just around the corner.

And here I sit alone with a microphone, talking about things.

What is this life exactly?

Anyway, sometimes those little environments, those little moments can catch you off guard, and the darkness that's in our past comes to the surface, and it can break you.

It's good to bring it to the surface often, so it doesn't break you.

And that's where I think talking to others helps.

I think talk therapy with a professional helps.

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And now, dear friends, here's Paul Rosalie.

In 2006, at 18 years old, you fled New York and traveled to the Amazon.

This started a journey that I think lasted this day.

Tell me about this first leap.

What in your heart pulled you towards the Amazon jungle?

From the time I was three years old, I'd say, it was dinosaurs, wildlife, documentaries, Steve Irwin, you name it.

And when my parents said, nature versus nurture, they nurtured my nature.

I was always just drawn to streams, forests.

I wanted to go explore where the little creek led.

I wanted to see the turtles and the snakes.

And so I was a kid that hated school, did not get along with school.

I was dyslexic and didn't know it, undiagnosed.

I didn't read until I was like 10 years old, like way behind.

And so for me, the forest was safety.

Like I remember one time in first grade, they had to do in those, you know, those multiplication sheets that was pure hell for me.

And so I actually got so upset that I couldn't do it that I ran out the classroom ran out the door and went to the nearest woods and I stayed there because that was safe.

And so for me, like once I got to the point where I was like, high school isn't working out.

I had incredibly supported parents that were like, look, just get out, take your GED, get out of high school after 10th grade, you got to go to college,

but like start doing something you love.

And so I saved up and bought a ticket to the Amazon and met some indigenous guys.

And the second I walked in that forest, it was like, it's like the first scene in Jurassic Park when they see the dinosaurs and they go, oh, this is it.

I walked in there and just, I looked at those giant trees.

I saw leaf cutter ants in real life and I just went, oh, it was like the movie just started.

You know, that was when, that was when like I came online.

Can you put into words, what is it about that place that felt like home?

What was it that drew you?

What aspect of nature, the streams, the water, the forest, the jungle, the animals, what drew you?

What drew you? It's just, it's always been in my blood.

I mean, for any forest, I mean, whether it's upstate New York or India or Borneo, but the Amazon, it's all of that turned up to this level where everything is superlatively diverse. You know, you have more plants and animals than anywhere else on earth, not just now, but in the entire fossil record.

It's the Andes-Amazon interface. There's just that's,

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terrestrially, that's where it is.

That's the greatest library of life that has ever existed.

And so you're just, you're so stimulated, you're so overwhelmed with color and diversity and beauty and this overwhelming sense of natural majesty of these, you know, thousand-year-old trees and half the life is up in the canopy of those trees.

We don't even have access to it. There's stuff without names walking around on those branches and it's like, it just takes you somewhere. And so going there, it was like, you know, the guys I met just opened the door and they were like, you know, how far do you want to go down the rabbit hole? How, how, how much of this do you want to see? You mentioned Steve Irwin. You list a bunch of heroes that you have. He's one of them.

And you said that when you're unsure about a decision, you ask yourself, W-W-S-D, what would Steve do? Why is that such a good heuristic for life? What would Steve do? He's a human being that like everything we saw from Steve Irwin was positive.

Everything was with a smile on his face. If he was getting bitten by a reticulated python, he was smiling. If he was, you know, getting destroyed in the news for feeding a crocodile with his son too close, he was trying to explain to people why it's okay and why we have to love these animals. And everything was about love. Everything was about, you know, wildlife and protecting. And to me, a person like that, that where you only see positive things, that's a role model. And it's just like an endless curiosity and hunger to explore this world of nature.

Yeah. And an insatiable madness for wildlife. I mean, the guy was just so much fun.

I got a, if it's okay, read to you a few of your own words. You open the book, Mother of God with a passage that I think beautifully paints a scene.

Before he died, Santiago Duran told me a secret. It was late at night in a palm-thatched hut on a bank of the Tampa Potter River deep in the southwestern corner of the Amazon Basin. And besides a mud oven, two wild boar heads sizzling, sizzled in a cradle of embers. They're protruding tusks, curling in static agony as they cooked. The smell of burning sycropia wood and singed flesh filled the air. Woe in basket containing monkey skulls hung from the rafters where stars speak through the gaps in the thatching. A pair of chickens huddled in the corner conversing softly. We sat facing each other on sturdy benches across a table hewn from a single-cost section of some massive tree now nearly consumed by termites. The song of a million insects and frogs filled the night. Santiago's cigarette trembled in the age fingers as he leaned close over the candlelight to describe a place hidden in the jungle. That line, the songs of a million insects and frogs filled the night for some reason hit me.

What's it like sitting there conversing among so many living creatures all around you?

Every night in the jungle, you live in constant awareness of that out there in the darkness are literally millions of heartbeats around you. And so we exist in this domesticated, paved world most of the time. But when you go out there past the roads and the telephone poles and the hospitals and you make it out into earth, just wild earth. And there's no, it's not like this is a national park. There's no rescue helicopter waiting to come get you. You are out there and you're surrounded at night by, I mean, there are snakes and jaguars and frogs and insects and all this stuff just crawling through the swamps and through the trees and through the branches. And we put on headlamps and go out into the night and just absolutely fall to our knees with wonder of the things that we see. It's absolutely incredible. And most of it doesn't make sounds like the insects do.

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The insects do. The frogs do. You have some of the night birds making sounds, but a lot of it, everything has evolved to be silent, invisible. I mean, everything there is on the list. There's another line in Mother of God where I said life is just a temporary moment of stasis and the churning recycling death march that is the Amazon. It's been called the greatest natural battlefield on earth. I mean, in any square acre, there's more stuff eating other things than anywhere else. And you go through a swamp in the Amazon and there's like this tarantulas floating on the water. There's frogs in the trees. There's tadpoles hanging from leaves waiting to drop into the water. There's fish waiting to eat them. There's birds in the trees. You literally are surrounded by so many things that your brain can't process it. It's just overwhelming life.

Churning death march. Some of the creatures are waiting and some of them are being a bit more proactive about it. What do you make of that churning death march? That the amount of murder that's happening all around you at all scales. What is that? We dramatize wars and the millions of people that were lost in World War II, some of them tortured, some of them dying with a gun in hand, some of them civilians, but it's just millions of people. What about the billions and billions and billions of organisms that are just being murdered all around you? Does that change the view of nature of life here? I've always wondered like that. When you see like a wildebeest taken down by lions and eaten from behind while it's alive and it makes you question God, you go, how could they let this happen? In the Amazon, I find personally that these natural processes make up almost a religion, that it reminds you how temporary we are, that the botflies that are trying to get into your skin and the mosquitoes that are trying to suck your blood, that when you sweat, you literally can hold out your arm and watch the condensation come off of your skin and rise up into the canopy and join the clouds and rain back down in the afternoon and then you drink the river and start it all over again. It's flowing through you. So the Amazon reminds me that there's a lot that we don't understand. And so when it comes to that overwhelming and collective murder, as Werner Herzog put it, it's just part of the show. It's part of the freak show of the Amazonian night. In certain moments, you're able to feel one with a mosquito that's trying to kill you slowly. One with the mosquito is a stretch. Is it always the enemy? What I mean is you're part of the machine there, right? Yeah, and it's fair play. It's fair play. We have bullet ants and you get nailed by a bullet ant and you just go, yeah, well done. Today's over. I'm going back to bed and I'm taking a pile of Tylenol. Do you think in that sense, when you're out there, are you a part of nature or are you separate from nature? Is man a part of nature or separate? I think that's what's so refreshing about it, is that out there, you truly are. And so whether we're bringing researchers or film crews or whether we're just out there ourselves on an expedition, you truly are a part of nature. And so one of the things that my team and I started doing when I became friends with these guys, this is a family of indigenous people from the community of Inferno and they took me in. And as we got close, they started saying, you can come with us on our annual hunting trip. And I went, okay. And it's four guys in a boat and you don't want to get your clothes wet. So we're all in our boxers in a canoe with a motor going out past the places that have names. And you're out in the middle of the jungle. And the thing is, when your motor breaks, you are so quickly reminded of the inerrant truths, like the things that nobody can argue with. And we live in such a human world where everything is debatable, religion and politics and perspectives on everything. And then you get down to this point where it's like, if we don't figure something out, the river is going to rise and take the boat.

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That's the truth. And nobody's going to argue with that. And it's like, to me, there's a beauty in that truth because then all of us are united there in that truth against the natural facts around us. And so to me, that's a state where I feel very, very at home.

And the Amazon is more efficient than most places on earth at swallowing you up.

God, yeah. Okay.

Yeah. So just a linger on that because you've spoken about Francisco de Aralana, who's this explorer in 1541 and 42 that sailed the length of the Amazon, probably one of the first. And there's just a few things I should probably read. I should probably find a good book on him because the guy seems like a gangster. Yes, some great books on him.

So he sailed, he led the expedition that sailed all the way from one end to the other.

There's like a rebuilding of a ship. Which is insanity.

Yeah. Yeah. So because it speaks to the thing, it's like, nobody's going to come and rescue you.

No. You have to. If your boat dies, you're going to have to rebuild it.

Yeah. So they came down the Andes, entered in the headwaters of the Amazon, constructed some sort of

raft, boat, craft, something, and made it down the entire Amazon basin. Of course, his stories are the ones that led to the Amazon being called the Amazon because he reported tribes of women. He reported these large cities, places where the tribes lived on farms of river turtles that they corralled and they lived off of that protein. And then when they came out to the mouth of the Amazon, if I remember it correctly, that just through navigation and the stars, they were able to calculate where the way was back to Spain and make a boat seaworthy enough to bring them home.

Incredible. Absolutely.

Do people like that inspire you, your own journey? What gives you kind of strength that in these harshest of times and harshest of conditions, you can persevere?

Yeah. I mean, you look at the stories of people that are so, these stories of people that have overcome incredible suffering like that or like what Shackleton did or something like that.

And so like when you're, I've been, your tent gets washed away, you go to sleep and the river rises 20 feet and washes away your tent and you crawl out and all you have is a machete and a headlamp, literally no bag, no food, no nothing. And you go, wow, the next six days before I reach back to a town is going to be just pure hell. I'm going to be sleeping on the ground covered in ants destroyed by mosquitoes. And then it becomes, am I in any capacity, any percentage as tough and resilient as the people that I've read about that have made it through things far worse than this? And then that's the game you play.

What goes through your head? All you got is the headlamp and the machete. So are you thinking at all? Like I've gotten a chance to interact quite a lot with Elon Musk and he constantly puts out fires having to run several companies. There's never a kind of whiny deliberation about issues.

You just always one step forward how to solve, right? This is the situation, how do you solve it?

Or do you also have a kind of self-motivating, almost egotistical, like I'm a bad motherfucker?

I can handle anything almost like trying to fake it till you make it kind of thing.

There was a little bit of that. With your machete in it. I got a sword.

There may have been a little bit of that when I was like 14, 15 years old. I'd have a hunting knife and my dog and I'd go out into the woods like the Catskills and survive for a weekend.

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My rule was one match. You get one match and you got to make shelter and then I'd bring like a steak and make a fire and stuff. And at that point, there may be with some ego, but in the Amazon, you get stripped down so completely that you... It's like that thing, like watch the atheism leave everyone's body when they think they're about to die. It's like when you find yourself staring up at the Amazon at night and you go, there is no hope of getting out of here. I mean, I was once lost in a swamp where it took me days to get out of there and there was moments where I just said, this is clearly it. There's no ego there. There's just hope. You start realizing what you believe in and praying that you'll be okay and then trying to summon whatever you know about how to survive and that's it. And so it's actually, again, it's kind of a blissful state if you can walk that line between adventure and tragedy and sort of keep yourself right at that very, very fine line without going over. Ever fear of death? Fear? Ever fear? Terror? No, I don't want to die. I love the people in my life and there's a lot of things I want to do, but every time I've been certain that I'm going to die, I've been very, very calm. Very calm and just sort of like, okay, well, if this is how the movie goes, then this is how it goes. Almost accepting. Yeah, which is reassuring. You mentioned Herzog just to venture down this road of death and fear and so on. There's been a few madmen like you in this world. He's documented a couple of them. What lessons do you draw from grizzly men or into the wild, those kinds of stories? Were you ever afraid that you'd be one of those stories? Oh, yeah. I actually think that it's in Mother of God where I said I almost into the wild did myself. I went out there and really I got so lost and so destroyed that I said this is going to be the next one. This is going to be the next story of some idiot kid from New York who went to the Amazon thinking he was Percy Fawcett and then vanished because if you do vanish out there, your body's going to be consumed in a matter of days, like two. If we see an animal dead on the trail, you got dung beetles and fly larvae and vultures and there's a whole pecking order. You get the black vultures, the yellow vultures, the king vulture, they all come in. That thing is picked clean in a couple of days. What would be the creature that eats most of you in that situation? Probably the vultures and the maggots. It's really quick. It's really, really quick. Even as far as you can't leave food out, if you have a piece of chicken, you say, oh, I'll eat it in the morning. You leave it out. You can't do that. It's not good by morning. Grisly Man, for example, like what? Because that's a beautiful story. It's both comical and genius and especially the way Herzog tells it. First, do you like the way he told the story? Do you like Herzog? I do. I love Herzog and I love his documentary, The Burden of Dreams, which is in the Amazon, not very far from where I work. The sheer madness that you see this man undergoing of just trying to recreate hauling a boat over a mountain is wild. And the extras that he hired to play the natives are, I think they're Machiganga tribesmen and they just look like all the guys that I hang out with and it's like, they're doing all this stuff in the jungle that months and months and months and you can just see him deteriorating with madness because the jungle, you know, your boat, you know how many times I've tied up a boat to the side of the river? This just happened like a year and a half ago. I tied up a lot through COVID. I pretty much just lived in the jungle for a while and there was nobody there and there was no support and I tied up my boat and the rain is just hammering. Like the universe is trying to rip the earth in

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half. The rain is just going and the river is rising and I tied up the boat, but then you go to sleep and you got to wake up every two hours to go check the boat and the boat is thrashing back and forth. So all night, every two hours, I'd wake up barefoot in driving rain like golf ball raindrops and just go down, check the boat. And then by morning, I was like, I fell asleep, woke up, checked the boat and then I was like, I'm just going to go make coffee. I was so done. I was so like at the end of my rope every time bailing the boat out and stuff.

And then we got 15 minutes of heavy rain that filled the boat sink. So now I'm stuck up river with no boat and it's like that type of thing where it's like, no matter how hard you try, the jungle is just like, listen, you're nothing. You are nothing. And so it's that constant reminder. And so Herzog really threw himself into that in that film and it's brilliant to watch.

What do you think you meant by the line that you include in your book? It's a land that God, if he exists, has created in anger.

Said in German accent.

Yeah. Overwhelming and collective murder. So he didn't really appreciate the beauty of the murder. I think he appreciated it. But to him, it was very dark. I think he saw the darkness and that's there. It sure is. As soon as you do ayahuasca, that door opens and you see the darkness because that brings you right into the jungle, like the heart of it. But I think that for him, it is, I think that darkness is something that he embraces and that he loves. There's another film of his and I don't know if this is accurate, but my memory has it that there's a penguin and I think it's an Antarctica and the penguins going in the wrong direction away from the ocean. And I feel like he goes on this monologue about how like he's just had enough.

This one penguin is just marching towards, you know.

Yeah. Because I remember that clip from that documentary and what Werner says is that the penguin is deranged. He's lost his mind. And I took offense to that. Because maybe that's a brave explorer. How do you know there's not a lot more going on? It could be a love story. Those penguins get super attached. Maybe his mate was over there and he had to go find her. Or it's a lost mate and he last time he saw her was going in that direction.

Exactly. So this is like the great explorer. We assume animals are like the average of the bell curve. Like every animal we interact with is just the average. But there's special ones, just like there's special humans. Yeah. That could be a special penguin.

It could have been. And I had the same thought where I was like, I found it beautiful how he interpreted it. What I took away from that was I found that Werner Herzog's monologue there was brilliantly dark and also comedic, but maybe irrelevant biologically speaking towards penguins. Which happens a lot with animals. I find there's so many times where I'll find people be like, do you think that animals can show compassion? And you hear like a bunch of people that have never left the pavement talking about like, wow, this one animal helped another animal. And it's like, go ask Jane Goodall if animals can show compassion. Go talk to anybody that works on a daily basis with animals. And so like to me, there's always a little bit of frustration and hearing people sort of like pleasantly surprised that animals aren't just these automatons of what's the word like programmed, nothingness. First of all, what have you learned about life from Jane Goodall? Because she spoke highly of your book and you list her as one of the mentors. But what kind of wisdom about animals do you draw from her?

The wisdom from Jane is so diverse. First of all, the work that she did at the time she did it was

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so incredible because she was out there at a very young age doing that field work. She was naming her subjects, which everyone said you shouldn't do. She broke every rule. She broke every rule. She was assigning and everyone said, you're anthropomorphizing these animals by saying

that they're doing this and that. And she was like, no, they're interacting. They're showing love. They're showing compassion. They're showing hate. They're showing fear. And she broke straight

through all of those things and it paid off in dividends for her.

Do you see the animals as having all those human-like emotions of anger, of compassion, of longing, of loneliness from what you've seen, especially with mammals, but with different species out there? Do they have all that?

It depends on the animal. On the scale of a cockroach to an elephant, it's like a lot of these things. And I wonder about this stuff all the time. I'll have a praying mantis on my hand and just go, what is going through your mind? Or you'll see a spider make a complex decision and go, I'm going to make my web there. And you go, how are you doing this? Because he made a calculation there. It's smart. I was in the jungle not that long ago and I was walking and all of a sudden this dove comes flying through the jungle, right up to my face, lands on a branch, right here, right next to me. I look at the dove, dove looks at me and she's like, hey, and she's clearly like panting. And I'm like, why are you so close? This is weird. And she's like, I know. And then an ornate hawk eagle flies up 10 feet away, looks at both of us and just like scowls and sticks up its head feathers and then just flies off. And the dove was like, sweet, thanks. And then flew in the other direction. And I was like, dude, you just used me to save your life. Yeah. The dove knew. See, this is what, because there's different, you know, there's Mike Tyson and there's Albert Einstein. Yeah. And sometimes I wonder when I look at different creatures, even insects, like, is this Mike Tyson or is this Einstein? Yeah. Like, because one or other kinds of personnel, like, is this a New Yorker or is this a Midwestern or is this like San Francisco barista of the insects? Like, there's all kinds of personalities you never know. So you can't like project. Like, if you run into a bear and it's very angry, it could be just the asshole New Yorker. Yeah. Sure. Sure. What he's saying about New Yorkers, man. Exactly. Point well made. So speaking about communicating with a dove, you first met the crew in the Amazon. You talk about JJ as somebody who can communicate with animals. What do you think JJ is able to see and hear and feel that others don't, that he's able to communicate with the animals? When I say this is the most skilled jungle man I've ever seen, and I know so many guys in the region, he has libraries of information in his cranium that we cannot fathom. It's just stunning. Like, you know, I have seen him use medicinal plants to cure things that Western doctors couldn't cure. I've seen him navigate in such a way that he's not using the stars. He's not using any discernible, you know, it's like when elephants, sometimes like you'll watch a herd of elephants and they'll be like, you know, let's go, we're going this way. And you'll see them sort of communicate. But there's no audible sound. They'll just decide that they're going that when they all do it. JJ has this way in the jungle of, you know, he'll stop and he'll go, wait. And you go, what is it? And he goes, there's a herd of peccary coming. And I'm like, where? Based on what? You know, and he's like, just wait, you'll see. And he'll sit there. You think that's just experience?

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It's incredible experience. It's growing up barefoot in the Amazon. And the gift is that he can speak fluent English. And so when I bring tourists and scientists or news reporters down there, he can communicate with them. He's actually good on camera because he doesn't care about cameras.

And like, you know, for instance, we were walking up a stream a few months ago, and I went, hey, look Jaguar tracks. And he went, oh, and I was like, what, Jaguar tracks? And he's like, no, look, look harder. And I was like, the toes are deeper than the back. And he was like, uh-huh. And where are they? And I was like, by the water. And I was like, the Jaguar's drinking. It was leaning to drink. And he was like, that's right. He's like, now look behind you. I look behind me. And there's scat. There's a big log of Jaguar shit sitting there. And it's got butterflies all over it. Fresh? Pretty fresh. And then there's another one that's less fresh. And so he's, he's teaching me as he does. He's going, look at this, look at this. Is that one as fresh as this one? No. And then he goes, now look up, look up. There's three vultures above us. The kill is near us. The Jaguar has been coming multiple times to the river to drink as it's feasting on whatever it killed. And he's going, it's within 30 feet of us right now. And it's like, I'm like, oh look, impressions in the sand. He's like, I just drew 19 conclusions from that. It's like watching Sherlock Holmes at work. It's just- Like constructing the crime scene. Incredible.

Does that apply also to be able to communicate with the actual animals? Like read into their body movements directly, uh, into their, whatever that dove was saying to you, you'd be able to understand. Or is that all just kind of taken in the complex structure of the crime scene of the interactions of the different animals, of the environment and so on? Like what is that that you're able to communicate with another creature that he was able to communicate with another creature? He knows the intention of pose. He knows the habits. He knows the perspective

when, when, when he talks about animals, he'll talk about each species as if it's a person.

So he'll say, oh, oh, the, the Jaguar, she never likes to let you see her. And so he'll come back from the jungle and he'll go, oh, I was watching monkeys and this, this Jaguar was also watching the monkeys, but I was being so quiet. She didn't see me. And then when she see me, she feels so embarrassed and she go, and he'll tell you this story, like, as if he had this interaction with like his neighbor. And, you know, and he'll be like, oh, the pukakunga, it never does that. You won't see it do that. And so one time, one time he caught a fish and I, I was such a big fish. It was this big, beautiful pseudo plattestoma, this tiger catfish, this amazing old fish. And they're all excited to eat it. And I felt so bad watching this thing gasp on the sand. And I went, you know what, we don't need this. This is for fun. I threw back. Oh no. And then I took my hand and I went, and I made like drag marks, like, so I could say, oh, it snuck back in the water. And so he walks up, he looks at it and he was like, I hate you. And I went, what? No, I said, I mean, it must have, it must have just, he went, that's not what happens. He goes, it goes like this when it goes, he knew the track of a fish. And I was like, oh, yeah. I was like, all right, JJ, I'm sorry, I'll catch you another fish.

So stepping back to that way, you open mother of God.

Yeah.

Who was Santiago Duran? And what secret did he tell you?

JJ's father was, at some point, he was a policeman. At some point, when he was a teenager,

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he was working on the boats that before this little gold mining city of Puerto Maldonado grew, the only way to get supplies in was to take canoes up the Tambopada River, up to the next state, which is Puno, and where the mules would come down from the mountains with supplies. And then he'd pilot the boats down, but they didn't have motors at that time. So he would be pulling the boat. So he became this physically terrifying man. And I met him when he was in his 80s, and he was still living out in the jungle by himself. And I mean, he's seen in Anaconda eat a taper, which is the, you know, a cow sized mammal in the Amazon. He'd seen uncontacted tribes

face to face. He once killed an 11 foot electric eel, opened the back of the thing's neck, removed the nerve that he says was the source of the electric, then he cut his forearm, placed that nerve into his forearm, wrapped it with a dead toad, and claims that it would give him strength through the rest of his life and continued to be a jungle badass until the day he quietly leaned back at a barbecue and ceased to be alive. The man was incredible. But the secret that he told us was that if you want to find big Anacondas, you know, if you want to see the Yakumama, he was like, you have to go to the Bawayo, the place of Boas, the place that we came to call the Floating Forest. And so he sent us there and it became like this pilgrimage. And you know, in the Amazon, a lot of the creation myths are based around the Anaconda coming down from the heavens and carving the rivers across the jungle. And if you look at the rivers, it looks like that. It looks like the path of an Anaconda crawling through the jungle. It's even the right color. And so from the reference to the tribes of women, the Amazons to the Anaconda mother, everything in the Amazon is very feminine based. Even the trees, the largest trees in the jungle, the mother of the forest, the Madre de la Selva is the Capeoc tree. And it's just this monster tree, these beautiful ancient trees. And that was the beginning of the transition that we made from me being like, I hate school. I want to go on adventures. You know, Jane Goodall got to do all this amazing stuff. I'm just a kid stuck here to eventually becoming something that had to do with where my identity became the jungle, where my life became the jungle. The secret that he told us opened that door because when we started working with these giant snakes, it started getting attention. It started getting people to go, what are you doing? And it started allowing me to have experiences that solidified and nailed down the fact that this wasn't just like a weekend retreat. This was something that I was born to do. And gave you more and more motivation to go into these uncharted territory of the Yakumama, which just to step back, what nations are we talking about here? Is there some geography? What are we talking about? Where is this? So I'm in Peru. Yeah, we're in Peru, which is a South American nation. Peru is a South American nation. Brazil has 60% of the Amazon, which is unfortunate because anything that happens politically in Brazil has a massive impact on the Amazon. Peru has the Western Amazon and Ecuador has a little bit of the Western Amazon. And the Western Amazon is where the Andes Mountains, the cloud forests, which is a mega-biodiverse biome, falls into the Western Amazon lowlands. And so you have the meeting of these two incredible biomes. And that's what makes this superlative, incredible, glowing moment of life on earth. So yeah, we're in Peru in the Madre de Dios, which is the mother of God, which I always thought was such a beautiful. The jungle is the source of all life. And so we were with the Aja people, and they belong to a community that's called Infierno, which was given by the missionaries who, when they tried to go bring these people, Jesus, got so many arrows shot at them that they just called it hell. And so Santiago Durán helped

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unite these tribes that were sort of scattered through the jungle and get them status, government recognized status as indigenous people. So he was sort of a hero. He was sort of a legend for a lot of the stuff he'd done out barefoot with just a rifle and a machete in the jungle. He had 19 children. And the last one, I think the 20th child that he adopted, was a refugee from the shining path that floated down the river, and he just took him in. And this is just a guy that was a, you know, everything he did, like when he died, the whole region showed up. He was somebody. So just the fact that I know him gives me street credit. Like the fact that I knew him, I can go like, oh, I knew Santiago. And people are like, no. I'm like, yeah, yeah. So you have to get integrated to the culture, to the place, in every single way, which is tough for you for the being from New York. Yeah. Yeah, it could have been tough, but it was, I took to it. You know, the jungle, they were very, you know, JJ is teaching me about medicines, and we were doing bird surveys and, you know, taking data on macaw populations. And JJ was just like, you really want to like, he goes, you got to sleep. And I was like, I only have a few weeks here. I don't know if I'm ever going to come back. I'm never going to sleep. So we'd be out every night looking for all the wildlife we could. I wanted to take photos. I wanted to see things. And, and then, you know, the exchange came with that he was like, you know, I'm terrified of snakes. And I said, well, I've always worked with snakes. I said, I'll teach you how to handle snakes. And then we just had this little exchange. And then when I left after my first time back in 2006, you know, I said, I said, how can I help? And, and they were like, look, you know, we're out here trying to protect this, this little island of forest that is going to be bulldozed. And, and the more people that you can bring, the more knowledge and the more awareness that you can bring to this, it'll help. And so really at that age at 18 years old, I sort of started dabbling with the idea of that I could be part of helping these people to protect this place that I loved. And of course, at that time, that idea seemed like too large of a dream or too large of a challenge to that I could actually impact it. So what was the journey of looking for these giant snakes? Of looking for anacondas? What are anacondas? Anaconda is the largest snake on earth. So you have reticulated pythons in Southeast Asia, they're actually longer. But anacondas are these massive bullies that give live birth. And unlike a lot of other species, so an anaconda starts off at, you know, a little two foot anaconda, just a little thicker than your finger, a little baby. And their food for cane toads, herons, crocodiles, you name it, they're pretty harmless, defenseless. But as they grow, they're eating the fish, they're eating the crocs. And then they grow a little more and they're eating things like capybara and they're eating larger prey. And then at the end of their life, a female anaconda, you're talking about a 25, 30 foot, 300, 400 pound snake with a head bigger than a football. And these things, that means that they impact the entire ecosystem, which is very unique. Moves up the food chain to become basically an apex predator. Yeah, apex predator. Yeah. The apex predator of the rivers. And so That's how interesting, just eating your way up the food chain. Eating your way up the food chain, if you can survive. And like that, you know, they're constantly at war with everything else. But you know, so I showed up in the Amazon, I was like, so where the anacondas at? And they were like, Oh, no, no, no, it's not like that. They're like, it's you, you have to find these things. They're, they're subterranean, they're living in the special swamps, they're people kill them. And so we went to the floating forest after we'd come back from an expedition, we'd call like a 12 foot anaconda. And it's

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now it's become like this like classic photo of me and JJ with this anaconda over our shoulders. And we were like, we, you know, we 12 days out in the jungle on a hunting trip. And we came back and we showed his dad and Santiago looked at us and he was like, that's the smallest anacondita I've ever seen. He's like, you guys are pathetic. And he was like, look, you go to the, go, he was like, go, he's like, I'm giving you permission, go to the boy or go to the floating forest. And so we went to this place and we reached there at night. And it was me, JJ, and one of his brothers, and his brother took one look at it and was like, I'm out. And he started walking back and me and JJ get to the edge of this thing. And this is our friendship. It's both this two idiots pushing each other farther and farther. And like, I like put a foot on the, on the ground and it all shook. And the stars are reflecting on the ground. And what we realized is that it's a lake with floating grass on top of it. And there's islands of grass floating on this lake, very life of pie. And the tops of trees are coming out of the surface of the water. And so we start walking across this and JJ is going, these are big anacondas. And I'm going, JJ, that's a two foot wide smooth path snaking through the grass. It's no anaconda that big. He was going, they're listening. I said, they don't have ears. He goes, they're listening. And he's like, we're walking and we're walking. And then it's like, maybe it's like 1am or something. And it was just like one of those moments where we saw it at the same time. And we're standing by the tail. And the snake was so big that, I mean, this must have been a 25 foot anaconda dead asleep with a, with a probably a 16 foot anaconda, like sprawled across her. And they're laying in the starlight and we're floating on top of a lake standing there in the middle of the Amazon. And JJ just, I just, I could feel the blood drain out of his face. And as like a, however old I was, you know, maybe 20 years old, I just said, if I, if we could somehow show people this, we'll be on the front cover in National Geographic and we can protect all the jungle that we want. And so I tried to catch it. So I jumped on the snake. And the only measurement I have of this animal is that when I wrapped my arms around it, I couldn't touch my fingers. And so I was, you know, my feet were dragging and to her credit, this anaconda did not turn around and eat me because her head was, you know, this big and, and she went and she reached the edge of the, the grass island and she starts plunging into the dark. And so I'm watching the stars vibrate as this anaconda is going. And I had to make the choice of either going headfirst down into the black, which no, thank you, or stopping and just keeping my hand on this thing as it raced by me. And I just felt the scales and the muscle and the power go by and then eventually taper down to the tail until it slipped away into the darkness. And I was laying there just panting. And then I turned around and went, JJ, what the fuck? Like, where were you, man? And he was just like, completely white circuits blown. And I had to go then like, kind of like take care of him. I was like, you okay? And he was like, no, he, you know, he just couldn't. And so we came back with that. And then after that, we were like, okay, clearly, clearly the parameters of reality that we thought were possible are just a tiny fraction of what's out there. Like we, we now that sort of recalibrated us. We were like, okay, we're rubbing up against things that are bigger than we thought were ever possible. And so we were like, okay, now we need to, we need to concentrate on this. So how dangerous is that creature to you, to humans? To humans, not at all. I mean, Mike, what our cooks, father-in-law was, was eaten by an anaconda. But like, you know, then again, like the way you see that story, sometimes it happens. It happens. I

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mean, come on, every now and then somebody gets stung by a bee and dies. Like, you know, it's, it once in a while, it happens. But you got to have a really big anaconda, really hungry. And like, anybody that works in the wild, I mean, just, you know, if you, you walk up to a crocodile, even a giant Nile crocodile, you walk up to them, most of the time, they're going to run into the water. They don't want confrontation. They hunt in their way on their terms, sneaky. You're not going to see him. And so with an anaconda, it's like, yeah, if you're, I mean, the guy who got eaten, like if you're drunk and you go to the edge of the water and you go for midnight swim, buy yourself in an Amazonian lake, I mean, whose fault is that?

But if you jump on an anaconda and try to try to hold on, then you're safe.

Because apparently, I mean, I think I've, I think at this point, we've, you know, the research we've done, I think I've handled or caught, you know, over 80 anacondas in the field. And not one of them has bitten me. They always choose flight over fight. They're like, just leave me alone, let me go. I'm just going to crawl under this thing. They're not an aggressive animal. I mean, no snake, no, I actually like, I kind of like, the only time I get particular with like, you know, the words is like, people go, that's an aggressive, black mambas are aggressive. And I go, no, no snake is aggressive. A rattlesnake is going to rattle to say, hey, back up.

The cobra is going to stand up and show you its hood. And people go, oh, look, he's being aggressive. No, he's not being aggressive. He's going, don't step on me. Don't make me do this.

They're actually being very peaceful. That's the way I look at it. Because if there was a cobra in the corner of this room right now, he would crawl under the curtain and we'd never see him again. Yeah. It's like a jengaskhan before conquering the villages. He always offered for them to join the army. Doesn't need to be like this. Yeah. Join us. Nobody gets destroyed. If you want to be proud and fight for your country, then we're going to oblige him.

Exactly. Okay. So how do you, how do you catch, actually, let's step back because there is, in part, you are a bit of a snake whisperer. So what, what is it that,

that others don't understand that you do about snakes? What's maybe a misconception?

Or what, what is, what have you learned from the language you speak that snakes understand?

I don't know. It's just, it's an animal that has, has many times in my life, I've been responsible for helping. The, you know, I started catching snakes when I was very young. I'd watch Steve ever want to go out and catch a garter snake or a black rat snake in New York. And, and then I had a rule. I said, I have to catch 100 nonvenomous snakes before I'm allowed to handle a venomous snake

if I ever need to handle a venomous snake. And then, you know, I was on a trail one time, I think in Harriman State Park and some guy, you know, like some big hero, he tells us, you know, he's like, back up, I'm going to get this. And he like picks up a stick and he like goes like assault this poor copperhead that's sitting on the trail. And so like at like 16 years old, I had to go and like shoulder this guy out of the way. And I like got the thing by the tail and used a stick to very gently just put it off the trail. Copperhead was not going to do anything to him, but he wanted to, you know, beat his chest and show his wife that he was tough.

But then in India, you know, I've lived in India for five years at this point in and out, you know, periodically. And, and snakes are always getting into people's kitchens.

One time we had a king cobra get into someone's kitchen, an 11 foot snake, like a monster, like a god of a snake. This thing stood up, you know, would stand up and be able to look at you

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over the table. And this terrifying monster thing, this giant gorilla dog thing, like we caught it with one of the local snake catchers. And we brought it out and he goes, you know, I wonder why I was in the kitchen. Yeah, looking for food. And they go, no, they eat snakes. King Cobra, Opio Vegas, Hannah, they eat snakes. And he goes, she's thirsty. And so we got a bottle of water and we got footage of this. And we, she's standing up, she's going, don't make me kill you. Don't make me kill you. You're scaring me right now. I don't want to kill you. We took the bottle of water, we poured it on her nose and she started, she started drinking. You could see, you could see her just drinking. And the snake just took this long drink, she drank a whole water bottle and then said, thank you so much and crawled off. And it's like, to me, the fact that people are scared of snakes, they have symbolic hatred of snakes. You know, you know, if someone's evil and sneaky, we call them a snake. And like, to me, it's like, when I take volunteers or researchers or students out into the jungle and we find an emerald tree boa or an Amazon tree boa or, or a vine snake. And it's like, this is, it's one of the few animals that you can't really catch a bird and show it to people. You're going to scare the bird, its feathers are going to come out, you might give it a heart attack. Snakes, you can lift up a snake. You know, if there's a snake in the room right now, I could lift it up and say, Lex, here, this is how you hold it. And we could interact calmly with this thing and then put it back on its branch and then it'll go. And I've seen what that does to people. I've seen how the wonder in their eyes. And so to me, snakes have always been this incredible link to teach people about wildlife, about nature. Because they have naturally a lot of fear towards this creature and to realize that the fear is not justified. It's not grounded, or is not as deeply grounded in reality. Of course, there's always New Yorker snakes, right? There's always going to be an asshole snake here and there coming for me, man. Well, okay. So back to the anaconda. How do you catch an anaconda? Like what, how do you handle it? Cause it's such a 25 foot or even 12 foot giant snakes. How do you, how do you deal with this creature? How do you interact with them? We had to learn how to do that. Cause one of the first ones we caught that I would say maybe like a 16 footer, which is no joke of a snake, you know, girth of a basketball, let's say. You know, we're on the canoe and this is, this is the early days. Like, you know, now we're at a whole different level, but this is back when we were barefoot and shirtless and just guys in the Amazon. And JJ's like, you know, I just listened to him. He'd be like, get off the boat, you come from the top, we're going to come from the bottom. So, okay. I just did as I was told. I came in, the snake is all curled up, dead asleep. She's got some butterflies on her eyes trying to get salt and stuff. And all of a sudden I see the tongue. I'm like, she's awake. And I'm like, guys, guys, guys, she's, and they're, they're paying attention to not crashing the boat to getting over there. And we're all trying to run. Snake starts going into the water. So I run ahead, grab this snake, get her by the head. So you got her by the head, you think, okay, can't, she can't get me. I got her right behind the head. And it's about this thick, the neck. What's that feel like side to interrupt? Like grabbing this thing with its giant head. It's exciting. It's amazing. It's, it's scary. How hard is it to hold? It's not that hard to hold. The scary part is the moment of, it's like, if you ever done like a cliff dive or something, it's that moment where you go, do it, do it the time, like do it. And if your body's going, do not do that. And then you're like, I got to do it. And you do it. Because you can't

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just gently like flirt with it. You have to grab it. No. And it's like, it's like crossing the street when there's a bus coming. It's like, you hesitate, it's more dangerous. You know, so like you just, you go for it. And I got her. And I was like, I got her. And then a coil goes over my wrists. And all of a sudden, my wrists slap together. And you feel this squeeze that can crush the bones out of an animal bigger than me. And the next coil comes very quickly over my neck. And now I'm on my knees with my arms tied. If I wanted to let go of the snake, I couldn't. And my shoulders are coming together. And my collarbone is about to break. And I tried to yell for JJ. And all that came out was, there was nothing. And so that's what they do to their prey, you know? So I attacked, as far as the snake knows, I attacked. She doesn't know that I just want to measure her. You started out as the big spoon, but then the snake became the big spoon. Very much became the big spoon. And I was, I would say I was 15 seconds away from having my entire rib cage collapsed. And then JJ showed up and grabbed the tail and just started unwrapping this thing. And then we got, but now we have a system. Now we know like, you know, I'm always, I've done, I've gotten more head catches than anybody. So I'm usually a point guy. And you know, you're the, you're the, the first, the point guy. I'm the point guy. Okay. The, the, the taking the big risky. Yes. First step. Yes. Although it could be argued that there's a similarly large risk for the tail guy, because the Anaconda's defense is to take a giant projectile shit. And so the person that gets the tail is going to smell like Anaconda for like at least a week. Yeah. So it's the least pleasant. You're taking, you're taking the most dangerous one there. They have the least pleasant job. This is fascinating. But what's really fascinating though, is that because they're the apex predator, they're, they're eating the fish, they're eating the birds, they're eating everything. And everything in this riparian ecosystem is absorbing the mercury that's coming off the gold mining in the region. And so Anacondas can be indicative for us of how is mercury moving through this ecosystem. And this is a region where we've lost hundreds of thousands of acres to artisanal gold mining, where they use mercury to bind the gold. They cut the forest, burn the forest, and then they run water through the sand and the sand particles have bits of gold in it, not chunks, but just little almost microscopic flecks of gold. And then they use the mercury to bind that. And then they burn off the mercury and that vapor goes up into the clouds, just like everything else. It's all connected down there. And then rains down into the rivers. And so the people in the region are having birth defects from the amount of mercury that's in the water. And so we were starting at one point when we were doing most of our Anaconda research, we were learning things like these animals actually aren't just ambush predators, which is what most of the literature would tell you is that Anacondas are ambush predators. No, they actually go hunting. They'll go find claylicks and salt deposits, and they'll wait there. They'll actually pursue animals. And we were trying to take tissue samples to find out if Anacondas could be used to study how mercury is moving through the ecosystem. And so that was really, it became, can we use these animals not only as ambassadors for wildlife, because everybody wants to see the Anacondas, but also, what can we learn from studying this? Very, very little understood apex predator. And one of the things you can learn is how mercury moves through the ecosystem, which can damage the ecosystem in all kinds of different ways. Yeah, it's brutal, man. The gold mining that's happening down there is, it's funny because we've been hearing a lot recently about the cobalt mines in Africa. And it's like where we are in the Amazon, we were down there with ABC News, I want to say like a year and a half ago,

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with my friend Matt Gutman, who's the chief correspondent for ABC. And he wanted to see the Amazon fires. He wanted to see some wildlife. He wanted to see the areas that we're protecting. And then he goes, I want to see the gold mining areas. And I'd never gotten in so deep, but we met these Russian guys, you can't go with the proving they will kill you. Like our lawyer's father was assassinated for standing up to the gold miners. There was two Russian guys though, who had a legal mining concession somehow, way out past the machine gun guarded limit of the pump us, which is where they do all this gold mining. And we got in there and took footage of the desert that is forming in what used to be the headwaters of the Amazon rainforest. And it's like there is a massive global scale ecological crime happening down there that you can see from space from this unregulated gold mining. And the cops can't go there because they will be murdered. It's completely lawless. What's the machine gun limit exactly? It's the border of this area that they call the pump us, which is where the rainforest has been cut and completely destroyed. And it looks like Mars. It's just sand. And inside of this area are gold miners. And we tried to get in there to film years ago. And there's just a lot of guys with machine guns who don't let that happen. And what the Russian guys have access to? The Russian guys had access somehow. They'd come down with a bit of money and they had a new system. Yeah. And actually what was interesting is while I was in there, they're very friendly and really, really two friendly gold miners. And one of them while I was there, he kind of tapped me on the shoulder. He was like, look at those guys. He was like, those guys over there? He goes, I just heard them say your name. And he goes, that's not a good thing. He goes, they know exactly who you are. He goes, I wouldn't keep posting to Instagram about gold mining in the Amazon. And I was like, thanks for the warning. And then in June, somebody pulled up beside me on a motorcycle and I got a more stern warning. But they pay attention to the flow of information because they don't want the world to find out. Oh, the last thing they want is to be shut down. But the gold miners are notorious for just whacking people and throwing them in a pile of gold mining leftovers. It's really like the Peruvian government has to get the military to go after them. The work we've done with gold miners, converting them into conservationists has all been like, I mean, I've seen the Peruvian Navy come down and literally blow up gold mining barges. And, you know, it's a war. It's a war being fought in the Amazon. So it's possible to convert them into conservationists? What's that process like? Or is that like, you say that in jest? No, I say that in absolute sincerity. We went up the Malinowski River several years ago, and I think it was 2018. And everyone was like, you are going to die. Like you will be shot and killed. And the reason we were able to do it with relative safety was that the gold miner that we were going with was the brother-in-law of one of my closest friends down there, our expedition chef and one of the directors of Jungle Keepers. And they said, look, you can go just keep a low profile. And so I went up with a photographer and we spent a week there and dead animals everywhere, deforestation everywhere. I mean, the things that we saw were so horrible. And we're living with these gold miners that are, you know, they're getting their gold, they're burning off the mercury. I watched the guy smoking a cigarette, burning the mercury off of his gold with the vapor going straight into his face with his child right there. I mean,

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unbelievable negligence of just sanity. And then towards the end of the week, the Peruvian Navy comes down the river and everyone starts scrambling. And I was like, I'm just going to sit here with my hands up because, you know, and they didn't even stop. They found the gold mining barge, you know, they have a floating thing in the river that just plums the bottom of the river, just sucks all the all the sediment up. And they stopped and they strapped a bunch of explosives to this motor. And good Lord, the sound of this explosion. And there was just hot metal raining down all over the place. And then they just went a bunch of guys in fatigues. And they just kind of like looked at us like, peace. And I sat there with this gold miner. And I went, now what? And he went, well, now I got to go get a new motor. And I went, why don't you just do something else? And he goes, what else is there? And I went, look what we do. And I sat there with my phone and I was like, see this, these are pretty tourists. And we feed them food and we show them tarantulas and macaws and things. And he looked at this and he went, wow. He goes, you because that looks like so much fun. And I went, it is so much fun. I said, we show people, we bring students to the jungle. He goes, so you're saying if I build you a lodge, you'll bring people. I said, yeah. And I came back a year later and he sat there with a chainsaw, a hand saw and some nails. And he cut down like 17 palm trees and he built an ecotourism lodge. So you gave him another channel of survival without making money. And that's what we've been doing through jungle keepers for loggers and for all kinds of extractors is just saying, look, what do you make? You make \$15 a day destroying the ancient trees of the jungle. What if we paid you \$35 a day to have a uniform and a job and health insurance and security and you just protect it and use all of the jungle knowledge you've gained as a logger to protect this place? Who are the loggers trying to destroy the Amazon? Can you say a little bit more about it? Is that as a threat to the Amazon rainforest? A lot of them are really close friends of mine. They're people that need to make a living and they're jungle people who, the rainforest is a very challenging, especially the Amazon, is a very challenging environment. So you have these people who they have a chainsaw, they have a job opportunity, they go out and they cut the trees and a lot of these guys grew up fishing, they grew up in the jungle, they know how to do it. And so for them, it's a way to like, they also love it. So this is the thing, these are outdoorsmen. These are guys that love the jungle. And so in the 90s, we had the mahogany boom where they went out after the mahogany and you can almost can't find a mahogany tree in the jungle anymore. And if you want to talk about like carbon sequestration in the rainforest, the ancient hardwoods hold like 60% of the carbon of the whole rainforest. They have an outsized disproportionate mass from that ancient density of the wood. And so these loggers go out and they cut the wood that's most valuable and then they bring it back to town and they sell it. And then people like us buy it and put it on our kitchen floors. And so the thing is, when I got to the Amazon, it was loggers are the bad guys. And if you talk to a lot of like the PhDs that I worked with down there were always very at odds with the miners, at odds with the loggers. And then I'd be with JJ and JJ would sit down and he'd be like, Hey, let's pour a drink. Oh, they have masato. Let's all sit down. We'd all be chilling and throwing them back with a bunch of loggers. And then the opportunity through not vilifying these people came to be like, Oh, these guys are great. And then of course out in the wild every

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now and then something will happen. You'll see somebody's boat flipped over and you go help them out. And then that creates a certain type of kinship. They're ultimately people who love the same thing you love. Often, yeah. Even if they don't love it, they're people that aren't necessarily looking to destroy it. I've met loggers who have looked at trees they're about to cut and gone, Ah, this is a shame. Start it up. You know, they're just like, this is where the paycheck comes from.

Let's come back briefly to Anacondas. Can you tell me this whole situation with discoveries eaten alive? There's some drama and controversy around that. Can you explain that whole saga with discovery with your whole effort? Maybe outside of even the drama, the initial thing, which I now feel you're sufficiently insane to actually do of being eaten by Anaconda. Is that actually possible to survive something like that? I mean, if Anaconda swallows you while you're wearing the suit that they made maybe, but that was in hindsight, that was the result of, look, I go to the jungle and you start seeing these beautiful places, these incredible species. You start developing a relationship with these animals and then you watch it get destroyed. Every year, we watch it burn. Every year, places that are crucial to my soul, I have seen leveled and turned to ash. And at some point, we started going, someone has to do something about this. And you look to your right and you look to your left and there is no one because it's the middle of the Amazon. And the rainforests have been being destroyed since the 70s. It's a cliché. And so we started trying to do something about it. And so I started putting a little bit more emphasis on publicity, a little bit more emphasis on getting the message out there. And so I started trying to see what was going to work. You start firing shots in the dark and seeing, and JJ is going, you have to help us do something. And I'm going, okay. And so from 18 years old, now I'm 23 years old. And all of a sudden, this place isn't foreign to me anymore. It's home. And so- You're trying to think of all the different ways you can bring attention to this place that you care about this being destroyed. Yeah. You're standing next to a boulder of progress of destruction and it's about to roll onto the forest and just destroy it and snuff out all that life. And no one's there to do anything about it. And so you go, is there any way that I could put myself in front of this boulder and hold it back? And you're talking about the global economic reality. It's just a massive, it's systemic. So what's the most dramatic possible thing I could do? Exactly. So when you find yourself flown to LA as a 23 year old dude and you're sitting there with some guy who's like spinning a pen and got his feet up on the desk and going, what can you show us down there? And you go, I could show you the biggest anacondas in the world. And we could talk about mercury and bioaccumulation. And we could show people how these animals are misunderstood.

We go on a big expedition and we could be the coolest show ever. And he goes, yeah, yeah, not good enough. Okay. And so those that, that, that, that cycled through a bunch of times and someone at some point in one of those meetings said, you know, what if we show people that anacondas really can eat humans? And I went, how is that a good show? You want me to feed someone to an anaconda? And I said, I said, I mean, I kind of joked like, what if, you know, I said, the only way that's feasible is if you like make a suit with a breathing apparatus and let the snake eat you

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and then come back out safely and make sure you don't hurt the snake. And they were like, kid, you're on. And I was like, oh, shit. So I should mention as a small tangent, I think I mentioned to you offline due to travel troubles where I traveled to the totally wrong part of the United States on my way to Boston. And on my way to Boston, I did a conversation with Mr. Beast, Jimmy. And I got a chance to hang out with him for the day. And one of the things we did is have a lengthy brainstorm session with his team, or I was observing it. But it was interesting because he's probably way better at that conversation that you had with the guy in LA than the guy in LA. Obviously, because he's made, he's revolutionizing entertainment and he's also doing philanthropy, which he's trying to figure out how to help the world with that kind of stuff. So I would love to actually send him a message to see what his thoughts, just brainstorm. He's so strong at this. Literally taking the situation you're facing. Here's the place that I really care about is being burned down. It's being destroyed. What's the sexy video? How do you get people to watch something that's, we all change the channel when they show us the kids in Africa with the swollen stomachs. Nobody wants to see it. And it's like with the rainforest, like we know, we know, we know. And I'm going, I could give data all day long. I could show photos of burning forest. And so I was looking for what would do it. And so the eating a live thing without spending too much time on a massive misstep was, I agreed to do it. They paid me at the time more money than I had made before, which I very much needed because nobody pays you

to be a conservationist. So I was a very poor 23 year old that was like, yes, I would love that, please. And I thought, you know what, this is the start of a TV career. We got shafted so bad. I mean, they used, somehow they changed our voices. They changed the things we said. They changed the message of the film. There was one point where we had caught a 19 foot snake and I was holding her head and I said, this is such a beautiful animal. The queen of the Amazon. This is such a great moment for me. I kissed her on the head. I said, she's made so many babies. Look at the scars. I was talking about just the poetry of this incredible dragon. And then the producer goes, yeah, that's great. Listen, if that was to bite you, what would happen? And I was like, oh, well, if it bit you, you know, you'd bleed out because it would lacerate down to the, that's what they put in the film. And so they didn't show me the film until the night before I went on Matt Lauer's show. And I said, I am not endorsing this film. And they had called it Expedition on the Call Sheet. They called it Expedition EA, Expedition Amazon. All of a sudden, they changed it to Eatin Alive. And I went, wait, guys, wait, wait, wait. I said, you're going to make people think that it actually happened, not that we're attempting it. And they, and I said, I'm not. And then they called me and they said, you better, you're going on live TV tomorrow. They said, you let us know what level of control we need to show for you, right? And it was very threatening phone call. And so I had to go out and smile for the cameras and endorse something that was a train wreck. And the scientific community was like, you're an idiot. We don't want to ever see you again. I lost a lot of opportunities. PETA came, which, you know, PETA, whatever, but PETA came out. People were like, you were trying to hurt a snake, which I would never do. And then the American public was like, you know, you said you were going to get eaten by a snake and you didn't. And so everyone was pissed. I basically had to exile myself to India for like six months and just, I mean, I had death threats coming through all my messages. People were furious with me. What gave you strength to that? How difficult was that psychologically? Just everything you care

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about being completely kind of flipped upside down. I've spent so much time on the ground with the local people learning from the wildlife. It's such a devout and important thing to me. And it got turned into a sideshow. It got turned into a joke. And then not just a joke, it got turned into that I'm somehow bad to animals. You know, I'm irresponsible scientifically. Jimmy Kimmel told me to have sex with a hippo as my next stunt. Like it was like, it got really ugly and it misfired so bad. And when you hear these like motivational speakers talk about, you know, you just got to keep trying. And sometimes you're going to fail hard. It was like, that one, I got hit in the head with a baseball bat. That one was tough. And at the time I was like, I'm fine. And I was like, I'm going to go away for a while, you know? And I learned a lot though. Like at this point, I'm still glad I did it. Because man, did I learn a lot about what a room full of people that you don't know who could look you in the eye and shake your hand and say, trust us. Oh boy. Do you have on a human level of resentment towards discovery, towards the people involved, are you able to forgive them? I don't care. It literally, that's what they do. You know, they literally put out a documentary saying that mermaids were real. You know, it's Wait a minute. Wait a minute. They're not. Listen. No. I said that. I'm not even touching that one. It is true. It is true. There is a documentary where they duped a bunch of scientists who were like oceanographers and they showed them ancient footage of mariners saying that seals were mermaids. Who cares? I was young. I got brought to Hollywood and I got spit out the other side. And that's on me. That's not their fault. There's that parable about the frog who gives the scorpion a ride across the water. And then at the end, he says, I'll give you a ride. Just don't sting me. And they get to the other side and the scorpion stings him. And the frog goes, why did you do that? And the scorpion goes, I'm a scorpion. Yeah. That's, it's not their fault. That's my nature. But now that you've become much more well known and much more successful what you do, you have a platform. Can you return to those people and use it, the machine, to get more and more attention? Is that something you work on? Or do you prefer to work completely outside? I think that most of the success that we've had now in protecting the rainforest and, and it's the levels that we've reached just so far, I think back to those barefoot days of catching snakes with JJ and the boat. And now the massive ecological reserve we have and the team of rangers and the converted loggers and all of that is because of the ability to communicate and to show people, but that's all been through social media. And so I'm open to the fact, you know, if, if, if somebody came and gave a sort of like Bourdainian pass where they said, look, you can be yourself, you can swear, you can fart, you can smoke, you can do whatever you want to do, go out there and show us the real thing I would love to. But now I know how those contracts need to be. I need to have right to refusal and they can't change them. And so I'd almost rather just do it like the way I think like Mr. Beast does stuff, does stuff where it's like, you just, you get a crew of guys and some seed money and go film the episodes and put it out. I mean, a committee never helped real art be better. It has to come from the, the, the source of inspiration. So you get, you get, I think, you know, you get JJ and a crew of people or the guys in Africa that I'm working with right now do an elephant conservation and like, but you got to show real. I mean, look,

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that's why, that's why, I mean, look, that's why Joe Rogan isn't is important right now. That's why you're important right now is because it's not being filtered through this ridiculous system of polishing it and dumbing it down. And yeah, that's why Joe has been an inspiration. You don't need a, a crew of a bunch of people. You don't need a crew period. No, you need is one or two other people. And that's it. And in my case, you don't need anybody. I've been doing this by requirement. I just need to be by myself. There's a few other folks now that help with the editing and so on, but it's just, they make life more awesome as opposed to a boss that's, that tells a creative director. Yeah. Somebody told me actually I was visiting LA, I think it was an LA that they were saying that now for all intimate scenes in Hollywood movies, there's an intimacy director. So when there's a two people having sex, there's a third person that ensures that unfilm. So it's not real, but there's still intimacy that there's a third person that ensures that like everyone is comfortable and the actors say that this like always ruins the chemistry of the scene. And so it's a very Hollywood thing. I understand there's creepy people. I understand. Thanks, Harvey Wines. It's usually, I think comes from the director pushing things too hard. If you just leave it to the actors, they know their boundaries, they can control their own boundaries. So the intimacy director is more for the, like the director pushing things. Warner Hersock. I understand the logic. Let's make sure that we don't have anything happen here that shouldn't be happening. I get it, but yeah. But no, I think that authenticity is the greatest currency. And I think that in order for me to tell the stories that I can tell, like what changed the game for me was, I want to tell you the story. So in 2019, the Amazon fires started popping off and we had just gone to film, like a month earlier, we'd filmed like a small documentary. And they'd been following me as if I was on a solo, which we did the best we could. I lived on my own. But as we were driving, we passed a spot where the flames were 70 feet tall, the forest was being destroyed. And I went out there with my phone, which overheated in like two minutes and said, you can't use it. But for a second, I was out there in the flames picking up animals and throwing them off to try and just get them cooled off. I was trying to get snakes out of there. Everything was the birds are flying. And I fucking lost it. I was red eyed. I was crying and I was going, this is happening every fucking day. I was screaming. And it's the first time that I'd done that because I've seen the burning so many times and I just lost it that day. And I don't know what made me pull out my phone because usually in those intense moments, I say, forget the documentation. This is real life. We got stuff to do and I'm doing, I'm not documenting. And then a month later, I'm home and I'm in New York. And all of a sudden I see these articles like, you know, the Amazon's burning worse this year than it was last year and blah, blah, blah. And I threw it up on Instagram like eight o'clock at night. And I'd never cursed on Instagram. I don't know why. I just never did. And my phone was on 100% and I put it on top of the refrigerator and I went to bed and I woke up in the morning and my phone was on the floor on 2% and it was ringing off the hook and it was like the news. And they're like, are you the guy that posted that viral video about the Amazon? And I was like, what? And that was the start. That's where it broke. And that's where we went from barefoot in the Amazon to, you know, all of a sudden, you know, I was talking head for three weeks and going around on all these news stations and all of a sudden I was like the spokesperson for the Amazon and JJ's calling me and he was like, go, go, go, go, go, like get us that support. And it was just,

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you know, so communicating with people and bringing them into that reality. And whether it's, you know, rhino poaching and elephant poaching or the Amazon being destroyed, it's like to me, it's like being able to take people into that is something that I would love to do.

Yeah. And you do it directly with authenticity on your Instagram. People should definitely follow your Instagram. I think, I think Rogan follows your Instagram too.

Well, the end of that story actually kind of involves him because yeah, because, because I went to all these news outlets and I was living in green rooms and traveling around and I was all strung out and I hadn't seen anybody I actually know in a few weeks, which was starting to get to me. And I finally got home and I went to like a family party and everyone was like, dude, you've been, it's been crazy. And I was like, yup. And then I left and my cousin Michael calls me and he's screaming. And I'm going, what, what, what, what, what? And he goes, Joe Rogan just shared it. Joe Rogan, you shared it. And everyone was losing their shit. And it was so amazing. And it was like, that's when it really took off. And what happened as a result of all of this is that a Canadian entrepreneur who started Lightspeed reached out. And several months later, after COVID, after that boom, you know, I'd been in the game for maybe 13 years or something, had no money, no savings, no job, no nothing. And after that great publicity thing, nothing happened. The waves came and everything got real exciting. Everybody reached out and they

said, we care so much. Nothing happened though. You know, we can run into battle, but if we don't have our arrows in the quiver, what can we do? And I actually, I made a phone call to my friend Mohsen right at the start of COVID. And I was going through a divorce and I was broke. And I said, I'm going to get a job. I said, I give up. So this is stupid. I said, the ecotourism business is done. Junglekeepers is dried up. We're done. And then this guy, Dax De Silva, called me on the phone and said, listen, I'm in. What, what do we got to do? And so if, if the analogy was me and JJ and a few other people trying to hold this boulder back from just destroying the rainforest, all of a sudden Dax comes in like a Titan and just puts his arm out and just goes, I'm going to help. And he gave us the funding to start actually developing a ranger program, to start actually bringing loggers to be protectors of the forest, to be supporting smaller conservation things. And now we're protecting 50,000 acres of rainforest. We're protecting entire streams and ecosystems that I love. And we're soon going to double that. And it's like this, this whole thing. So yeah, the, the, the, the communication of these things is crucial. And I actually think it's incredible that, that social media has played such a big role in it. Well, I mean, just, just because I, I know Joe well, and I love him so much. I definitely think you should do his podcast, but also just be friends with him. I think you guys, he's one, you know, not the meme, but he's one with nature and not much more with the, I'm one, while I do appreciate and love nature. I also love technology and robots and so on. So we're in that meme type of way. We're very, very different, but Well, either way, at some point, make sure you tell the guy, thank you, because it definitely really helped push us over that, that limit where, you know, if enough people see it, you get someone like Dax who, who, who says, I can help and I have the resources to help. And that, that changed our whole lives. Geez, everything.

Back to the jungle. You had a bunch of interactions with Jaguars. How are you still alive? Like what? Man, dude, Jags, Jags aren't the Jags. I'll tell you this, Jags are not

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the danger, the falling trees of the danger. I'll tell you some elephant stories and then you'll, then you'll wonder why I'm still alive. But Jags, I've, I've just one, you know, so JJ started in Santiago, his dad started challenging me to do solos, go out alone into the wild style. You know, I'd have a hammock, a headlamp, three days worth of food, some fish hooks, some machete, that's it. And so like one of the stories that, that happened early on was I was out there and it was raining and I was lost and this is how we test your jungle knowledge. Can you survive out there? Do you know how to find food? Have you listened to the things that we taught you? And there was one night that I was in a hammock and a Jaguar came up and I was asleep when it happened and she came up right next to my head and she was, and I could hear her smelling me. And then my first instinct was to, to, to turn on my headlamp and just the sound of my arm moving against the, the, the material and she just like she just right here, I could feel her breath and I just laid there in the dark. And that's one of those moments where you go, you really learn a lot about yourself because I wasn't scared. I felt like I understood the intentions of the cat if she was hunting, I'd already be dead. She was curious and I was lost and I didn't know if I was ever going to get out of that jungle, but what she did was energize me because it was an experience like the giant anaconda where I said, this is so wild that it's, that it's so almost cinematically outside the realm of what I thought my life could be like, that it made me like, wait, because the previous day I was lost, tired, confused, kind of devastated tail between my legs. After that, I was like, man, you've been waiting for this your whole life. Go get it. And I like woke up and I was like, I am going to navigate, even though I've been in this swamp for three days, I'm going to find my way out of this swamp. And like, she just like breathed fire into me where it was like, it was like, if that's possible, if I could be six inches away from a Jaguar's face, then I got, I got that energy from her. So you're able to start to really hear and feel the, the jungle around you. Yeah. That was a, that was a sign that you know what you're doing. It really felt like a sign. I really did. How do you survive on a solo, solo hike through the jungle? What are the different components? What are the different dangers? So you said you had a hammock, you had some food. What kind of food, by the way, we're talking about? Nuts, stuff that won't go bad. Yeah, because you can't, so you can't really start a fire in the Amazon. Like I'm a good fire. I mean, I camp all over the place. I'm a wilderness guide. Starting a fire in the Amazon is futile. In fact, a lot of survival manuals will tell you, don't do it, because if you're really lost, it'll break your spirit. You're not going to be able to do it. That's dark. Yeah. They're like, don't even try it. But you can still get like hypothermia from, if you get wet and you lay out in the jungle, you could, you know, you could still, exposure can still get you. So you want fire. I even, in the beginning, I used to bring like ramen noodles, which is, which is, nutritionally is irrelevant. And so I started bringing like nuts and then supplementing that with fish, which forced me to become a very good fisherman. And now, of course, JJ knows that he can like, they can cut certain roots and they bash it up and they put it in the stream and the fish just float to the top and they take what they want. So like, he's got like, he's got all the cheat codes. Whereas like, I'm sitting there with a hook and then he's like, he'll go, now find bait. And I go, bait. And the most competitive ecosystem on earth. Good luck finding a worm. You can't do it. What does JJ do? He takes the machete, looks at his foot, cuts a slug of callus off of his heel because he's got this thick rhino skin, puts that

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on the hook, catches a six inch fish, chops it in half, puts it on a bigger hook. And in 15 minutes, he's got a four foot giant catfish that could feed a family of 16. And he's happy. I'm sitting there and I'm like, I'm trying to like stick a beetle on a fishing hook and like, you know, do you have just a line and a hook or is there a rod too? Just a line and a hook. And then you just chop a, you just chop a rod and tie it to the, you know, you just chop a little sapling. So are you still able to start a fire or no? I like for the food that I bring to not be fire dependent. Sure. And so if I have some nuts, I can, I can shove in a few enough calories to get me through the night or like and leave a fishing line out and there'll be something there in the morning. But yes, I can start a fire, but a lot of times what I'll do is I'll bring a flask and not with like alcohol, but with diesel. And so you have a tuna can and you put the diesel in the, this is what the local guys do. Everything I do, you know, I'm sure there's going to be someone listening to this and they're like, how could you do that? And it's like, yeah, this is what we do down there. Sorry. It's a, it's a tuna can, you pour a little bit of diesel in it, it burns slow, you light it and you put your sticks, you make your pyramid over that and eventually that will burn through the moisture. And finally you'll get a very reluctant little fire enough to burn, you know, to make yourself like a cup of tea or to pour that into the noodles, something, something, or you just eat a fish raw. How important is it to stay dry? Is it basically impossible? It's impossible to stay dry. You're wet all the time. You're wet all the time. What does that mean? That means infections are more efficient.

Yeah. So yeah, I don't know if you saw the picture in my book where I have the- The yellow spots? Yeah. So yeah, there's a picture with your, like entire face consumed with yellow spots is basically, I guess that's Marcia. Yep. Oh boy. Yeah. So how did that happen? What was the infection like? And yeah, and how crazy are you for letting that infection stain you for a long period of time without treating it? Or you had no choice?

No, I did have a choice. I was 19 years old and I was taking care of a giant anteater that was orphaned. And this is like my dream animal. Yeah. And she was mine. And my job was to teach her the jungle. And so when I started like noticing that I had an infection and that I was, I had, I think I had dengue at the time too, I went back to town, probably picked up Marcia in the hospital where I got tested, came back into the jungle and then got progressively sicker and sicker and weaker as I was two weeks, three weeks in the jungle. And it got to the point where my vision went black and white and I passed out one day. And I don't know why, but at the time I had shaved that day. And when I woke up the next morning, I couldn't open my eyes because the pus had come out of my eyes and out of the pores in my face, all those little micro cuts and the pillow was stuck to my face. And I was stuck upriver with no help at 19 years old. And also when you see that picture, you can imagine that I assumed that my life was over because I didn't know what it was.

And I also didn't assume that, or at the very least I figured I'd be disfigured the rest of my life. I didn't think there was any getting better from that. And so I remember sitting by the side of the river praying that a boat would come by, but it was the rainy season and there aren't going to be any boats because the river is psychotic. And so it was a long time before I got back to town and I didn't want to leave the anteater, but it became like, I was like, I realized I was dying and then I finally got a boat with some loggers, a death boat just loaded with,

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these guys had gone into the jungle and shot everything they could and taken all the babies and they were going to go sell them. And so it was like baby monkeys and toucans and birds and cages and pieces of crocodiles and anaconda skins and jaguar skins rolled up. And it was just like, I was just laying there with all these dead animals in the boat with all the flies on my face and then got back to the hotel, called my mother, said, please book me a flight out like today, like today. And then I sat on the plane and somebody sat next to me on the plane and I had a hood on. And I do remember that in the haze, at this point, I was having trouble staying conscious, but I do remember that she looked over like trying to see what was sitting next to her and then she got up and never came back. And when I got to immigration in New York, you know, the cop, he like takes my passport and he goes, yeah, he goes, so what were you doing in Peru? He's looking down and he goes, yeah, and he like holds up the passport, looks at the passport, looks at my face, he goes, Bo, buddy, what the fuck. And I said, no, that's what he was like, I'm trying to get home to go to the hospital. And he goes, he stamps it, he goes, go, go, go, go, God bless, God bless. He's like, oh, shit. And then they put me in the room in the hospital with like the hazmat suits and they didn't know what it was. And I spent like five days on IV antibiotics with like four different things running through my veins. And the doctors were like, don't let it go that close. They're like, you went real close on that one. Yeah, that's what that picture, I mean, people should check out the book just to see the picture because I imagine you just laying there unable to see, have a fever probably. So you're like half hallucinating. And there's no, there's no boat, there's no way out. There's no help coming. Plus there is this creature who you've become a parent of that you love. Boy, that's a dark place to be as a 19 year old. I mean, most people will never be in a place like that. Like where did you find strength in that place? I don't know. I just remember writing like a goodbye letter to my parents because I said, if I die out here, it was really dark. It was terrifying. It really felt like it was the end. And I was writing, if you find me out here, I'm sorry. And all that, all that type of stuff. And it was, I don't know about strength. There's no strength. It was just like move forward. And at some point it was like, if you'll take me down river, take me down river. And you just got lucky with the loggers or the death boat that they found you. Well, how did the infection start, by the way? I don't know. I really don't know. I mean, we always have some sort of little shit, but the thing is now JJ taught me that there's like three different trees that can cure infections. I didn't know this at the time. I didn't know the cheat codes. Now there's, there's, if you have a small infection, you can use Sangre de Drago and it'll cure it right away. Like let's say you have a bot fly and it gets a little pussy. There's a fly living in your skin. You put that on there. Not only will it kill the fly, but it'll heal the infection. And if you have a worse infection, you can go to Oh Hey, which is Ficus and Sipida. And you can use that. And that will completely heal. That will murder. It's like crocodile blood. It will murder infections. So like, forget Neosporin. That's a joke. These are heavy chemical compounds running through these trees and they know all about them. And so whatever it is. So now at this point, that's no longer an issue. Like because we know how to handle it, which at that time, if JJ had been there, I would have been fine. Well, learn the hard way. So these are open wounds. And then there's creatures that start living in them. That's basically what, what is it? Well, that's separate. That's bot flies. Yeah. There's, there's a, there's a creature that unfortunately, very, very, very unfortunately likes to make its home inside the flesh of mammals.

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And so the flies attach their eggs to mosquitoes. The mosquitoes go and seek out warm-blooded animals. The eggs, microscopic eggs fall into your skin and then begin to grow. And sooner or later, you feel a twitch and it's a worm living inside of you that's like vertical down in you. And it's, it's eating you. And at first it's not a problem. But when they get to about as thick as that pen, it starts to hurt because you've got a hole in you and they have a little breathing tube that comes up and they breathe and they go back in and then they eat and they come back up to breathe and you have a, you have a friend living in you. And it's- You've had one of those? I've had lots of those. It's tough to take them out. They have hooks.

How do you, do you have to- Oh man, you gotta love the juncture. So how do you take it out? You have to come. A hundred percent. You gotta, you gotta put an irritant. So like a lot of times, what we'll do down there is someone will take a massive drag of a cigarette and then they'll spit the, they'll, they'll power like exhale and get some of the, some of the tar, which also shows you how much tar you get out of a cigarette. And then with a knife and you put that right over the hole and then you slap some Vaseline or something on top of that so they can't breathe.

And eventually over the course of a few hours, they'll come up enough looking for air and then you got to grab them with a tweezer and try not to rip them because then you're going to get an infection. And you got to squeeze from the, it's a whole ceremony when people have bought flies, we're all like, oh, it's bought fly time. Let's go. And then like JJ will squeeze. He's got like pliers for thumbs. He can like take a piece of your neck and you think he's going to break your skin. He'll just squeeze until this thing comes out. And you don't want to, I guess there's an open wound right there. And yeah, you don't want to bathe for a day or two after until that closes because otherwise you're going to have like water sloshing around in like a little pocket of your, this is kind of gross. And that water might have other organisms in it.

Water in your skin tends to, yeah. I mean, the jungle water is clean. We drink it like I drink the water fresh out of the stream. Oh, that's interesting. Well, it's just a giant filtration system. All those roots, the whole jungle is constantly purifying everything. People might be thinking about that with the jungle. There's insects probably all over you all the time. It's not as bad as you think. Like I've been to Finland lapland in the summer and the mosquitoes are horrendous, like devastating. The Amazon in our area, if you're sitting in a hammock reading a book out, you know, our research stations don't have walls or anything. You're good for about one mosquito every half hour, which really is not a lot. I mean, it's worse in New Jersey. Like it's really not that bad. Tell me a little more about the little baby anteater, Lulu.

They who you've rescued and had to decide they leave behind.

Yeah, I just was always fascinated with giant anteaters or this, you know, German shepherd-sized thing with wolverine claws and these giant Popeye forearms. And they excavate ant and termite mounds and they have this long tongue. And their babies ride on their back for the first six months of their lives. And so they actually have this incredibly intimate relationship with their young. And it just so happened that this animal that I was wildly fascinated with, there was an orphan on the river and JJ was like, you love these things. And I was like, yeah. And so he went and he was like, Hey, my friend, you should, he got, he got me the, the baby. And we were like, we're going to rewild her. And so I spent like weeks and weeks and weeks just like with this thing on my back, crawling through the jungle, teaching her to find ants, giving her milk, falling asleep with her on my chest. And their, their tongue is like 11 inches

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long at that age. And so she, when she wanted me to wake up, she'd fired up my nose and would come out my mouth. And she, and then if I tried to get her off me quick, she'd stick the claws in. And, you know, I'm all my clothes. I've like, I've old, like, you know, now they're like, you know, like museum pieces with rips in them from, from Lulu's claws. Just able to also communicate emotion and feeling and all that. She needed it. She needed it. So if this animal didn't have the physical touch, if we didn't, if I didn't hold her all day long, she'd throw tantrums. She'd go shred something. She'd go pull down the curtain. She'd go ruin the woods. She'd start literally having a traumatic response to not having intimacy, which was shocking. Cause again, on the scale of a cockroach to an elephant, you go, I didn't know that giant ant eaters had such intense emotions like, but she did. And we, we, you know, and also taking care of her forced me to, to explore the jungle from the perspective of an animal. So I got to like be an animal. And so there's only a few times in your life, in my life where I've gotten to do that, you know, one was with her, another time was living with a herd of elephants where I had to walk with them through the forest and like see how they interacted completely natural. And it's, it's, it's different. It's very different. And you realize like just like a person's public persona, when they're out on the street in Manhattan, it's going to be very different than when you're on the couch with them on a Tuesday night. And, and, and with wild animals, it's very much like that. You know, like if we see, you see a bobcat on a trail and it's going to look at you and glare at you and then go off. And it's like, yeah, but what's it like when it's in the den? And it's playing with its cubs. Yeah. So that when it's looking at you, that's like the Instagram post it's making the actual doggies. Yeah. So you've, besides Amazon, I spent a lot of time in India. Can you tell me what you learned hanging out with a herd of elephants? What, what should, what do people not understand about elephants? That's, that's beautiful to you. That's interesting to you. First of all, I think that elephants should have government representation as like a subset of society. Like actually they, they have intelligence. They are so intelligent. And, and when you look at an elephant, so there's this question that keeps coming up of, you know, are we, are we smart enough to know how smart animals are? Can we, can we interpret the intelligence that we're seeing? And I've, I've, I've lived with a semi-wild herd of elephants in India for a while. And some of the things that I saw like changed how I view reality, to be honest with you, because you know, you watch a matriarch of an elephant herd walk up to someone that none of us knew was pregnant and her trunk goes to his stomach. And then she calls all the other ones over and they're interested in this little human that they know that there's something in there. And they're, and they're all conversing about it. And you go, whoa, or that every morning we'd wake up and the elephants didn't want the stream water. They didn't want the lake water. They didn't want puddles. They wanted the water from our well. We had like a stone well, you know, like a traditional. And every morning we had like run out of bed because all the elephants were going to come and they were going to rip the bucket off and destroy everything, but they wanted that nice cold, clean water. And so it was like caring for elephants that were wild, that were sometimes getting shot at by farmers because if they went to try and rob some bananas. So these are sort of like delinquent elephants that were half wild and the forest department was thinking about, you know, getting rid of them, which whatever that meant. And I made really good friends with this one elephant and his name was Dharma. And Dharma had the, had the, this stuff doesn't,

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this is, it's hard to write the book I'm writing right now because none of it sounds real. He grew up around people because he was a tuskless male. So he couldn't hang out with the females because he was a grown up male and he couldn't hang out with the males, the bulls, because he couldn't defend himself when they rough housed and everything. So Dharma would be like wandering around the forest, not knowing who to hang out with. And so like there was one night there was a tiger calling and we just heard, you could hear it echoing over the hills. And what does Dharma do? 2am, we hear Dharma show up. And he's the same thing. He starts throwing a tantrum. He starts pulling shit over. He says, takes a chair, throws it. We had bananas in the truck. Dharma walks up to the truck. It's like a Jeep. He walks up to the Jeep, smells it. He looks at me. He's like, are you going to get out of bed? I'm like, no, I'm not going to get out of bed. I was like, Dharma, you're a grown ass elephant. The tiger does this thing again. And he's like, I need bananas to feel better. Yeah. Pushes the truck up on two, two wheels. Oh, wow. Looks at me. Is this how you want it to be? And so I'm up. I'm up. And I go and I'm like, please, please, please, please, please, don't make me rub in his face. And he's like, he puts it down. He's like, all right, well then hit me. I didn't do it. So he lifts it up again. And so in the end, there was no way for me to outsmart the elephant. He wins. There was nothing I could do. And so a lot of my job was taking him out into the forest and spending a little bit of time with him. I had this beautiful one time I set up the tripod and I went and I was just, I was just journaling. And he would come and he would just like play with my hair and be like, Hey, what's up? You know, and he just, he wanted someone to, to interact with on an emotional level. And, you know, when you think about elephants in terms of the fact that, you know, people go, oh, you know, they, they use medication to induce labor. It's like, yeah, that's not that surprising. They, they, they hold the bones of the dead. It's like, yeah, they have the best smell of pretty much any animal. That's also not surprising. They probably know exactly who that was, that bone. But they can navigate to waterholes and communicate in ways that we cannot really figure out. And so when you hear about people measuring elephant intelligence, you'll hear about scientists being like, Oh, well, we gave it a, you know, a bucket with a hole in it. And then it had like a key and there was a rope. And you're like, bro, this is all human stuff. Yeah. Can you go walking with them for three weeks in the wild and watch how they deal with the problems that they encounter in the forest. And so elephants have become, especially recently with the work that's been going, that I've been doing in Africa with betpaw. I've just become so fascinated with elephants. And, you know, elephants, the elephant, the African elephant population right now is down at 2% of what it was a few hundred years ago. We're really, we're really putting them on the brink of, you know, there's, there's some elephants that are being born tuskless because we've, poaching has taken down the great tuskers to the point where now it's, it's actually beneficial for some elephants to not have tusks because they won't have humans. But that's, that's like we've created deformed elephants. And so like now I'm got very concerned with issues of elephants. And tusks are fundamental to the interaction between elephants. Absolutely. I mean, with males compete with each other, but also elephants use their tusks,

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you know, like they'll, they'll break a branch and they'll be like, this is a good branch. I'm going to eat the hell out of this. And they'll like hang it on their tusk. And they'll like grab a bunch of other stuff. They'll like hold it, you know, ripping a tree up out of the ground. I just watched two weeks ago as, as, as watching an elephant, he got down on his knees and stuck his tusk into the ground and like leveraged up. He like, Archimedes to this root out of the ground. And then was like, that's a sweet root. And then when he left, I went and I tasted the root and it was like sweet ginger. And I was like, I have no idea what this is, but he knew it was good. Do they use tusks for sexual selection, like to impress the ladies or no? It's certainly involved in how, who, who has mating rights. Oh, who wins in the competition. Who wins. I mean, if you got the big tusks and there are elephants out there, like the mammoth big tuskers that have tusks down to the ground, like huge. And when you see them, it's like seeing something unique on earth, unique in history, because we're at a point where we might lose those. There are only a few of them left. And then they're so prized by hunters. Yeah, it's interesting. Cause I, I forget what the actual conclusion on that is, cause there's some studies of the use of the value of beauty in evolution, like birds and peacocks and so on, that there's no actual value to it, but it plays a role in, in sexual selection, meaning value. Like it's much easier to understand competition. Like a tusk helps you defeat the competitor. Sure, it's a tool. But I bet you there's a component to the tusk where the ladies go, God damn, that's nice. Like there's a visual beautiful component, maybe not. I don't know. But what if, what if beauty though, as we're defining it though, is, is, is symmetry and the, the absence of yellow spots on your face and, and healthy looking hair. And so like, I think to us, beauty is sexually appealing traits that look good to mate with. And so. So that, that 19 year old with Marissa, everybody in the world with swipe left on that. The least I really desirable option in the universe. Okay. Uh, what do you mean, speaking of elephant intelligence and something I, I think, and work quite a bit on as with artificial intelligence is what the philosophical question that comes up is, what is intelligence? What is intelligent? Um, humans, homo sapiens are often thought to be highly intelligent. That's the reason they stand out. Uh, in your understanding of different species like the elephant, what stands out to about humans or are they just another animal with different kinds of intelligence? Well, we're certainly unique because we have altered the entire planet. Yeah. You know, that the term, the Anthropocene, I mean, it's like, we've literally created a geological layer of us. Whereas other animals don't, and going back to elephants, it's like, they also engineer their environment. If you're in a forest, like if you drop me in a forest on earth, I could tell you in two seconds, if there's elephants there, because there's twisted branches and excavated earth and they, they're constantly gardening. Um, but I mean, look, look at us. I mean, there's, we're, we're clearly unique in nature, which, which makes me not understand the, the, the anti-human sentiment that, that so much of environmentalism has about like, you know, like we're, we're, we're bad, we're damned, we ruin everything. And it's like, I've seen the worst, I've seen the burning Amazon and I'm still like, I love being able to share ideas with you and travel to places and FaceTime my family when I'm not around them. And it's like, I, I celebrate a lot of what makes us human. And I, it's almost like reality is this crazy video game. And it's like, if we could just figure out the right keys, we can pretty much do anything we can think of. And it's like,

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I mean, poetry, art, I mean, you know, I'm, I'm the biggest animal lover in the world, but we are, we are, we are different. We really are. Yeah. The ability to puzzle solve, create tools. What do you think is the coolest invention humans have come up with? Is it fire? What's the most impactful? I feel like fire is fire. I feel like fire is kind of a gimme. I feel like the, they didn't really invent it. They probably like the wheel flying. I mean, flying. I mean, think of, think if you could go back in time to someone that never flew, you know, a sultan, an Egyptian king, George Washington, you know, and be like, you can fly. I mean, this is just, just on my way here. And I fly way too much, but I was looking out the window at the clouds and going, this is unbelievably spectacular. It's just stunning. You know, as a kid, you, you look at a cloudy day and you go, this is, the world is like this today. And then you get in a plane and you fly above the clouds and it's sunny up there. And you go, oh, it just, it changes your perspective. It's like when people go to the moon and they come back and they tell you the pale blue dot, you know, just, I say, I say flying. I think the ability to fly. I mean, the fact that I could, I could get on a plane and be in India in, you know, 20, 22 hours is, is shocking. In terms of its usefulness, I would argue that's not in the top five, but in terms of its ability to inspire. There's somebody I forgot who told me this idea that there's something about the atmosphere or atmosphere that allows you to look up and see the stars. Like if we didn't have that, human civilization would not have happened. Meaning like being able to look up and see something out there would fill our, like the something that allows you to look up versus just look down to like first looking at your local environment, be able to like wander and see, holy shit, there's a big world out there. And I don't know anything. If you're able to look up and see that, that that kind of humility combined with the ability to dream about exploring, maybe it just inspires the exploration. It's kind of an interesting thought given how inspiring, for example, the, the extra upgraded super cool version of flying, which is flying to other planets. I mean, there's going to be hopefully, as possible, the century, a child born, not not the century, maybe the century, a child born on another planet that looks up and looks back at Earth. And it has to be educated by his or her parents that like, there's another place. There's another place where life is way easier. Oh, God, it's so easy. There's water everywhere. Exactly. People complain about Earth, man, Earth is really, really, really good. It's really, really good here. Water everywhere. I wouldn't even leave. Given like right now, like if somebody said like, oh, you could like, you could go to the moon. I'd be like, no, I'm good. If I died in space, I'd be so pissed. I love it here. Yeah, but you're still, there's a longing to explore for you. There's a longing to explore, but I really think I'm such a, like my longing to explore is like river streams, oceans, jungles. Like to me, yeah, I would, I would watch the hell out of the, the live stream of, of, of Elon touching down on Mars. Like, I'd be like, this is incredible. It's an amazing that I get to be around to see this. I'm staying where I'll be right here. Yeah. But it's good that the human spirit pushes us. Oh, it's amazing. That what's possible. And it does that for you. What, just a outdoor questions. What's, what's the most dangerous animal in the Amazon, would you say? Mammal. Let's go with mammal. Dangerous mammal. Like dangerous in terms of you walking around, doing the solo hike. I'm going to disappoint everybody with this, but it's, it's humans. It's nothing, there's no, if I'm out in the Amazon, there's nothing that's going to attack me.

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You know, and in India, you might have, you might have an old leopard or a tiger that's missing a tooth that decides your prey, or you might have an angry elephant that's in musts that just decides to, just decides to flatten you. In the Amazon, you're not, there's real, jaguars won't even let you see them. And there's really nothing else. One of my friends, brilliant scientist friend of mine, Pat, got attacked by a rabid ocelot once, but that's like a diesel house cat, just having a fit. You know, it's wasn't the worst thing in the world. Just the assholes looking them. Okay. What, in terms of humans, you said that the tribes, some of them uncontacted, can be exceptionally dangerous. What's your experience with them? What should people learn? Because it's such a fascinating part of life here on earth that there's tribes that don't have much or any contact with the quote, unquote, civilized world. I think most of the people that I meet don't actually really understand how isolated these people are or how weird it is that we're sitting here and that we have iPhones and airplanes and all this stuff. And these people are living naked in the forest at this moment. And so the thing though, I also was recently, somebody said, oh, there's like Paleolithic tribes. And it's like, no, no, just by default, they're modern tribes living now. They just happen to be living out in the jungle. And there's a huge debate about, do we try and contact them and bring them in? And there's two camps of people on this who they said that it was the trauma of the rubber boom that sent them out that far into the forest and made them terrified of the outside world. And so that's also what made them so hyperviolent. I mean, there's one of the guys we work with on our team, Victor was in, I think it was 2004, he's coming downriver and he had a load of mahogany wood. And he's piloting this boat. And he sent two people, husband and wife, ahead to go start cooking breakfast on the beach. So they could put the little kitchenette thing down and put the propane. He sent them ahead as the, he's going nice and slow with the barge coming down the river. They go ahead, reach the beach, they get out, he starts cutting some cane to start making a fire. Tribe comes out. No warning. They just start screaming. They start shooting arrows. The man instantly gets an arrow through the leg and it pins his leg so he can't run. He tells his wife, go save yourself. And she does. She jumps in the water. This arrow is falling around her too. And as she's floating down the river, she looks back and the last thing she sees is these guys getting to her husband and beginning to rip him apart. As Victor comes down the river, this is a guy we work with every day, he comes down the river and sees his friend disemboweled, opened up, dissected. His parts are all over the beach. The beach is red. And they only found out what happened because they found her later on holding onto a stick in the river. And they were like, what happened? And she was like, they just attacked. They don't want people on their land. On the sort of the underground WhatsApp chain of the Amazon, they, a few in August, like this was not internationally known, some loggers went up and tried to steal a few trees from where the tribes were. And then everybody sent the pictures of what the loggers looked like after a few days because the tribes porcupine them with arrows. They were laying there on the ground, which is arrows sticking out of their bodies. And then eventually the authorities came out and looked and there was just these white bodies. I'll show you the pictures later. There's just these white, puffy bodies with like the skulls sticking out. And it was like, you don't mess with these tribes. I wonder what are the, what's the mythology around that they construct around who these outsiders are? Are they gods? Are they demons? Are they humans? Who are they? Who are we to

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them?

Well, you gotta go back to the rubber boom. The rubber barons went down there and at the start of the industrial revolution, the only way to get rubber was to mine it from the trees that were out in the forest. And so the only way to do that, because you can't make a rubber plantation in the jungle. The rubber, when it's in plantation form, when it's a monoculture, it gets this leaf blight and it all dies. Henry Ford tried it. It didn't work. And so what they did was they sent these people down who just whipped, burned, enslaved, raped and pillaged the people. It's one of the worst periods in human suffering that I've ever read about. One missionary said they were killing the locals the way you or I would kill a mosquito. They just went nuts. And so they sent them out and they would come back with rubber. And this would go to fuel the industrial revolution for hoses and gaskets and tires and all this stuff that suddenly we needed. And it was during that time that these gangs of foreigners would go into the jungle to enslave the natives that these uncontacted tribes went back into the jungle and said, not us. And they have six foot bows and seven foot arrows with bamboo tips. They make the bamboo tips into razor blades. And so when those things fly, actually one of my rangers, one of the jungle keepers team, was present when the tribes had come out onto the river and he tried to help them because they're nomadic and they live out there. And so there's an element of like, brother, they're trying to be like, you don't need to be like this. We're friendly. So they sent a canoe across the river with bananas. And so he's up to his waist in the river and the tribes are right across the river and they shot. And he sees the arrow come and right at his head. And as he moved to the side, it hit him at the temple and sliced him back towards the ear, opening him to the skull. He's fine. But let me tell you something, when he goes and gets a crew cut, it's the most badass skull, the scar you've ever seen, man. And so he always keeps it real short on that side. But even if you try to help them, they're not necessarily friendly. That's a tough lesson. Yeah.

I suppose they have a point. They have a point and protecting them is a default of, you know, now that we're protecting all this ecosystems and all these other indigenous communities, it's like we all sort of live with this knowledge that they're the hermanos, the brothers are out there and that's the way they want to keep it. And so we just have to be respectful of like, you don't camp on certain beaches at certain times of the year because we know that they might be there. You really have to be careful about that. Have you yourself interacted with any?

My interaction with them came on a solo where I pushed it a little bit too far.

And I was planning to do a three week, this was like the big one. And I got dropped off by poachers up a river and I went past the point where they were like names. I said, what tributary are we on? And they were like, tributary. And I was like, okay. And I said, leave me here. And I remember the guy being like, are you committing suicide? And he didn't understand. And I was like, no, I have a backpack and I have like food and like, I'm going to like take videos and I have a tripod. And I was like, we're cool here. And they looked at me like they were like, goodbye. And I was like, all right. And I went up this river. And again, like you just, you learn these things like, you know, it was only when I'd been alone for a week that you realize you're, you know, that's saying they're like, oh, you're, you're born alone and you die alone. It's like, no, you're not, you're born into a room full of people usually at the very least your mother's there for everybody. And, and so you've been around people probably if you're a normal person every single day of

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your life, you've seen dozens, if not hundreds of people. And all of a sudden you realize what a social creature we are. Because on day six, it gets weird. For me, it got weird. I know there's people that can do it longer. So what does that mean? Like longing for contact? Like are you lonely? Longing for contact, the distortion of reality in the sense that like, you know, you wake up and there's no one there and you start to, you know, you're going up a river. So I would keep, I kept looking back down river and almost thinking of my life as something, it was almost like I had already died and I had gone to somewhere else and I was looking back on that life as like something that I had experienced. And then there came this panic of, what if it's gone? Or like, what if World War Three broke out and I just don't know about it? My family in New York is vaporized and something just, you just, you're, you're, you're.

So actually your ability to comprehend and interpret reality kind of requires other people. It's not just that you're lonely. You need that contact to actually just perceive the world, make sense of it, all of that. So you start basically hallucinating in a certain kind of way. I started feeling very uncomfortable. It doesn't help also that like Santiago told me these stories where he's like, if you hear cappichons sounding not quite monkeys, if you hear cappichon monkeys sounding not quite like cappichons, he goes, it's the tribe and they're coming to get you. And then the guy who was shot, Ignacio, they showed me videos where we saw them on the beach and they're communicating in monkey calls. They're using it as code so that we don't understand them, even though we don't speak their language, but they're, they're using animal calls. And so every night you go to sleep and then you go, did that tinamoo sound off? And you're like, shit, you know, and it's really hard to fall asleep. And then like one night I messed up and I left a fish. I like cleaned this fish. I ate like this huge fish. I just ate it to my face. You're, you're putting out like marathon levels of, of energy every day. Like, you know, Goggins would love solos. He'd be like, this is awesome.

Yeah. You eat the fish raw? This one, I actually cooked it, but you know, the skeleton was laying there right outside my tent, stupid. And in the middle of the night, I wake up and I just could tell there was something there, you know, and then like, you almost don't want to look. It's like when you're a kid at the basement door and you're like, is there a ghost? It's like, I like unzipped the tent and I like open it up and there's like 27 black caiman outside of my tent all looking at me like this and like some of their heads are this big and they're like, there's fish there. Can we have it? And I'm like, holy shit. And like, you know, I was like, do I, I kind of like had to like scooch the tent back and like move back and let them have their fish. And there's a host of crocodiles outside of my tent.

Yeah. Um, but no, so then there was there.

Wait, how many? Like 27, maybe there's a lot. A big one, small ones, medium sized one, every type. They were all there and their eyes glow in the night. You know, you shine a light at animals and they have a tape of them, lucid them. And so their, their eye shine comes back at you. If you shine a headlamp at a, at a Jaguar or a frog or almost every animal has a tape at them. To ease the crock, there's a whole lot of them. Yeah. I thought, can we go back to the part of the conversation where you said the jungle is not dangerous. The humans are the most dangerous. Did they eat me? No. Why didn't they eat you? They wanted the fish. Is there some way of you interacting with them that shows that you're not a source of harm? I don't believe so. I'm sure there's someone out

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there that thinks they can talk to crocs, but. Because there's a, there's a story of you grabbing a croc by the tail. Yes. What did you learn from that? Learned to not always listen to JJ. So JJ was testing you to. Yeah. To see how stupid it was. How do you hold the crocodile exactly? You have to get them by the head, like an anaconda like this. And so. So you're one of the world experts at grabbing creatures by the head. I wouldn't say world expert, but I've done a lot of it. I also have, you see how there's like kind of a ball there? That's where a crocodile tooth went in that side and like came out that side of my mouth. That was a really good chomp. And the watch I was wearing at the time saved me because that, like that. It's real fast. Just chomp. Just whack. Like somebody took a sledge hammer, you put your hand on the table and I just went, really hurt. Shouldn't have been doing that. How did that come up? Because I caught a croc that was too big. So usually when we catch little caiman in the streams and we measure them to monitor the populations, you get it by the neck. And then I tuck the tail under my arm and I hold it. And you're talking about a little, you know, four foot croc, nothing. And I, this one I dove into a swamp and I caught like a six foot spectacle caiman. And her head is big and I had her by the neck and I realized I couldn't get her tail under my arm because her tail was all the way back there and she started thrashing. And it was like probably croc number 375 that I'd caught. And I just got a little cocky and I said, oh, she's, you know, I just, I just like grabbed her by a leg. I was like, I got this. And she just came back and tagged me and I went, okay, gonna go back to being safe. Just a linger on it. What, is it one of the, one of the bigger predators in the Amazon? What, and it's, is it going, are they going extinct? Black caimans? Black caiman were, I believe they were critically endangered for a while because for a while the fashion industry loved their skin. It's soft and it's black. They're bouncing back a little bit now, you know, like most animals, if you leave them alone, they'll be fine. I mean, crocs have been through, you know, how many millions and millions of years on earth before us. I mean, that's even the joke with, with the joke, but that's the grim reality of tiger conservation. It's, there was a hundred thousand tigers in 1900. Now this 4,000 tigers left on earth. It's not rocket science. All you have to do is not bulldoze their forest and allow there to be some deer and tigers will be fine. That's it. It's so simple. And that's like sometimes where I feel like I have the dumbest job in the world. I'm like, guys, please stop killing the things that keep us alive. The Amazon regulates our global climate, produces medicine, is home to indigenous people. It's beautiful. Rainforests only cover 3% of the planet's land mass. Like it's not that much to ask. If you leave their home untouched, they'll figure out how to have sex and multiply, except for pandas, apparently, because pandas you have to convince. Yeah. Humpbacks. Humpbacks, they went down to, they went from 130,000 down to I think about 8,000 at whaling times. And then when we banned whaling, since that time where I think we're back up to over a hundred thousand humpback whales, they've bounced back. It's a success story. We're not going to lose them. Okay. So you're on a solo with Crocs looking at you. See, this is why you're good at this. I would have lost. We would have been tangent forever. No, that's pretty epic with the fish. That was your mistake. Okay. That was my mistake. I don't understand how you're still alive. I mean,

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I, it's really inspiring. When you come, we're going to, I'm going to show you. You told me you're coming or you're in it. Yeah, 100% coming. Yeah, but, you know, if there's any place, I mean, a sort of a grim joke, but if there's any way to die, that's a good one, if I'm being honest. It's a cool one. It's a pretty cool one. They'll become part of the part. Yeah. I mean, there's, I'm not even like joking. There's a there's a oneness to the whole thing. All the stories, just reading your work, looking at your work. It seems like you're part of this machine that is nature, this, this incredible machine. Like we all die and we're all part of this big thing that humans do have the capability to also construct narratives and stories and myths and tell them to each other and share them with each other and have more sophisticated ways, therefore to communicate love to each other, but animals do as well. They communicate love, maybe more simply, maybe more honestly. Anyway, so you were the crocs and the fish. Yeah. So I messed up. I left the fish out, crocs showed up outside my tent, but in the end it was fine. I backed off, they had their way with the fish and then they all started biting each other. It was fun to watch. Is that a general rule you want to not leave? Yeah. Just like if you're camping in the northeast, you don't leave like you do a bear bag or a bear canister. You don't want to invite the wild animals. I really did mess up. I kind of was just like, you know, whatever. I do this every now and then. I get a little too cavalier and the ocean has almost taken me down for that a few times. But yeah. So the crocs and then you keep going for a few days and my plan was to get to a point where I reached the end of the tributary and this had a very, you know, again, for me, this is like a pilgrimage. This is like me going into the heart of the very center and soul and essence of everything that I am fascinated with, like as close to God as you can get because you're leaving every type of security, every human relationship. You're also pushing all your chips in. And so it's, you know, every step I took further up river, it got weirder and weirder and more intense and every day and every moment it changed. And I brought pictures at the time. There's no way to keep a phone charged. I didn't have like a power bank or anything. You know, I brought pictures from home. I brought a National Geographic magazine, something just to, you know, and there came a day right when I was getting to the end, like to the point where the river was so shallow that it was just a trickle and I was walking on the rocks and the Andes Mountains were in front of me and I was like reaching the place and the music was swelling and then all of a sudden I saw smoke around the next bend. And I, like my spine is reacting right now as I talk about it because I knew, I knew what I was going to see because I knew that it was impossible for loggers to be out there. There's no motor that could take you, the boat would have run aground miles ago. And so I went, and this is the other, this is the other idiot thing. It's like, just turn around. Just do it. I'm that kid though, when you see like a wet paint sign, like I walk by and I touch the wall. And so I went around the bend and, and I see, I see a few naked people on the beach and they see me and we're like a good distance apart. It's there on the other side of the river, but, you know, arrow in hand, bow in hand, the intention of pose, they're looking at me. They're clearly conversing and that moment lasted for a long moment where I said, this is the part of the story where they are going to rip me apart, dissect me to see what I eat. I mean, every other story in the region that we've heard, that's the ending of it. If you're alone with these people, it's not going to go

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well. And I have nothing to defend myself with. And I just, I turned and I ran for like three hours and I got in the river and I swam for a while and all my food got wet. I mean, everything, I just, you know, also just ran for dear life and my, my get out plan, the thing after I crossed the mountains and came down into the next tributary was I had a pack raft and it's a tiny little inflatable raft, good enough to handle rapids. And I inflated the pack raft once the, once the river was like six inches deep, I inflated the pack raft and I went, and I went for the rest of that day into the night, I went into the point that my headlamp died and I was just floating, floating in a raft down the Amazon and hitting into things. And I was like, I'm going to pop this raft. So I got out of the raft, set up my tent and I was like, I need some sleep. I was freaking out. I hadn't had food and now, you know, hours and hours and hours. As soon as I fell asleep, my asshole brain comes up with the dream of that I hear voices. They're right outside the tent. I just, you know, sleeping was worse than being awake. So I woke up, got back in the tent and then at one point it was really cool. Cause one of those, one of the same black came and that had come for the fish as I'm going down river, he came right up next to me and the two of us were going and he was just like motoring down river, this giant like 16 foot crocodile. He just like came up to me and like looked at me as I was going and it was funny cause I wasn't scared of him. I was scared of them. And yeah, it took me like a week to get back to town. And, and again, the things you learn in these moments, the, the, you know, the appreciation for your parents, the, the, the, the, what a hug feels like, you know, when you, when you are faced with pretty much certainty that you're not going to get those things again, whether it's from Mercer or uncontacted tribes or, you know, I find that, that it brings, it brings, it brings you this new joy for life where you, you're just being that close to death. Yeah. You go, you know, I, you go, my God, this is all a miracle. It's sad because they're human, just like you. Actually, how different are they? Like if you were forced to interact for a week together where they can't, they're not allowed to kill you. Not allowed to kill me. Would they, are they, how fundamentally different are they? Do you think? I don't think they're different. I think they're like any other Amazonian natives. They're, they're, they're tall. They seem to have tall genetics. And there's places, you know, again, there's, there's what is known, and then there's what we know down there. Like there's, there's one community where I don't know whether it was like a bad rainstorm or something, but some kid from the uncontacted tribes did end up in a village. And so we, he learned Spanish or he learned whatever dialect they speak in that village. And so he's told us a little bit about what life was like with them, but like, they're just people. They're just people. They have their own culture. They know about medicines that we don't know about. They definitely have hunting practices that, that we don't understand. They can hit a spider monkey out of a 160 foot tree with a bamboo arrow. We can't do that. I mean, they are incredible hunters and also like living naked in the jungle with the botflies and the mosquitoes. I don't know how they do it. Like sometimes at night, and again, we don't have night vision, whereas almost every other animal does. And sometimes we'll be sitting, you know, on our, you know, at the research station at night, and we'll be just drinking and like looking out and at the, you know, we'll do, we'll scare each other. We'll go, you know, realize if they were

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out there right now, they could be looking at us. And it's like, the truth is, is that when it's dark out there, they can't see. It's not easy to start a fire with matches and a lighter and gasoline. They do it with friction. They have some, some beads on survival that we could really learn from. Not to mention that then you have people that believe that they are actually the guardians of the extinct giant ground sloth. And what they're doing is, you know, living out there, because they're protecting a secret population of previously extinct megafauna. But there's all kinds. I mean, this, it's like you go into the crypto world so quick. I've heard so many people be like, but then again, you have to be humble at how little we know about, about that world, about the world of life. Like you said, there's so much of life in the Amazon that we don't, uh, creature with no names. Tons of them. We could go out on a night walk right now and I could show you something that, you know, you, I've done it. You, you, you pick up a bug and you go, that doesn't look right. That's not right. He's got three heads. Yeah. You know, and then you send it to, to the, the, the greatest expert on that genus of insects and, and they go, look, I got no idea. And you're talking to a world expert. And it's like, that's it. And then 50% of the life is up in the canopy. And so like we started climbing the trees, like rock climbing, like what Alex Honol does, like, well, like I'll climb up 50 feet and then I'll put a safety, like I'm basically trad climbing and then I'll climb up another 50 feet and I'll climb up another 50 feet and I'll have JJ belaying me from below. And then he'll be like, oh, look, a snake. I'm like, JJ, pay attention. Like, did you get up there? And the, the branches are as thick as this table. So you can like walk around freely. Oh, it's like total like avatar when they're in the floating islands. Like you can, you can go run around if that's what you want to do. Prameely adds orchids, cactuses, because up there it's against the sun. So it's a different environment up there. Yeah. Interesting. And then you start seeing lizards and snakes and birds and things that aren't down on the ground. And so how many scientists have actually gotten to really spend time up there and really inventory the life. And that's why when you hear about, you like it, it's like a taxonomical discussion of how many species they're on earth. They're like between, you know, 10 and 30 million. And it's like, well, that's a big, it's a big swing. What about stuff on the ground? So you mentioned some insects. What about bullet ants? So it's supposed to be the most painful bite in the world. You've been bitten by one? Seven or eight times. Yeah. What does it feel like? Okay. So the first time that we ever did bullet ants, JJ said, you know, okay, this is what we're going to do. He goes, you know, it's bullet ant roulette. We're going to get a bullet ant. I mean, you get like chopsticks, you like pick up this bullet ant and they're big, they're big and they're tough. Like he goes, we're going to put our forearms together and we're going to drop the bullet ant and clamp our forearms together and just rub and whoever, whoever it takes, it takes. Of course, JJ did not get stung and I did. And it hurts every bit as much as they say it hurts. It really let me have it. And then, and then I was like hitting my arm against the table to try and like kill it or get it off, but it was holding on and just like really injecting the venom. And yeah, really letting you have it. And then it travels up and it goes into your like lymph nodes and into your ear and you get a headache. And I think the brilliant thing about the venom of a bullet ant is that it makes you feel like this feeling of alarm, it makes you feel like something's wrong. You don't just go, oh, this hurts. Like it's like a beasting where you are, this really hurts on my hand. It's like, no, no, no, no, your whole nervous

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system is freaking out and you start sweating and then you get cold and then you're tired and then you get a little blurry vision and it's like, that's actually that bad. I mean, now after six or seven, I get bitten and I'm like, kind of okay. So it's a full body, full mind experience.

It's a full body, full mind experience, but then there's places in the Amazon where they, you know, stick their hand in a glove with like 70 of them. Right. And I think Stevo did that, which I just don't understand how you could do that without going into complete anaphylactic shock and dying because one really sucks. Well, just like we said, with animals and with humans, there's a different kind. There's a different kind, certainly a special unique kind of...

The first of his species.

On the point of un-contacted tribes,

it's interesting to think about what kind of civilizations have there been.

This is something that you've talked about a little bit. Graham Hancock has written about ancient civilizations instead of challenging the conventional, the mainstream thinking about the civilizations that have been there in the Amazon. Can you steel man and criticize the idea, so the pro and the con of the idea that there have been advanced ancient civilizations in the Amazon? Like how much do we know? What are all the possibilities of what's in the Amazon in this past? So like when Oriana went down the Amazon, the reports were that there was great civilizations

in the Amazon. And then a few hundred years later, when people got to actually check up on this stuff,

it was all gone. And so was that because of disease that we wiped out all these civilizations and these communities of people? Potentially, probably. Was he just wrong? Probably not. This is a guy that navigated by the stars back to Spain after building his own boat. Or was he trying to just I don't know. I don't know. But there clearly is a long history of complex civilizations in the Amazon. 100%. There's no one that can deny that. The thing that I reacted to was that I've heard videos, I've seen moments in podcasts where the narrative becomes not there's more ancient civilization information in the Amazon than we previously thought. True statement. We're discovering with LIDAR, and this is what Graham Hancock is talking about, that we're discovering constantly, that there was more civilizations than we thought in various places. The place where I take offense is where they start to say that the Amazon, there's actually articles that are titled this, that the Amazon is a manmade garden, which is not true. So the actual, which I think is a really different idea, that the entire ecosystem and everything we've been talking about, all the species, all the forestry and the different, just life, life, one of the most diverse ecosystems on earth is initially created by humans. It's ridiculous. Well, it's not, first of all, it's unlikely, but it's not ridiculous. So we can't, well, there's no ridiculous in science.

But the complexity of life is very difficult to engineer. As you, the more you study about biological systems and so on, it's very difficult to create the kind of things that nature is able to do. That said, I don't know if you've heard, but the entire earth, the world has gone through a pandemic recently. And if, and everybody said, of course, it's natural, oranges, viruses mutate all the time. And nevertheless, it seems more and more likely than this particular case, it was an artificial origin leaked from a lab. So humans are able to create stuff, at least modern technological genetic engineering. Made golden retrievers. Come on. You can't be that nice and that good looking. Used to be a wolf. Yeah. But so that bothers you because it allows you to think

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that we don't need to preserve the Amazon, we could always engineer it. Yeah, exactly. Then just this is, just to me, that's a slippery slope. Like I totally, it's just, it's so quick from a fan of expeditions to find ecological ruins and to learn more about the ancient civilizations to, which I don't think is what he's putting out is that then sort of like news articles, which I think they're trying to bait you where they're going, was the Amazon man made? And it's like, yeah, you know, because then you get, you're going to get a Brazilian president to go see, see what they said, it's man made. So we might as well continue to engineer it and manage it. And it's like, there's such complex systems and interactions and such a, such a giant web of life there that at least in my opinion is clearly one of the most authentically natural things. And again, are there things that we've engineered to the uncontacted tribes? Sometimes they, they have banana plants that they've stolen and we could see it from the air that they've, they have banana plants. We made banana plants. That's engineered by us. We know for a fact. So agricultural engineering.

Agricultural engineering and stuff like that, but suggesting that the Amazon basin, you know, it's just, it's just a weird way to think about it. I've just heard people dismiss the conserve, the protection of the Amazon based on the fact that like, oh, well, if people made it and it's such a giant leap from, from, from zero to a hundred, you know, is there slash and burn that the ancient civilizations did? Of course. Are there areas that were affected by people? Of course. I just get worried when we start talking about, it was a man made thing.

Yeah. Hear you loud and clear on that. And I personally think that's completely separate from wondering about what the ancient civilization have been able to accomplish.

Oh, sure.

It's almost really sad because if all the humans on earth die now, how long does it take before all signs of humans ever existing disappear?

For the most part.

From an alien perspective.

How, what timeline are we talking about? I mean, like,

I mean, there's, there's a hundred thousand years.

Like, it could be less, it could be less, it could be like a few thousand, because a hundred thousand is complete destruction.

A hundred thousand is like nothing.

But, but then it could be in just a few hundred years.

Yeah.

It starts becoming, you know, the government of the alien civilization is going to have to pay quite a bit of money to do the research, because they're going to find other life first.

Sure.

They're going to find the dolphins and the fish and so on.

They're going to find the trees. Maybe the trees are the interesting thing.

Sure.

The buildings are not that interesting.

They're crumbled.

But there must be examples of cities that have been left unattended for a few decades and like,

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how quickly the, the plants push up through the street and everything starts to get broken down. If you really look, you'll be like, oh, there's some interesting geometry here for the buildings and so on, but most, most of the computer stuff.

All the stuff of the past hundred years, the airplanes, all of that, all the technologies, all of the paperwork that, all the hard drives that store all the information.

I want to, I want to actually know how long it takes like a 747 to like biodegrade.

Like how, like if you just leave it there, sitting on the runway, society stops.

Yeah.

How long does it take for that thing to disappear?

Like that's a weirdly versus to a point where it's unidentifiable, might be different, but sure.

I mean, the point I'm trying to say here is as you've brilliantly put the, the Amazon churns.

Yeah.

Oh yeah.

And the fact that I wonder throughout its history, what are the peaks of the awesomeness?

Well, how many banana, how many agricultural, Einstein's of bananas were there?

The creating different kinds of ideas, different kinds of geometry, different kinds of tools.

Well, yeah.

Look what the Incas did.

I mean, the Incas, you know, Machu Picchu.

I mean, when they found, when Hiram Bigum found Machu Picchu was covered in jungle, you could hardly see it.

And I mean, the, the stonework they did, much like what the Egyptians did with the pyramids, a lot of it, we don't really understand how they did it.

If you come to the jungle, you got to go to Machu Picchu because it's not far from there.

And I usually like, I'm the person like, I won't, I don't usually go see like the, you know, like I've never been to see the Taj Mahal after living in India for five years.

Like I'm just not, but when you look up and you see Machu Picchu, you go, either they were either they were communicating with the gods there or these people were so smart that they knew that anybody they brought, they were going to impress.

They, they've built something there that when you look up at that mountain, you go, whoa, with those giant stones, the beauty of it, you know, it's just, it's just stunning to imagine that there was this culture of people that, that could achieve this.

And so through the Amazon, I mean, that's sort of up in the Andes, but

there's all kinds of stuff in the Amazon. There are places where they say there's

pyramids beneath the canopy that we just don't know about. I mean, there's, it's endless.

If you had billions of dollars, trillions of dollars, what, what would be the efforts in the Amazon for the, for both conservation and for exploration?

All right. Well, first thing.

Which are tied together.

Yeah, exactly. First arrest the, the deforestation so we don't have an ecological crisis on our hands. We don't want to keep losing species, losing indigenous cultures, losing the climate stabilizing services that the Amazon provides as a whole. Stop that. That's my first mission.

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Next, then we can play. And then it's like, let's go find, I mean, I've flown over the Amazon in a Cessna and it's like, you see things where you go, we have to go see what that is. You know, weird lakes or shapes in the jungle that don't make sense that are, that are, that are strange. And like, So even at that level, you can see weirdness. You can see different, like signs of possible awesomeness. Oh, the jungle is so weird. And here's the other thing is that most to like the region I've been working in, you see where the researchers go. The certain biological stations, the certain places where like, oh, like this university has a relationship with this, this university is this. So everybody goes to the same few study sites and then they walk on the same trails and they have the same guides. When you fly in a Cessna and you fly a few hours away from all that and you see a tiny little tributary and then you fly for 40 minutes over unbroken green, just wild before you reach another tributary. Even if somebody could survive going up that tributary, had the expeditionary expertise and the ability to survive getting shot at by arrows, if they could get up that tributary, now cut perpendicular into the jungle, which I don't do on the solos. You can't, you can never, don't ever leave the river. But you're telling me that in that span of 70 miles between tiny tributaries at the edge of the world, no one's been there. None of us have been there. You know, maybe somebody 10,000 years ago was there, but we don't know what populations of things are there. We don't know what ruins are there. And so there's so much undiscovered stuff in the Amazon that is just waiting, just waiting. What, what is the process of exploring that? So how does money get converted towards exploration? Is there, is there safe ways of doing that? There's places where, you know, we found out about things that have to be explored, but where you come up with, well, how do we do this without getting shot? And, and all, and not only without getting shot, but also without endangering them too. Because how stupid are we if we, if we go in there to people that are living in the jungle, not bothering us, and we go insert ourselves into there because we're curious about some rocks. That doesn't seem fair for the loss of life. And so like, yeah, that's, that's something that we're working on. And like one thing, of course, is like Lidar and stuff, but eventually, eventually at the end of everything, it comes down to boots on the ground. Yeah. As somebody who has to ask that very question about how to deal with uncontacted tribes, they're going to kill you. But you also don't want to disturb their environment. If you were an intelligent alien civilization, and you came about earth, how, how would you interact with it? Can you put yourself in the mind of any alien civilization? Because there seems to be some parallels here. It is actually right. It's like a microcosm of, we're very aggressive. Human civilization is very aggressive. So if we were easily, we get threatened easily. Yeah. For stupid reasons, because we start, like American military probably thinks it's like the Chinese or the Russians. If we see any kind of flying objects, they get very unedged. I don't know. I mean, because, you know, part of it is like, you just want to ask, like that's the thing. I just want to ask questions, you know? But you don't know the same language. You send a boat of bananas. You send a boat of bananas, you get shot. I mean, picture, if aliens landed in New York, how long would it take for one of them to get shot? It could be minutes. It could be a matter of

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minutes.

Yeah, best because it's New York. Everywhere else.

Look where we are right now.

That's true. It'd be even worse here. Yeah. It makes me really, makes me wonder what is the right way to interact with intelligent life that's not like our own. I hope, I dream of, in our lifetime, we would interact with possibly life on Mars or on one of the moons of Jupiter or Saturn. And like, how do you interact with that thing? Well, there's very technical, biological, chemical processes. But also, if there's any kind of intelligence, how do you try to communicate with that intelligence? Yeah. So we're not talking about like a cockroach. We're talking about like something that's clearly like doing things, making things. Well, cockroach possibly. How do you know the difference between a cockroach? Like, how do you know we were just talking about like a

helipad? Yeah. We don't know. We don't know. We have just like a race of like philosopher cockroaches chilling on the rocks. Well, here on earth, we kind of, there seems to be a strong correlation between size and intelligence. Like, yes, it seems like the bigger things, the bigger nervous systems and brains. And so they're usually smarter. But that doesn't, I think it's brain, it's the ratio, brain to body. Sure. Because you have like crows. Yeah. That are up among the most intelligent. And it's like the size of the brain to the size of the body. But there also could be kinds of intelligence we work completely. No idea. We're not appreciating. Maybe cockroaches. They survived the longest. They're talking shit about us right now. It's dumb humans.

These rocks are so great. A couple of hundred years. Exactly. Did you ever, you ever hear that Kurt Vonnegut where the two space travelers get lost? This really impacted me as a kid because my dad was an English teacher. So he's always quoting Dostoevsky and Kurt Vonnegut.

And there's this, these two space travelers get like crash landed in a cave. And on the walls of the cave are the harmoniums. And these kite-shaped animals and they feed off the vibrations of the cave. And that's all they do. They don't hurt each other. They just do that. And so for like two years, these travelers are stuck and they're trying to fix their ship. And one of them starts playing music for the harmoniums. And the harmoniums love him for the music. And they all come around

him and he plays this music for them. And finally, they fix the ship. And the one guy is like, all right, let's get out of here. And the other guy is like, you know what? I'm staying.

He goes, I found a place where I can do good. I'm not hurting anybody. And they love me.

I'm staying right here. Yeah, this whole ambition thing we've got going on, always trying to build a bigger boat, bigger thing. That might not be the ultimate conclusion of a happy existence as a civilization. That's one of the possibilities why we haven't met the aliens yet at scale. It's because once you get good enough at technology, you realize that happiness lies in a peaceful coexistence as possible.

So where do you stand on aliens now? There's a lot coming out about the pilots and the things people have been seeing. And again, I kind of come in and out of this stuff. I'll be in the jungle for three months. I miss a lot. So update me. Are we being contacted right now? Of course, nobody knows. But I tend to believe my intuition says there's aliens everywhere, that even our galaxy, that's a bigger leap. But I believe our galaxy has probably billions,

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hundreds of millions of planets with life on it, like bacteria type of life. And I believe there is, I don't know, thousands of intelligent alien civilizations that exist or have existed.

The problem is there's a lot of time and it's very difficult to contact each other. So to achieve a kind of civilization that's able to actually send out enough signal or radiate enough energy where we would notice, I think that's really tough.

That said, statistically speaking, it seems like that should have been possible inside our galaxy or maybe nearby. And so I suspect that once an alien civilization is just many orders of magnitude smarter than us humans, the way it would contact us is going to be very difficult for us humans to understand. We're very egocentric. We want the message to be sent as like in English versus, I think consciousness itself, emotion, thoughts could be like fingertips, could be words in the story that the aliens are telling us. Or things that are just like a low dimensional projection of a much higher dimensional message that's being sent by aliens. And maybe our striving to create technology is to create the kind of sensor that's actually able to hear some of the message. Maybe that's what AI is trying to do. So I think that bridging that barrier of communication between us and cockroaches, I think that's the biggest challenge.

Interesting.

Like the messages are all around us. They're here. I suspect the alien messages are here.

The aliens are here. We're just too dumb to see it.

So first of all, the imagining planets where there are just picturing like a not a silent planet, but just like a planet of alternate life forms. Maybe it's not something that we can communicate and have a conversation with, but just like a planet of like butterflies and centipedes and weird things.

Unfortunately for billions of years, it was bacteria as single cell prokaryotes and eukaryotes, but they're not, they're boring. But animals of some sort in an environment of some sort, imagine that would just be such an interesting, beautiful, amazing thing. And I'm sure they're out on that. The kind of viruses they got going on.

It's, but they could also not be biologically based. There could be different chemistry.

So you have to be humble to that too.

Sure.

But then, you know, depends on the day, like I think you caught me on that day today, an optimistic one. Sometimes I think we're all we, this is all there is because you start, you ask that question, the Fermi paradox, like, why aren't they here?

You can't imagine an advanced alien civilization that would not be explorers because we're explorers.

Why is that depressing to you? That the idea that, let's just say you found out right now that there isn't anything else. Let's just say that, for example, say that the earth is the earth and the universe is the universe. And it's sort of like the backdrop of a video game. And it's just, what's out there, would that be tremendously depressing to you?

I think it's exciting for an engineer. It's probably exciting for an explorer, but I would equate that to your going out, hiking for three days with one match.

It kind of terrifies me that we only got one match.

Really?

Yeah.

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Really?

Yeah. All you got is one match.

This, no, no, no. Hold on a second. Hold on a second.

Wait.

Paul, wait, wait a minute. You're going out, there's no more matches.

There's no more matches. This is the only match you got.

No one's going to extinguish the planet. As far as we know, there's no meteor coming. I'm saying like, do you live in a, so I'm saying is that, is your worry then that we need to have a backup plan?

Yeah.

Really?

So like, what if we do, what if we do mess it up so bad that we can't live here anymore?

Well, there's different ways to mess it up. There's ways to mess it up to make life really difficult. Mad Max type of thing.

But there's nuclear war.

Yes.

With further and further advancement of technology that can destroy all of Earth, it just feels like that's going to be exponentially growing.

Yes. It's going to get worse.

I'm very optimistic, but it's a heck of a Russian roulette we're playing.

Okay. So I'm still curious about your intention though, or where your passion for this comes from. Is your, or maybe it's both, but is it the need to have a backup plan for humans, which is admirable for your intense love of humanity and our consciousness and love and art and everything? Or is it also just the raw fascination of imagining what's out there?

Because the way you said that about like, oh, you caught me on a positive day where I think it's, there was some, there was something in there that made me think that you need there to be.

Yeah. Yeah, there's,

I think I'm the kind of person that sees beauty and everything, but to me, a universe full of diverse life is more beautiful than one where it's just humans. It's just the Earth life.

Interesting.

There's more beauty. I mean, I'm not egotistical about the awesomeness of humans. I like if humans are not the smartest in our galaxy or not even close to being the smartest.

And that to me is, I don't know that, that to me is exciting about the possibility of what the universe can create.

Yes. I'm with you on that, that it's wildly exciting to, like if we found, even if it was just a distant inkling that we found out that there is a planet that has life, there's no communication coming from it, but we know for a fact there's stuff going on there. It would just change how we think about our entire reality. We know now.

And it could be, to me, I guess the little inkling of a thing that is depressing if all there is is Earth and humans destroy it, then we're the coolest thing that the universe has ever created. It's over.

I'm interested to have this conversation. I'm really, I'm saying I would be interested to bring you to the jungle. And now I'm also wondering, I'm wondering what your wilderness

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experience is, because I feel like for me, I'm so Earth-centric to the point where I'm like, we differ in that, for me, this is like, it's a curiosity. I feel wonder and I feel it's fun to talk about like, what's at the edge of space? Like, you know, there's the conundrums of space time. And but, but I'm so, to me, I'm like, what if, what if the aliens are watching us? Or what if the aliens aren't watching us? But what if the challenge here is, we've been put on Earth as the most intellectually complex of these creatures. And we're being observed to see how we manage it. And it's like, we haven't made a good job of managing each other.

Before Oriana went down the Amazon, I mean, they showed up and just sacked the inkles. I mean, we, our history, I don't have to tell you, you've just got back. But it's, I just, sometimes I wonder, you know, what, what the, is, is there a grand narrative with, with what we're doing to wildlife? Because it's like, we have all these other species and we're, we're struggling even here in this conversation to sort of quantify like, you know, I think that most people don't think outside of the human framework. You know what I mean? Like just driving around for me, living outside of the jungle, even just for a few weeks, I get, you don't, you don't, you don't even think about the fact that there's other species around us. We really don't day to day. You look at TV and you look at, you listen to the radio and it doesn't, it's not very consequential to the average person living in a city that there are these, you know, islands covered in walrus and that there's rainforests filled with birds and frogs and all these things happening and that, you know, the salmon are contributing to our fresh water and, and that, that life is literally given to us and made possible by these ecological systems. To me, that's where like the whole, you know, essence of my existence comes from. And so like.

Yeah. Thank you for that reminder, because you're basically saying like the alien civilizations you dream about are here on earth. Those, those, those worlds are here.

For me, yeah. Yeah. No, I agree with you. I think, I, I, I agree with you. And I think that's actually the way I think most of the time of, you know, I, I think I'm on mushrooms all the time genetically somehow, because when I go out in nature is just the beauty, even of nothing, you talk about the Amazon, man, just basics of nature. Yeah.

Yeah. Fill you, fill me with awe. And the other thing that fills me with awe is our own mind, like the biology of these things firing, basically, not our own mind, but biology of any living organisms, because it's like an ecosystem. They've come, these cells came together, they somehow function there. They delegate, they mostly operate in a local way, but they, first of all, it's just like you said with the anacondas, you start out as a tiny snake and you become giant. When you're a tiny snake, you're, you're prey for everything. When you're a giant snake, you're a predator or you're prey to no one. And like just that whole process, same, starting with a single embryo, single cells, human, and through the embryogenic process, constructing this giant human that's able to have limbs move about the world, think about things, write books, and so on. Just to say that that is incredibly beautiful. And all of that is here on earth, yes. And so actually, I was being sort of poetic about aliens and so on. I think I can spend 99.99% in terms of filling my mind with awe and beauty, just looking down here on earth, for sure. I agree with you. Yeah. And they shouldn't cancel out. Like, I think it's beautiful that there's, that there's people that are fascinated and obsessed with looking out into space, and that will travel there. I mean, just to me, the idea of, I mean, I have a little piece of

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meteorite at home that I hold and it does amazing things to my mind because I'm like, everything I've ever touched is from this earth. And I'm holding this thing that's been places that we can't even think about. And it blows my mind and I love it. But when it comes to like intelligence, I think it's like, I'm so concerned with the fact that we're at this moment in history. And it's interesting to me that, you know, we had the internet and now that with the emergence of AI, and more and more, I feel like we are starting to resemble like an ant colony, where there's more and more connection, and there's more and more interaction globally between everybody. In the next 10 years, we're going to have to decide, are we going to let our ocean ecosystems just collapse? Are we going to just take that 3% of rainforest and just let them log the shit out of it until it's gone? And it's like, we're going to be in a very different reality then. Then it's going to be very dystopian future. Or can we keep the good things about earth, transcend that, realize that we have these incredible alien species around us that are animals that we grew up with, that we wouldn't be here without, that we owe something to. And I feel like at that stage, then the outward look becomes something else. It's almost like we've proven that if aliens came up to us, that's when I'd feel good. Aliens would come up to us and they said, you know, there's Louis has the thing where he goes, God comes back and he goes, what did you do? He goes, the polar bears are brown. He's like, I left food for you. It's like, if the aliens came and were like, you know, and they interviewed the elephants and they said, how are you feeling? And the elephants would be like, listen, fuck these little primates. You know what they've done to us? And it's like, I mean, you know, I've seen people break an elephant. I've seen it all with that stuff. And it's like, if anybody was to ask them, they'd be screaming. And so like, to me, it's just, you know, I have trouble looking out into space. I have trouble looking out into normal life as a human, because I'm so concerned with trying to make sure that they're okay, because not enough people are doing that.

Well, the interesting thing about all the development with AI, and just that we're living more and more of our life online, I think we're actually learning what's missing when it's online. Like, I think people realize that online interaction is shallow, but we're just learning that that's a reality, that we need that human connection. And I think there's going to be the swing back to like, sadly, AI systems of the future might be able to live fulfilling lives online, but us humans have to have a deep connection with Earth. And like with each other, physical connection, I think there's going to be a phase somewhere in the century where we go back to deep physical connection. And there'll be a digital world that we visit that will be separate. And that's the you have a discussion with that with Twitter, with Instagram, with all these social networks, that they don't they seem to be dividing us, they seem to not be bringing happiness. And you have to try to figure out like, okay, so how do we use them in a way that does connect us, does educate us, grow a knowledge base, but also keeps us keeps our lives fulfilling in a deep human way that we're for good and for bad genetically designed, they can't overcome, but we can't escape these meat vehicles. Yeah, but that's to me, that's so reassuring. Yeah. It's like when it was like, I have, you know, we all have those friends that are like, you know, we got to live forever. And it's like, I don't know, man, do you? Yeah. I don't know, is it that bad that this is how it works, like that we don't understand it? Yeah, the, it's often from the tech sector that you have discussions about immortality and so on. Yeah. I think that's somehow trying to escape the beauty of this earth, for sure, that that there's something to do right to look at, like.

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Yeah. And I, perhaps like you, I'm worried about the unintended negative consequences of trying to escape the way things are on this earth, because this is an incredible mechanism. How many times in the past has new technology come out that people have hailed as, you know, blasphemy or it's not going to work or it's, it goes against nature and, and now, well, heart transplants are pretty cool. Yeah. You know, and, and you could say what you want about like television and like, oh, it's, you know, it's, it rocks your brain. It's like, yeah, but also how many times have you sat in a room full of people being entertained and all laughing and interacting and eating popcorn because of the televisions there? It's not, it's not one or the other. And so I feel like with AI, we'll, we'll learn, we'll learn our way through it, you know. There's a, like with the, with the legged robots, especially and humanoid also. So anything on legs, four legs of two legs. I remember like the first time I interact, interacted with a legged robot, I saw a magic there. Like that this too can have consciousness. This too can have this life like quality that a human being loves about other human beings, about other living creatures. Now, while I'm still, I grew up in the place with no internet in a time with no internet. So I still like biological dogs better. I noticed the magic in robotic dogs. And it makes me wonder the way, same way we're just talking about aliens looking up, it makes you wonder about other alien civilizations. Now the deep love is for dogs, for other humans, but there's still this wonder. I struggle with that. Like you said, the, the whatever's going on in here. The idea, and there's so much talk about the fact, like at what point does an artificially intelligent robot become something that has, and it's like, I get, I get very uncomfortable with that. It makes me, I don't know how to, how to handle the things because I don't know enough about it, probably, but it's like, I don't know how to handle like, I don't know how to handle it. Nobody knows anything about it because the, it's really, everything is terrifying here because it could be as simple as consciousness is easy to fake. So what if we live in a, in a world 10 to 20 years from now where you're toaster, there's a bunch of robots in your room that are faking consciousness. And then you fall in love with them and you have a deep connection with them. And then you actually have a deeper connection with your toaster than you do with any romantic human partner you've ever had. And you started, I was, I was upset about the dogs. At least the robot doesn't take a shit on the floor. I was like, you just, you just took it way worse. Yeah. Yeah. And then, you know, and then they, they start to, I don't know if you've seen AI porn, but it gets pretty intense. Like fully AI porn, like they're, they're fake people. Fake people that can, things I've missed in the jungle. Things boy, do I have a lot to show you or not, not show you, not show you. Let me ask you about a touchy topic. Climate change. What's the effect of climate change on the, on the Amazon? Maybe species diversity. What, what, what is something that people should, should think about because there's different views on, I think most people believe that climate change is human caused and that it's happening, but there is different perspectives on the degree of damage that it's going to do over the next several decades and what our response should be as a society. And so it would be amazing to hear your perspective on it in, in small slices of your experience or in large. To me, there's no denying the fact that we are experiencing changes. I think anybody that, that doesn't agree with that hasn't been outside in the last 20 years or hasn't interviewed old farmers who will tell you that it changed or, you know, it's that, I think a lot of us

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can agree with that. Where I deviate is that I am not a climate scientist. I am, I am not qualified. And so I just, like everybody else, am listening. And what happens to me is I see that the, someone like Santiago Durán, JJ's father will, will tell me it's totally different than it was when I was a kid. The seasons have changed and moved and like in New York when I was a kid, like we used to get

like white Christmas. Like we used to get snow. We don't, I was in shorts, like I came off the plane right before coming here and I was in like shorts for a second. Like I was like, this is a different reality, but my ability could, my, or my, my interpretation of climate change, you know, I feel like it's just as dumb as those people that go like, you know, it's really cold. I thought they said it was getting warmer. It's like, it's, it's a very rudimentary thing. And so as a, as a, someone that's fighting for the preservation of biodiversity, I, I, I don't feel like I'm any more qualified than the average person to, I can only provide anecdotal, anecdotal evidence of the stuff I've seen. What I, what I do do though, and I always, I always make a strong alienation here is that I can speak to the fact that I've been places where the ocean fisheries have been depleted and the local fishermen can tell you and the scientists can tell you, there's no more fish here. I've been to the places where the rainforest line is being pushed back in Borneo and it's getting smaller and smaller and smaller.

And I've been in the Amazon and I've walked through the killing fields and through the fires and I've burnt my lungs on it and, and I'm a big believer personally in, in instead of trying to take on all of it, I've tried very hard in my life to pick one thing. And to me, that one thing is protecting as many wild heartbeats as I can because they're under constant fire. And so climate change, you know, there's so much arguing over it. And, and like you said, the, the, the degree to which we, we affect it and, and, and how do you, you know what I mean? Like I like to have

provable data points. Like, you know, I can show you tropical deforestation. I can show you the decline in tigers over the last hundred years. I can't prove. I, you know what I mean? Like, I can't answer that question. I don't think if probably you can better than I can.

No, I think one of the criticisms I'd love to get your opinion on is one of the criticisms that somebody like Jordan Peterson provides is that the climate is such a complex system. There's so many variables that making conclusive statements about what's going to happen with the quote-unquote

climate in the next 10, 20, 50 years is a nearly impossible task. Therefore, as he would say, as people like Bjorn Lomborg would say, the kind of fear mongering that is done, saying we should spend humongous amounts of money to change the trajectory of everything we're doing in terms of energy, in terms of infrastructure and so on, in terms of how we allocate money is not justified because predicting is very difficult. And instead it's better exactly what you're saying, which is focusing on local problem, local, saying we need to protect the Amazon. What are the, what are the things attacking the Amazon this year in the next five years? How can we stop the deforestation? How can we stop different things? And then humans are exceptionally good at coming up with solutions for that, especially when you put money behind it, you put attention to it, and that's the way we solve all the different problems that are projected for the climate change in its worst case scenarios to be realized on this earth. So that's kind of the case he would make. And I should also mention that one of the reasons I was fortunate enough to discover your

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work is first a friend mentioned that I should definitely talk to you, and then I googled you, and I saw that somebody recommended that Jordan Peterson absolutely must talk to you on his podcast.

I think it was like a Reddit post. Thank you, Reddit poster. That's great. I was like, oh, interesting. And then I looked and Jordan hasn't yet. I thought my goal is for you to talk to Rogan and to Jordan Peterson for different reasons, but for the same reason, they get connected to the human being that deeply cares about this earth. And I think that's probably the right lens through which to look at the effects of climate change in terms of focusing on the different things that are threatening the diversity of species in this most magical place on earth, which is the Amazon. But also, as you talk about with elephants and tigers in India, and focusing on how to solve those problems. I don't know if there's any comment you want to make on folks like Jordan Peterson who are sort of raising questions about how much do we really understand about the climate? First of all, I'm such a Jordan Peterson fan, and I think the guy is heroic for a number of reasons. And I find his use of language and his use of theology and the message that he puts out wonderful. I cringe a little bit when he says, and I might not even be accurate on this, but I cringe a little bit when I feel like he dismisses that there is an ecological emergency happening right now. Now, I'm not talking about climate change specifically, but I've heard him say, environmentalists upset me. And he goes, well, what do you mean by the environment? Everything? And it sort of seems to outrage him. And I kind of agree with him there, because so are you telling me that we need to halt our global process and progress and economies and everything? I don't know. I don't know. And so to me, that doesn't bother me because he's exploring what the hell are these people talking about. When you say, I personally have friends and students and people filling my inboxes, I have young kids telling me that they've become vegan, and they ride a bicycle, and sometimes they don't watch TV because it uses electricity. And I mean, they're just becoming so terrified of that they're killing the earth. And so it's this doomsday anti-human sentimentist thing that we're evil. It's almost like a new religion about you're evil. And so to me, it almost makes me in a totally different camp where climate change and the right-left politics, and I consider it a family, I consider it Thanksgiving dinner, and listen to the climate thing go back and forth. And I'm like, I'm not even here. And that might actually annoy some people in the environmental field that might feel betrayed by me saying that, but I don't care. My job, and it's not just the Amazon, and that's one note I wanted to make is that my career has taken place largely in the Amazon and also in India and now a lot in Africa. But it's not even just these exotic places either. It's people realizing that the salmon runs in Canada and the butterfly gardens in our backyards, there's biodiversity everywhere. And I strongly feel like the idea of jungle keepers, the idea of stewards of nature. And so for me, my job, my one thing, and I try to tell this to these kids that message me and that my inboxes are full of this where they go, the climate is burning and elephants are in decline and tigers and this and that. I'm like, guys, look, first of all, calm down, first of all, go outside, go get laid, do something, have fun. Next, pick something that you can affect. And it doesn't have to be with the environment. Do something good on earth. Go help somebody that needs food. Go help your elderly neighbor, whatever it is. Practice with being effective at one thing at a time. And so for me, like I said, from those early days of sitting there with JJ on the side of a river and going,

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someone has to protect this. My concern is that we've lost 70% of the wildlife on this planet in the last 50 years. That's a huge problem. Wildlife maintain the ecosystems. And so I have a very clear cut, very definable, very measurable, and provable thing that I'm fighting against. And it's a very, to me, it's a very like small ask, don't cut down the 3% of the world that has 50% of the biodiversity in it. Maybe let's keep some wild tigers for future generations and because tigers have their own inherent right to exist here. That's my thing. In terms of when we get to, you know, I get attacked for, you know, you should be a vegan. Okay. You have me roll into a village in the Amazon when they offer me spider monkey, and you tell me that I should be a vegan, and you see how much they respect you when you tell them that you're a vegan.

Like, but no, so for someone like Peterson, I think it's actually good that he's, first of all, telling everyone to make their damn beds and exploring it through a different lens. You know, he's coming at it from a totally different thing and saying, you know, are we just being alarmist here? Are we what? I mean, again, imagine if, you know, imagine if there isn't a problem and they're making one out of it and all the implications that that could have for progress. It's like, so I think what he's doing is perfectly reasonable. There is a podcast though where he's, it was a great one though, where he's discussing animal intelligence. And I could really see that, you know, the human psyche and theology and religion is so much his world that the really the idea of animals being intelligent was novel and it was fascinating.

Yeah, that's why I would love for the two of you to talk just, I don't know, and hopefully I'm not on a line here, but he is so focused on the human mind that I think he forgets that there's other life out there. There's this whole machine of intelligence, of a kind of intelligence out there. This entire trillions of species, tiny and big, just moving everywhere. And we're actually part of it. So like to look at a human psychology as distinct from that is missing at least some of the picture. Some of the picture. I do believe though, I would agree with him on that humans are unique. Human psychology is unique. We just are. But I also, you know, he's in such an interesting place because usually you have, you know, environmentalists who are like, you know, nature, nature, nature, and then you, and that's very anti-human.

And then you have the other side. And it's like, he's on this path where he's starting to explore what those like diverse intelligences mean. And that to me is really amazing because I love hearing what he'll do with that. And I think also on top of that, I think if you're aware of nature, deeply aware of nature, it gives you another perspective on the evolutionary history of humans. It's one thing to be an evolutionary biologist and kind of study it from a like philosophical perspective. And it's the other to really, I think, experience it and deeply know it to see, I don't know, the fact that we came from fish and really be cognizant of that. That's something else. That's like, I don't know, to realize that we're part of a computing machine that created intelligence. We're part of the thing that started bacteria and is now

creating AI and, I don't know, Dunkin Donuts. I don't know what else is impressive.

The other great human achievement.

He's the other great human. I was thinking, well, what's interesting about Boston?

But I feel like we keep scratching up against this thing and this conversation that it's so easy. I think something like 50 or more percent of the humans on this planet live in cities.

And I think it's so easy for people to forget that we share this planet with so many other

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things. And I think that in a way, we're almost like ecological orphans and that we've left the things that actually make us feel at home. And that's a bit of a stretch because I don't know if everybody feels that way. But for me, I mean, professionally as an expedition guide, when I take people into nature, I see what happens to them. And they leave going, I mean, it doesn't have to be the Amazon. It could be upstate New York. But it's like, if you do it the right way, if you remove the fear of breaking an ankle, seeing a snake, being bitten by a mosquito, all that stuff, if you can get people to a peaceful moment and you're fly fishing, a lot of times they'll take that moment and they'll talk about it the rest of their life. If they don't live in that, then there's those of us who spend our lives doing that. But for a reason, because it's the only place we feel sane.

And you were kind enough to suggest that we might travel together for a time at some point.

If we do that, if we journey together, where would you recommend we should go?

So what I would want to show you is sort of, I'd want to take you to church. I'd want to take you to see the giant trees, take you to meet the old gods, really. There's places when you walk in off the river that are so deep. And again, this is now we do this. We have the boats, we have the rangers, we protect this ecological corridor now. And so it would be taking you to meet some of those loggers that we converted. It'd be taking you, we'd have to go to the floating forest, meet some of the trees that I love the most, go piranha fishing and really just spend, my ideal trip for you would be to spend five days of airplane mode phone on completely living out comfortable. I'm not saying I don't want to torture you. I'm saying go and live comfortably on an expedition in the Amazon. And that means a few days at this research station, maybe go up river three days and camp up here just on the edge of where the uncontacteds are, and then come back and then see the jungle keeper station. But along the way, seeing all the special sacred places, it'd be almost like saying, let's go see all the treasures of Italy. It's like this is one of the most beautiful things on earth. And I've had the incredible, almost unbelievable fortune to be responsible for protecting it. And I don't, I think it's a privilege to be able to share that with people.

To be able to witness what this earth has created. It's been just a gift just even to follow your Instagram. The window you create on this part of the world is just really beautiful. I do want to ask on that,

and maybe it's like behind the scenes a little bit, but how do you keep the equipment dry?

How hard is bringing the equipment to the cameras? You're an incredible filmmaker and photographer. So how do you make it work? I don't know. It's not that hard. It's not that bad. It's wet. It is wet. The new iPhones are waterproof. And if they don't get, I'm telling you dude, it's been such a weapon. It's been awesome. If you drop it in the river, my one thing is you got to have a tether because I drop it all the time. And so I'll be hanging off a boat, and I'll be trying to take a video, and I'll be like, here we are in the Amazon, you can see the lung. That's the biggest thing. But we shoot on cannons, and I don't know, it's worked out. It's not that bad. Oh really? So you can keep the equipment dry?

I keep the equipment dry, and a lot of people put their shit in silica at night and keep it dry, and then they take it out. And I find that when you do that, the temperature change creates moisture inside the camera. So what I do is I never do that. I just keep my cameras in my backpack with a zipper. So they're more or less exposed to the elements. And so it always has

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a little bit of equilibrium. And that's it. I shoot on some pretty fancy equipment sometimes, and it's great. But the awesome thing though now is that with a cell phone, I put my phone down on the ground a few weeks ago, and let this rhino walk up to it and stuff. And it's like, you can get video footage that you can literally put on Netflix. It's getting really exciting. And that's where I deviate from the nature of people that are like, we need to go back and live in cabins. I'm like, dude, this is awesome. And I love taking slo-mo's. No way. It makes you re-appreciate, but just by yourself. Just re-appreciate over and over and over. And then you can also share it with the world. Well, that's the thing is sharing it with people. There's nothing better than teaching a kid to catch a fish. And in a way, Instagram has allowed us to do that where it's like, I can have this crazy ass moment that is so unique and then put it up for people to see. I mean, I remember one of the most recent things that got people, you never know what's going to get people excited. I literally just like, there was 3,000 butterflies on the beach. And they were like, black, red, and blue. Beautiful butterflies. And I just like panned the phone across it and then like jumped in the river and swam away. And like threw that up on Instagram and people went berserk. They're like, this is the most amazing thing in like four different accounts to reach out to try and share it. And I was like, butterflies, they're everywhere. There's 4,000 species of butterfly in the Amazon. But sharing that with people is beautiful.

How do you find the thing to shoot? How do you come up with the butterflies? How do you notice the thing that's beautiful and say, I'm going to wait a minute, like pause. This is beautiful. Let me take a picture of this. Because sometimes you might get used to the beauty, right? Yeah. Yeah. Or like sometimes simple crazy things like leaf cutter ants, they're just walking by. They become, it becomes pedestrian. It's like, well, I mean, just like when you're, you know, you're living at the elephant camp and it's like, the elephant comes out and he starts like trash in the water bucket. We're all like, we just stop. We're trying to watch Peaky Blinders here. Just leave us alone. It becomes normal after watching. But no, in the jungle, I don't, that's never a struggle for me because as a photographer, it's like, whenever my eye hits on something, I went, I've never seen that many of those butterflies, all the same species together. I'm trying to get this one thing that the butterflies do is in the dry season, the salt deposits, you'll get like three or four, maybe 5,000 butterflies all coming onto this one area of sand because there'll be like some leaching. There'll be some, some salt deposit there or something. And they'll all be wings flat against the ground with their, with their proboscis on the sand. And if you go walk near them, they will vortex up and you have a rainbow vortex of butterflies and you can like go run through that. And it's surreal. And I want to, what I want to do is get the shot where I, I guess leave the phone recording in slow mo facing up and leave it there for an hour, let the butterflies come in and settle and then disturb them. So I get the bottom of the vortex of the bug. I'm like, these are the ways I think where I'm like, how can I show people the absolute mind blowing, you know, perfection? That's amazing. I mean, that's what I have. You know, I'm sure that somebody else could do it with, you know, a red and, and nail it, but it's like, that's what I have in the jungle because I have to travel light and I, you know. Yeah. I think that, that, that really, that works. I have the same thing when I was traveling in Ukraine. The, the equipment was just the suitcase, that suitcase over there with a foam and you just shove it full of equipment and who cares, you can go to war zone. It doesn't matter. It doesn't,

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like I, it has to do with the, you're talking about like with the, like protecting your camera or not. It feels like the more you protect stuff, the more it's going to get damaged. Yeah. Like, so like, see like my cameras, they're all missing. This is like, this is amazing to me. So all my cameras are missing the, they're all how you can see the metal through the paint. Nice. So all this. And so like, they're all, because I'm constantly like, I'll like slide in and like take a picture and like, they're banged up, but these, they're good, they're good machines. I think they get tough over time. If you put them through, it's like the immune system. It's like muscles. It's like David Goggins cameras. If you got to, you got to make them suffer every day. Yeah. What's your view on hunting? So you really hate poachers. I really hate poachers. How do they operate? Who are they? What are they up to? What do they do? Poachers to me are the people that are going in and annihilating wildlife for profit without any, you know, the people that are going in and machine gunning an elephant to take its tusks. The people that are sneaking into protected areas in Africa and shooting rhinos so that they can cut off their horns before the animal's even dead while its baby is beside it. So, and there's a difference between a poacher and a hunter. I'm a hunter. JJ is a hunter. I work with an organization called VetPaw in Africa and they use United States veterans who have come back, post-911 veterans who have come back from the war and have these skills. And they've been using these guys to protect the last black rhinos, white rhinos, elephants. And so we've, I've gotten to see this play out on a private reserve in Africa where these incredible people have decided to protect zebras, wildebeests, all types of impala, giraffes, several herds of elephants, white rhinos, black rhinos. All of this stuff is protected. And what's interesting is it's a hunting preserve. And so it's been very interesting and challenging sharing my work there with the public because, for instance, I went to a very high-profile photographer recently and I said, you have to get over here and see this. It's amazing what these people have done. It's this reserve called Buffalo Cluf and they've, you know, this rescued families of elephants and they have, you can see a black rhino every day if you want to. They're critically endangered. And it's because of the work that VetPaw does, protecting these animals from poachers. But what people don't understand is that hunting happens all the time on the reserve, not for the elephants and the rhinos. Those are special and they will never be hunted there. But things like an impala, things like an inyala, a wildebeest, a zebra, there aren't as many predators as there used to be. So if you leave those animals un hunted, you know, without the wolf to chase the herd, to thin off the ones that are old and dying or sick, well, then you just have animals that are old and dying and sick walking around suffering. And so on the reserves like this, they hunt and they take the old ones and they use the funding from hunting. No one's gonna pay you \$30,000 to take a picture of a buffalo, but they'll pay you \$30,000 to hunt a buffalo. And so these reserves, responsibly and ethically on foot, can go hunting and manage. And again, if they were hunting rhinos or if they're hunting elephants, I'd be out in a second. They're hunting non-endangered species. They're hunting non-endangered species, they're hunting game species. And the difference is that a poacher is gonna, so those are responsible hunters that are ecologists and conservationists, whereas a poacher is someone that will come in and kill recklessly

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and murder an animal for no reason, for a part to sell.

I would love to travel together actually. So we'll talk offline. I would love to make that happen if you allow me. I'm 100% serious, man. I have tremendous respect for your work and I've been watching you since the beginning. I would love to do that together.

I've been, I've talked to Joe quite a bit about it. I really

love the idea of eating the meat that I've hunted. It's mostly what I eat is meat, not for dietary. I don't have any weird constraints on my diet and so on. I just really enjoy eating meat. It's really good. And there is a part of me that's bothered by factory farming.

Yes, sure. That it's very easily accessible meat, but there's something deeply wrong with it.

Part of the reason I love fishing and eating the fish that I catch is that it just seems to be more ethical, but also a more intimate, deep connection, honest connection with nature. You get to see the killing of the food that you're consuming versus removing that from the picture, not even thinking about it, not thinking about that this came from the meat.

Yeah, I love the idea that I kill one animal and I eat that animal basically for the whole year.

Yeah, an ethically slaughtered animal, whether it's a fish or a deer or whatever else.

To me, that's, oh God, I'm going to use the wrong religious term here, but I feel like I want to use the word sacrament, but there's a deeply profound ritual. Honestly, if you teach a kid to grow a vegetable, you show a kid how to grow a carrot and the miracle of, wait, I put a, this thing just grew in there, it just appeared because there was sunlight and it's like, yeah.

When you feel that fish tug on the line, to me, it does something that awakens a deep primal something, this satisfaction. Then when you eat that, you feel good.

The other thing, sort of functionally speaking, is that aside from the fact that I think it's one of the original, we're so disconnected. We should be hunting. We should be gathering, walking more. Look at what we discussed now. People are like, oh, you got to get your steps in for the day. That never used to be a problem. People are like, well, should we be eating animals? It's like, what do you think we do here on earth? I'm not sure how you got so confused, but Walmart did it to you. I don't know. Living where I've lived, I mean, from 18 to 35, I feel like I've grown up, I've lived more outside than I have inside. To me, showing people these things, I can see this miraculous wonder in their eyes when they realize that they can reach out into the world and interact with something. When I hear these frantic people talking about whether or not it's right, it's like, of course it is. Then again, factory farming is awful, but I try to stay, I try and walk the line. I'm worried about wild animals. I'm worried about wild ecosystems. The other thing that's sort of important about hunting is that if people's livelihoods depend on salmon and elk and ocean fisheries, well, then they'll fight to protect it naturally because it's part of their life. If everybody's going to Burger King and everybody's getting chicken wrapped in plastic, they forget that the fish are there because they're too busy watching sitcoms. Then when the conglomerate comes in and builds a dam, nobody really cares, and then you just end up with a few hippies and signs standing next to the river and it becomes silly. We forget the meaning. You mentioned that ayahuasca reveals-

Oh boy. Oh no. The darkness that's there in the jungle. There's beauty, but there's darkness.

So what is it that ayahuasca reveals? What is the heart of darkness?

Fuck it. Hope is the heart of darkness right up. I'm going to show you a picture of our shaman, and then I'm going to ask if you want to do ayahuasca here, not here in that sense. It can only

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be done in the jungle. Anybody that tells you, I've heard people be like, oh, I did ayahuasca in Brooklyn last week. I'm like, no, you didn't. I actually told that to my native friends. I went, hey, guess what? I said, a bunch of gringos keep thinking they're doing ayahuasca in Brooklyn, and they were howling laughing. They're like, you can't do it outside the jungle. I was like, exactly. I've never done ayahuasca. I've done or eaten whatever mushrooms. It's a wonderful experience. I think it's wonderful. But ayahuasca, oh man, yeah. See, I had done mushrooms. I thought

I was like, okay. Yeah, I was like, I got this. I had my notebook. I was like, I'm going to journal a little bit. But I quickly realized how out of my depth I was and how unprepared I was for what was happening because you sit in a circle with these native guys, and there's one, he's got the feathers, and he's old, and he's got a face like the map of the world, and he's smoking this fat old tobacco thing, and he calls you forward, and you kneel before him, and you're going, is it too late to back up? And everyone's, there's one candle, and he blows smoke over the cup, and he hands it to you. And you're like, again, it's these things that you can't argue with it's these facts. You're like, as soon as this goes down, I'm gone. I know it. And this is a moment in my life that I have to either embarrass myself in front of everybody, or I'm going forward with this, and then I went and sat, and you're sitting in the dark, and it's again, so we're on a platform with palm-thatched roof, and the jungle is all around you. So all those tens of millions of frogs and insects are, and I'm like, all right, cool. And I remember I tried to light a cigarette or something, and I went, oh, that's not gonna happen. And then I put my hands on the floor, and my experience, I mean, we've done mushrooms, so you know, it's interesting, it's introspective. No, this was like somebody unzipped the universe. I spent a lot of, without boring people with it, I spent a lot of time in unconstructed dream space, floating between nebulas. There was a long period where there was no physical shape, where I lived without a name. And so it's like, you get brought so deep down, so elementally lost in the universe, where I truly felt like I was experiencing moving through places like that asteroid that I have. It's like a piece of, your piece of something detached from the earth. And so I got back from it and had an interesting new appreciation for life. I strongly suggest that people just do mushrooms like a normal person, unless you're ready to- It was really intense. It was really intense, but to be fair, the shaman who did it was like the old school guy, and he was getting up there in years and he had forgotten and overboiled the brew. And so we came back and I was like four in the morning and I had all this crazy shit. I'd been on journeys and years down there. And so when I came back and I had like hands, I started crying. I started absolutely weeping. Gratitude or what? Gratitude that I was alive. I was going to get to see my people again. I was like, I'm going to have to see my parents again. I'm going to get to talk to you. So you kind of thought you might have been gone. I was gone. I was gone. I was a dimly conscious something floating in dark space and spent what felt like years down there. And so when I really did feel like being reborn, which I was like, cheap trick. But no, the way it moves you through the jungle, the way the jungle moves through your skin, there are moments of absolute majesty and incredible discovery that happened along the way. And on the way up, the jungle brings you up and the shaman brings you up and you get to move through the forest in a way that it's almost like you're inhabiting the consciousness of animals. Very, very, very like, I didn't think that hallucinogenics could do this to a brain. Mushrooms, you're like, oh, I feel like I can

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feel music. You guys want to watch March of the Penguins? This is transformative. Like what, did that change you? I don't know. I think it definitely, I almost feel like it showed me the thing that I was scared the most of. And it's that it was like that it's all just cold, dark, nothing. It brought me to the basement of the universe. And I felt like the point of that was to come back to this place where there's all this life and light and love and all this amazing stuff that we experience on a day-to-day basis and don't take for granted. And so just like almost dying, this was like fully dying. But the great part is, is that usually it's not that intense. This guy had overboiled the brew. He'd also, I saw the vine afterwards. Most ayahuasca vines are like as thick as your arm. This one was like as thick as a garbage can. It was like the oldest ayahuasca vine you can imagine. And at like four in the morning, I like crawled over to my friend Chris, who's a tough New York City firefighter. We were like holding each other, just like weeping, just like, thank God we're back. And then we had to go looking for the shaman. Where the hell is this guy? He was gone. We found him in the morning and he was laying in the stream naked, like ET at the end when he's like laying like in the, yeah, he kicked his own ass with that brew. And he retired after that. So we really got like, somebody turned the dial all the way up on us. And so we got, we got blasted. So it's not supposed to be that bad. But I think you're somebody who's fearless in sort of diving into those kinds of places. I think I also retire from ayahuasca. I could be fearless with other things, but I think I'm good. It sounds kind of, to me personally, kind of exciting.

Well, I think that you have a severely fearless aspect to you. I mean, you're, when you come up with something that intrigues you, like if somebody told you right now that you could go physically into deep space, I feel like you would do it. Yeah. Yeah. If go to Mars, yeah. Right. And some of it is, I don't even know if you have that. Some of that is more Goggins. Like I want to see where my mind breaks by pushing it to tough places. There's a curiosity of exploring the mind, the limits of the mind. I feel like you're not a cold plunge. That's like, you're not coming back. Right. Right. And it's okay. I do. I'm with you on that. I love seeing my limits. I absolutely love seeing my limits. I love getting my ass kicked. I love being shown how insignificant I am. But when it comes to something like that, where you got to push your chips in, it's got to be something for me. It's got to be a hill that I believe in before I die on it. And it's like, to me, the promise of exploring space isn't enough. But like even just the way, I mean, you said, you're like, I'm going to Ukraine. Here I go. There's a certain dedication to curiosity at any expense. And I think that that is something that maybe we share in different directions. Something tells me with those crocodiles outside, I would have gotten eaten. Something tells me there's something trying to preserve you in this world. I'm not sure exactly what that is. Somehow you keep surviving. What do you think is the meaning of this whole thing? Why are we here? Like, do you ever ask yourself for that question? I feel like that's every day. I feel like I'm someone that lives with that a lot. And I think that it actually takes me away from the human world a little bit. I feel like I've always been a little bit apart. Because I think that other people do mushrooms and they go, wow, I really made me think about how amazing it is here. And I feel like on a daily basis, I find myself where I'm like, I can't believe that any of this is possible.

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And that goes from how delicious something tastes to being able to talk to someone in your family or have as times where I'm in the Amazon and I miss home and I even just FaceTiming with someone. I go, this is possible. People were rubbing sticks together to try and survive Sabertooth Tigers not that long ago. And I'm over there like, yo, mom, look at this. It's wild. Like I'm in a constant state of all. And so I actually hope that this is a testing ground. And whether it's aliens or God or whatever it is, that this is something crucially important. That would be nice. Because it feels like it is.

Yeah. I hope that too, that the universe almost created us to see what's possible.

And that I'd like to believe that beauty and good is possible.

And those are the things that make me say that it's impossible for it to just mean nothing.

And just like you said, there could be life forms that we can't even understand.

I'm very open to the idea that there's meanings that we have no idea about.

The few things I know are the things that I love and some of the things that I love are being pushed to extinction. So I try to protect them. But that's my mission.

But I'm saying like in terms of what are we doing here, I'm just always amazed at the simplest things that we can sit here doing this, exchanging.

Using our imagination to fill in the gaps, exchanging feelings, experiences, images.

Yeah. It fills you with awe. And every once in a while, you get a little glimpse of something, like a deeper meaning that might be there. You don't really know what it is,

but you get a glimpse and you keep searching. And then it's over before you know it, Paul.

Well, hopefully for you, you got many more years.

It was dark, man.

You're an important, important and a beautiful man. Paul, thank you so much for talking today.

Thank you for being who you are for everything you're doing.

I hope to see you again soon, many times, and maybe one day soon in the jungle.

I hope that happens. Thank you, Lex.

Thanks for listening to this conversation with Paul Rosalie. To support this podcast,

please check out our sponsors in the description. And now let me leave you with some words from Jane Goodall. If we kill off the wild, then we're killing off a part of our souls.

Thank you for listening and hope to see you next time.