

[Transcript] Lex Fridman Podcast / #372 - Simone Giertz: Queen of Sh*tty Robots, Innovative Engineering, and Design

The following is a conversation with Simone Yetch, an inventor, designer, engineer and roboticist famous for a combination of humor and brilliant creative design in the systems and products she creates, including as part of her new product design company called Yetch. She has a popular YouTube channel where she has demonstrated a lot of her incredible and fun designs and inventions from quote, shitty robots to a Tesla Model 3 converted into a truck, but where she also revealed her personal journey after having been diagnosed with a brain tumor. Simone is a brilliant, fun and inspiring human being. It was truly an honor for me to get to meet her and to have this chat. And now a quick few second mention of each sponsor. Check them out in the description. It's the best way to support this podcast. We got masterclass for learning, insight tracker for biological data and athletic greens for my daily multivitamin. Choose wisely, my friends. Also, if you want to work with our amazing team, we're always hiring. Go to lexfreedman.com slash hiring. And now onto the full ad reads. As always, no ads in the middle. I try to make this interesting, but if you must skip them, please still check out our sponsors. I love their stuff. And maybe you will too. This show, Speaking of Love, is brought to you by masterclass. 180 bucks a year gets you an all access pass to watch courses from the best people in the world at their respective disciplines. The list is so long. And it's amazing exploration of all the humanities able to create. You know, when I ask about the meaning of life, to me at the core, it's love. But the way that love manifests itself in the human condition in society, I think at this moment, I can try to express as the creation of beauty, of increasing the amount of beauty in the world, of celebrating, of noticing, of admiring, and of creating beauty. And the mastery of a particular discipline, I think, is one of the best ways to create that beauty. So the best people in the world doing a thing and teaching you how to do it, or even just talking through how to do it. It's not always the big advice, but the little details. And you notice the genius of these people in the details, in the way they see the world, in the way they care themselves, in the way they start and end the thought, in the way they start and end the sentence, in the way they look, in the way they move their hands, in the way they think, in the way they hope, in the way they fear. This is why it's good to learn from the best people in the world. Get unlimited access to every masterclass and get 15% off an annual membership at masterclass.com slash

Lex. This show is also brought to you by Inside Tracker, a service I use to track biological data that comes from my body to give me recommendations on what the heck I should be doing in my life.

I'm happy to report, if you cared, that most markers for me are looking pretty good. The only small exceptions, I think, reveal themselves in just the tremendous amount of stress I've been under over the past year. And I think stress or not, many of you listening to this, are going through a rough time, for reasons that are hard to explain and for reasons that are obvious.

The human mind can experience some deep moments or deep days and weeks and months of loneliness, for reasons that make no sense to the outside world, but it's still real to the human mind. And of course, our life is such that we experience a lot of loss, a lot of struggle, a lot of pain and suffering. And through that, it's more obvious that the mind can be in turmoil and suffer and feel lonely and feel hopelessly lost in this world. And

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I think through all of that, the least you could do is to honor this life you're given, this moment, this chance you're given, no matter how hard it is by taking care of yourself, mentally, physically. It sounds silly to say, but sometimes a nap, sometimes a shower, sometimes a healthy meal, and maybe a walk, a brisk walk, or a run can make the difference between a mind that's really struggling and a mind that at least sees a light at the end of the tunnel. So take care of yourself. We need you here. Got special savings for a limited time when you go to [inside.tracker.com slash Lex](https://inside.tracker.com/slash/Lex). This show is also brought to you by athletic greens and his AG1 drink that I just consumed and I really enjoyed. I put it in the refrigerator to make it cold. I don't know why I've been into that recently. It's an all in one daily drink that I drink twice a day now that has all the multivitamins make sure I'll get all the healthy stuff in there. You can read up about it. The point is you don't have to worry about all the vitamins and minerals you're supposed to get because athletic greens takes care of all that for you. For me, it's a little bit home in a bottle. I make the drink and even when I'm traveling, I feel, I feel grounded. All the turmoil, all the madness going on in the outside world that there's something at least I can rely on. A little bit of habit. I do the same thing with meditation. I wake up every morning and repeat a mantra to myself and most evenings before bed, unless I'm really struggling, I'll repeat the mantra and it's a kind of meditative process. So that to me, no matter where I am, feels like home because home is a place you live in inside your mind. But little triggers, positive triggers like drinking an athletic greens drink is very much that for me. All of a sudden, I'm transformed into this place, into this feeling of home. They'll give you a free one year supply of vitamin D and five free travel packs with your first purchase when you go to [athleticgreens.com slash lex](https://athleticgreens.com/slash/lex). This is the Lex Friedman podcast. To support it, please check out our sponsors in the description. And now, dear friends, here's Simone Yetch. What was the first cool thing you built when you fell in love with the process of making stuff? You know, I think in the beginning of building stuff, you run into the limitations of your skills so much. So I feel like honestly, building gets less and less frustrating or like I love it more and more, the more I know. So the limitations aren't fun? The limitations are fun, but it's like when you have an idea of something and you want to make it a certain level and then you just have to compromise with the materials and the tools and the skills you have. So I can't remember first time where I felt like, I'm proud of this. Wow, this was so smooth. I'm so proud of it. I feel like a lot of people, I watch them build stuff and it's just like watching water pour down. It's just like so easy and for me, it's just like trying to shove a toy car into a wall. So you're not able to step back and marvel at the early creations, even like we're not even talking the Arduino stuff even before then. I'm from Sweden and you have to choose either sewing or woodworking and I chose woodworking in middle school. And I remember the sense of pride when I got to bring something home and that thing of like, oh my God, I get to show my parents this. And I think that is kind of the feeling that I've built my job around. It's like the sense of pride and wanting to show people something that I made. And back then, it was like a little wooden spoon. And now it's a slightly larger wooden spoon. Wooden spoon. It's dynamic and moves and has a mind of its own. You first started doing more engineering type stuff with Arduino boards at Punch2Design, which is an SF engineering firm. What are just from your memory there? What are some cool things

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you built there? So the thing is, I went to advertising school and I just like a vocational studies a year. And I realized there that I didn't care much for advertising, but I thought it was really fun to build stuff in programs. So like, I just completely focused on that. And there, I built my first hardware project or like electronics project, which was this iPhone case with retractable guitar strings. So basically, I imagined that you could like pull out guitar strings from the bottom of your iPhone and you could pluck it to your belt and then you could hold a chord on the screen. And I built that together with my friend, Jonathan. And I was like, oh, this is dope. I thought it was so much fun. And I considered like, oh, should I go to school for this? But then I thought, maybe I can get a job and I could get paid to learn about electronics. So just based off of that one project, I got the job at Punch2Design, which actually was one year internship. Can you explain what we're talking about here? So it's a case with guitar strings attached to it. Does it actually work at all? It does. These are not on the screen guitar strings. No. So they're actual strings that you pull out. So there's a mechanism that's almost like a seat belt mechanism. And yeah, you pull them out from the bottom of your phone and you can attach them to your belt. I mean, it's terrible. There's a few different ways to decide if somebody's touching a guitar string. And what you do in a real guitar is you have the little it's like measuring the vibration or the change in the, as the, yeah, you're measuring how the guitar is vibrating. And you can't really do that because I can't have a receiving sensor because the guitar strings are going to move in relationship to that because you don't have like a rigid neck. And this is like, yeah, this was my first electronics project. I was a little fledging baby maker. But what I decided was to use capacitive touch, because that is independent on if the guitar strings are moving in relationship to something or in relation to something. So basically, there was just this little Bluetooth Arduino board that this company Punch2Design made. So that was how I found them. And I measured the capacitive touch.

So like whenever the guitar string was measured, there was this little microcontroller that was like, oh my God, a guitar string got measured or it touched. And then that sent a signal over Bluetooth to my phone. And I'd built a little iPhone app that interpreted those Bluetooth signals and then checked what type of cord I was holding on the screen and then play the chord here. So you're holding the chords on the screen. So you're doing the multi-touch sensing there.

That's incredible. I honestly cannot believe that I pulled it off because I think I was, I was, ignorance was definitely bliss because that was like, yeah, the first hardware project I'd ever built, the first iPhone app I'd ever programmed. And like now if somebody was like, hey, I want this to be my first project, I would probably be like, oh, that's a lot. But I pulled it off. Because that's such an interesting thing for people to hear because it's your first project. And a lot of people stop because of the difficulty of their first project. They never truly discovered their own genius because they stopped at the first. And you didn't stop. So it'd be interesting to kind of psychoanalyze you on the couch of why you didn't stop. Because you have to build an app to figure out how to, did you know how to program much or no? Okay. I mean a little bit, but I never programmed it or done any iOS apps. Okay. So you have to figure out how to get, forget like what the app does, just get the app running and working. And then you have to figure out how to get the sensors in like real time, the finger touching, and you have to connect how to

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get the capacitors touch working with the microcontrollers. Do you know anything about the capacitor touch sensors at that time? I mean, it's pretty easy. Now it's basically... Everything is easy. You know, rockets are pretty easy. You sound like my grandma. I have an Italian grandma. And I always trying to get her, we're like trying to get her to tell her recipes. And every recipe starts with, it's very simple. And then there's like 45 minutes of her explaining it. It's like with gymnastics at the Olympics, they make it look easy. The best people in the world always make the impossible seem easy. I pride myself with making buildings that look really hard, because I feel like I'm always struggling so much. You make the easy seem impossible. No. So how many strings was it? Oh gosh, I mean, it's such a long time ago. No, it was six. Oh, six strings. And you can touch it and then there's, wow. And then the phone itself makes the sound. And I still think it's such a cool concept to have this like, I'm not even a guitar player. I don't know. I was, I mean, I got the idea because I was kind of strumming on my charge cord of my phone. Oh, like an air guitar, but on a cord? Yeah. But I've been thinking about it because I'm like, oh man, it would be really fun to go back to that project with what I know now. But the problem with it is that when you're producing the tension in your string just with your arm, like you can't make it taut enough to actually play. Like it kind of becomes playing these like saggy strings. So it's, you're not really getting that experience. And I think that's why, I mean, I, yeah, I haven't really pursued it. I wonder if there's a way to generate the tightness from the case itself. The device that unfolds and then with some kind of tightening mechanism is tight. Yeah, but then it kind of becomes this like whole thing in a guitar, then it just becomes a really shitty guitar. Yeah. Like, which this is a really shitty guitar, but it's also not a guitar. But it's so shitty, it's awesome. Yeah, I don't know. But it's a cool, it's cool that you have an interface between a device that's capable of incredible computational power and an actual hardware thing. Is there something that you can psychoanalyze that made you finish that others could hear in their own struggle to do their first project like that? Because you were not, you were in a non-engineering person, technically. And you did a pretty cool renegade out there, wild, no instructions, engineering project. No, it's definitely, it was an off-road build where it's like, if you're building a Lego kit, it's very much on the road and you're following instructions and this is like, you have no idea if you're headed for a cliff or a dead end or you're going to get stuck. I think it had a natural pressure to it because it was a school project. So it did have deadlines built into it and stuff like that. So that definitely helped. But I think also it was just so incredibly motivating when I realized that I might be able to pull it off. Like that was, I felt like a bloodhound, you know, and you're just like, oh my God, I can actually make this happen. And I think if I hadn't seen that the horizon, it would have been harder to stick through. Were you able to see the end of the tunnel pretty early on? No, not really. So there's something just suffering for a while. I don't know how your brain works, but it's like, if I have a problem, I can't stop thinking about it. Like it's so fun to think about it. Like I spent two and a half years designing a coat hanger and I just can't stop thinking about it. Like I get so into it because I think it's so much fun. Take me to this two year journey of the coat hanger. How did it begin? It began with a corner in my home where I couldn't fit a coat rack. The thing is, I shouldn't have brought this up because I'm going to release it as a product

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probably in a year. Oh, an actual product. Okay. Well, that's a mystery. It's a mystery. Yeah. But it solves a fundamental problem in the human condition. And I am so excited about it. And I cannot, I don't, yeah, but this is, I get so pumped about it because I see, it's just this issue or like this problem that I want to solve. And I kind of can't put it to rest until I have. I mean, speaking of coat hangers, doorknobs have always been interesting to me. It's cool how there's things that everybody uses that somebody designed.

Lex. Yeah. Oh my God. So, okay. So this is, I have two big, so basically I started on YouTube and I've been doing that for like the last seven or eight years and I've kind of been thinking of like, okay, what's next for me because I want to keep on trying out new things. And I'm kind of going into two different avenues. One is the product business that I started, coat hinges, TBD. And then I am working on a pilot episode of a show where each episode is about an everyday object and why they look the way that they do. So we've written a pilot episode about forks and it's all about like, why do they look the way that they do? Why did this become the like eating implement of the West? Why are we ruled by an iron fork? How did that happen? And every everyday object that you have and that you just take for granted, somebody's just made it up. Yeah. Well, sheep. Well, keep using it. Yeah. Even if it's not optimal. I mean, presumably most objects are optimal, you hope. Or at least a local optimal. Yeah. And that's what I think is so like the world around us. And this is why I love building things is because it just opens up this idea that the world around us is so malleable and you can make objects work for you better. Like I spent, I made this fruit bowl. I had a fruit bowl and I was always annoyed that I had either too little or too much fruit for it. So I made a fruit bowl where I can change the diameter of it. It has a mechanism so you can like make it bigger or smaller. And that's just like the thing of being like bowls. Why are they the way that they are? I can make them different. And I think like, I want to make an episode about doorknobs. I think it's so interesting. Why are they the way they are? Why are they placed the way where they are? I think that's going to be a rabbit hole from which you will never return. I would happily live in that rabbit hole forever. Like if I could, if I can like dig out a little niche for myself there, because I think it's like, you know, they go so deep. They're also on different sides of doors. You never like the push-pull situation on doors in general. Like that's one of the main problems of humanity is figuring out the push-pull, figuring out which it is embarrassing. Yeah. Okay. How many, there's eight billion people on earth. Every single second, there is millions of people being embarrassed by the confusion of what the push-pull is. Real life stats from that. Right now there's somebody, some guy first time in college, he's trying to be impressive to everybody who pushes on and he plays it off like it's cool ocean. I knew that over and over. And it affects our behaviors. That was why I think it's so interesting with forks is that forks actually affect our eating behaviors and they can get you to eat faster or slower, take bigger bites or smaller bites. And there are all these ways or like the social, I mean, the reason that chopsticks work is because they do the food chopping in kitchen rather than on the plate. And also you have a bowl that you bring to your mouth with, whereas a plate you keep on the, like there are just all these ways of these objects affect our behavior, opening and closing doors. And I think it's such an interesting take on culture through and like human behavior through these objects that we use every day and we never question them really. Yeah. And then there's institutions that are

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controlling our mind that don't want us to know the truth. Why are sporks not more popular? Have you asked yourself that question? Yeah. No, it's all big utensil is behind all of it. All right. So, I mean, in those early days, did you suffer from imposter syndrome? Like that leaped to being an engineer. Was there, especially when you started working on points of the design on a team of engineers, was there insecurity? Both yes and no. I think I've, I always try to flip my flaws into selling points. And for that, so getting that job, I I was like, oh, you're a team of engineers. Everybody working here is an engineer. Your customers are not all engineers. You need somebody who can be your filter and tell you when something is going to be too hard for your customers to understand. So it was more me being like, oh, no, it might seem that me not having skills is a bad thing. But actually, it's a great thing. I represent the everyday person. I understand deeply what everybody needs and wants. Yes, that is me, the representation of the average human. But I mean, I remember that. So I studied physics for a year in college, and then I dropped out. And I had this rule for myself that whenever I did not understand anything, I would ask a question. So I was always raising my hand in class. And it's this room, entire auditorium filled with incredibly intelligent people who are mortified of seeming stupid. And I think that was really like, and I remember people at the end of the year coming up to me being like, thank you so much for all the questions you asked, because whenever there was something that I was too scared to ask, you always raised your hand. So I think it is a bit of a skill. And I think that is kind of how I channel my imposter syndrome is I'm just like, no, let's lay it all out there. So you're okay being almost like self deprecating, just coming off. I mean, I'm definitely that I kind of lean into a call myself an idiot. I lean into being stupid. I think not all heroes wear capes. And the guy and girl who asks the stupid question is everybody zero, including the teachers. Yeah, I think it's it's both it's a double edged sword. I started out on the internet, kind of I kind of got the moniker, the queen of shitty robots, because I posted a lot of stuff on slash r slash shitty robots on Reddit. And people started calling me the queen of slash r slash shitty robots. And then the slash r kind of dropped. So what I'm trying to say is I did not come up with that with myself. But I did happily adopt it. So I definitely came from a place of like, building things that didn't work and kind of yeah, everything going wrong every time like happily failing. And I think that was amazing. It was a really powerful tool for me to like not get my perfectionism in the way because if I set out to do something that's great, then I'm never going to start. And I was like, no, I just need something that looks funny. But what I've realized now is there was also a defense mechanism. Being self deprecating is like always beating people to the punch. It kind of was a survival tactic on the internet of being like never daring to set out as an expert. And I still do that. Like I'm terrified to tell people how to do something even if I know because it kind of opens you up for being shot down. So I think I have, I definitely have a conflicted relationship with it. And now, especially as I'm getting older, I am more skilled than I was before. I mean, I'm a CEO of three businesses. And I'm like, I don't need to like keep on talking myself down all the time. So yeah, I think it's definitely something that has served me really, really well and that is still like a thing that I have in my work life and in my relationships. But I'm also trying to only do it when it's beneficial to me and not when it's harmful. Yeah. I mean, but when you're as successful as you are, I feel like people like it when you're

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self deprecating, you don't take yourself seriously. You have that humility. I think it's probably the hardest when you're starting out. I think it was easier than almost, I don't know. But nobody takes you seriously, right? And when you're starting out, when you're young. You know, I just realized that I played a lot more stupid than I was. And I think it's also, oh gosh, I can't believe I'm the one bringing this up. But like being a woman in a male dominated field. And you're like, I was just trying to make myself the least amount threatening or like really unthreatening because people are threatened by you in different ways. And it's like, you have such a thin line that you can walk where you're like, okay, I need to be just attractive enough for people to not be offended by my appearance, but just unattractive enough for people to not sexualize me. I have to be just smart and witty enough for people to be like, oh my god, that's really cool. But also shoot myself down enough for other people not to be able to do it or be like, oh yeah, watch this woman try to thinking that she knows how to build electronics. So it's like... That's an interesting skill to build, especially when you put yourself out there on the internet. Unfortunately, that's the reality of the internet. And it's a skill you have to kind of develop. And it's actually why a lot of really brilliant people avoid the internet. Yeah. Like there's not many people, like at MIT, for example, there's not many brilliant professors or PhD students and so on just putting their stuff out there. Because like, if they really put their heart and soul into a thing, first of all, that's really hard. And nobody sees it. And everyone's like, this is boring. So there's so many failure modes, like this is boring. Or like you said, you're coming off as too much of an expert, you're not self deprecating enough. Well, there's just so many failure modes and it's terrifying for people. But I feel like that's a skill you should learn. Because most people like at MIT, at university and so on are doing a lot of awesome stuff. And you should show it off. But I feel like you've figured out a really good process of showing it off. When you fail, when you succeed, all of it, not taking yourself too seriously, but also revealing through the humor and the self deprecation, a kind of genius, a kind of intelligence and curiosity. Okay, I just want to snapshot that quote and put it on my LinkedIn profile. On the back of your book. On the back of my book. When is your autobiography coming out? Oh, never. You don't want to say that because like a year from now. Oh gosh. I don't want to shit on autobiographies. No. No. But even just by saying that I'm shitting on autobiographies. I just, me being interested enough in somebody to want to read 600 pages about them talking about themselves. No. Well, that's exactly the kind of person that should write one. But also I'm fucking 32 years old. What do I have to write about? Like I went through puberty, I lost my virginity and here we are. Like I don't know. It's like such a three chapters. It's a coloring book. Chapter seven. I learned to tie my own shoelaces. I feel like it would be awesome. Anyway, what's the queen? So how did you achieve the status of royalty? The queen of shitty robots? What's the origin

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story there? I mean, I have officially renounced my title now.

Can you still speak of the time when you led?

I can still speak of the time.

Your kingdom?

Yes. No, I mean, it started on because I-

Did you rule by love or fear?

By fear of rejection from me that people would reject me. So I, yeah, I started making these little gifts. Like my, the early projects that I did were very gift forward. It was always like, I only did it because it could be translated into a gift.

Gift forward? I like it.

Yeah. But honestly, it was like it's a really good mental exercise to vet if your project is easy enough to be explained by like a seven second looping video without audio.

And because like nobody's going to care that it also has Bluetooth. Like it's really like, is it self-explanatory enough to be explained through a GIF?

So yeah.

Let me just pause. I'm sorry to interrupt, but I feel like all scientific papers and projects should go through that exercise.

Can you explain us a GIF?

Yeah. Actually, DeepMind does a good job of this. Like, you know, this, we've solved protein folding. Here's a GIF. That's literally what they do because who is going to read the nature paper.

So like this, you have to, like, how do we communicate this visually in a sexy, clean way where people can intuitively understand, even if you don't know what a protein is, even if you don't know what protein folding is. Yeah. It's very like, yeah, if somebody comes out of context, and that's been really interesting also, like building this product business and trying to do the marketing around that. And I'm like, if somebody comes in and they have no idea about what this product is, will they get it explained to them in this ad? And I don't know.

But it's definitely a worthwhile exercise to do. So I started making these projects. I got translated into GIFs, and I posted them on slash r slash shitty robots on Reddit.

So that's how Reddit existed? Yeah. And I loved it. I thought it was really fun. And I was like, I want to contribute with content here. Conquered it. I don't, I mean, okay, I don't know. I was through fear of rejection. I think I was voted top user of 2015. So yeah, that's an old merit.

Once you win a Nobel Prize, you always have the Nobel Prize.

Okay. So what was the first new member of the early GIFs that you created?

So this is when I was at Punch Through Design in San Francisco. I was kind of building a lot of hardware projects for them, but I also felt, and they were so supportive of me. But I also, it's such a different way representing a brand versus representing yourself. So there were some projects that I just like ruled out because I was like, this feels too weird for this brand.

And I started building them on the side. One of them was a toothbrush helmet.

And yeah, so it's like a skateboard helmet with a robot arm on the forehead, kind of like a unicorn horn. And it pressures your teeth for you.

Was that the first YouTube video you uploaded?

It was the first GIF that I uploaded. So actually, I wanted to,

I wanted to do a kid's show about electronics in Sweden because I was like,

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I love electronics. I think it's fucking dope. I could do a kid's show about it. So I filmed this terrible, terrible pilot episode in my bedroom in San Francisco. And that's when I built the toothbrush helmet. And I emailed it to them. I mean, just cold email, like I'd know in or anything. But I was like, hey, I want to do this. And they didn't get back to me. Nobody surprised. And I was like, well, I have this thing I built. I might as well post it on the internet. So that's when I made the little GIF and I posted it on slash r slash duty robots. And I think it got like 50,000 views. And I was like, wow. And from there, I just kept on building things. And I think within six months, it was my full-time job.

Can you go through the detailed design of this toothbrush helmet?

There's a motor. It's like a server. What's the motor? What's the, is an Arduino involved?

Yeah. So I built it off of this robot arm called the me arm. So it's just this acrylic robot arm. And it has three servo motors. It's all controlled by an Arduino, all the electronics. The arm is already pre-built.

It was a kit. So I assembled it.

How do you make sure the length of the arm is the proper?

I mean, the arm came down. So it's like, I mean, I just programmed it to come down to my mouth and then poorly brush my front teeth. Yeah. And it was just swung back and forth. I mean, trial and error. What was the challenges of that?

Do you remember? Oh gosh.

Or was that one not much of a struggle?

No, it was definitely a struggle.

Because also, how do you loop it with a nice GIF?

I mean, it loops fine. Yeah, it looks pretty fine.

Yeah. Or is that that's not that hard?

No, I mean, it doesn't have to be perfect. It's the GIF. It's the internet.

Things are shitty all the time. I mean, I think the biggest struggle of that was that I had this intention for it to be this show and then them not giving back. And I was like, well, if they don't want it, then maybe YouTube will have me.

They don't notice my genius yet. What was so bad about the pilot? Do you remember?

Oh, it's just so cringey. Yeah. I mean, it's thankfully not on the internet, so nobody can find it. But it's very much me being in what I called host mode, which is where I'm like, okay, so what we're going to learn today is that we're going to look at this. This is something called a servo motor and it's like the intonation and everything is really different. And I'm actually, I mean, thinking back of that, I'm so happy that they didn't get back to me because it's such a different thing to kind of start your career in your living room, running back and forth to the camera and like filming something and then looking at it. And like, I got to really find my own voice in a different way. And then like a year later, they offered me a show, but then I was so often running, I was like, no, I don't want to do this. Hmm. You didn't fall into that place of being like a actor, like a YouTuber, where you're presenting a kind of personality, you're more focused on the product you're creating. I mean, I think it's the combination of it. I mean, I think of it as acting sometimes, but I only play the role of myself. But of course, it's like when you're shooting something for the

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seventh time, like you have to be able to muster that enthusiasm. But no, it's not a kind of think of everyday life me as a watered down version of the YouTube version. It's like.

That's a cheap knockoff.

Yeah, the wish.com version. No, it's just like add a few parts water if you have me.

But like on YouTube, it's just so condensed because you have jump cuts and you know, like, I'll script jokes and make sure that everything lands and there's music and stuff. And then like in real life, you don't have any of that, but it's still me.

What are some other cool robots in the early days that stand out to you? I mean, there's a million we can go through. But maybe what was like a challenging one, like a really challenging one in the early days?

I mean, I remember the breakfast robot, which was my second project, was a challenging one.

Was it eating cereal? Yeah, it's a robot that like pours milk

and cereal and feeds me with a spoon. I was mostly challenging because it was so like everything had to be in the right location. And there were so many takes before I got everything right. And by right, I mean, it makes an absolute mess.

Yeah, that one was challenging. How many takes was that one?

I don't know, probably 12, 10, something. It's just a mess everywhere.

It's a mess. And also I use like Cheerios for the cereals and it's shot in my old bedroom in San Francisco and the floors were sticky for weeks afterwards.

Dude, this goes into your autobiography. Yeah, it's nice.

I'm sure we can just type out this podcast and I'll release it as my manager would be stoked.

We'll fix it in post. Yeah, the feed, because you have like a couple of feeding ones, right?

The soup, isn't there a soup one? Yeah, there's a soup robot. There's a beer pouring robot.

I mean, that's awesome. That's a difficult robotics problem in the shitty and the perfect version of having an arm that interacts intimately with a human being. And one of the most intimate things you could do with a human being, that's PG, is to feed it. Where is he going with this?

Oh my God, he's a YouTube comment come live. Damn it.

To me, feeding is tricky or even pouring a beer is tough until glass.

Yeah, it's trickier than anyone who hasn't tried it, thanks. And even making it, I think what I realized is that making things really shitty or failing in a spectacular way is also its own sort of skill. Because the shittiest robot is the one that doesn't turn on, but that isn't much to watch. So it was always wanting for it to fail in these spectacular ways.

No, there's a lot of stuff to be said about engineering in it.

Is there something to be said on a philosophical level about the value of a flawed robot? So the kind of robots you want is to be partially flawed. Do you think the kind of robots we'll have in the home that are friends and you know, almost like pets, wouldn't they need to be kind of shitty?

Because somehow we humans love the shitty.

I mean, it is kind of endearing because I think it kind of, I'm going to mess up this world word, anthropomorphizes them. I think it's, I mean, I never feel as deeply connected to my gromba as when it's like, I'm on a cliff and I'm like, paper. Have you had grombas talk?

No. I really, yeah, I've done that a lot when they talk to you. And it immediately anthropomorphizes them. And then you have, if they have a name, which is why most roboticists don't give names or gender to robots because you become connected to them. I'm of the opposite

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mind. You should have like an intimate relationship sounds weird, but you should have a close connection

to robots. I mean, there's power in that. There's a social element to robotics, even a arm.

I don't know. There's something about us humans that gains so much value from our interaction with dynamic objects. And we should like lean into that as opposed to run away from it.

Like that was always the confusing thing to me about robotics.

Isn't it most roboticists run away from that? Yeah.

Weird. Because it's obviously going to be, robots are obviously going to be everywhere.

Yeah. Obviously.

But it's also humans are sensitive and squishy. And there's so much liability. Oh, yeah.

Yeah. But the humans are sensitive and squishy when they interact with each other and they hurt each other all the time. Like sometimes they get together and they're like, oh, you're the best. They didn't know you're the best. And then they leave each other and then they break each other's heart. Sorry about your break up. I'm actually drunk for this interview.

Yeah. I haven't been able to sleep. Have you slept all night?

But from a safety protocol perspective, people think about like physical damage, not emotional damage. I know this sounds ridiculous. I know it sounds ridiculous, but it won't be. It's already happening. There's an app called replica where people have an intimate relationship with an AI chatbot and they hurt themselves. I was thinking about this. Yeah. Okay. In dating, what if you, because you can train like a chatbot to kind of mimic the way that you talk to people and interact with people. Go on. Yeah. But then I'm like, okay, but what if we could all make AI versions of ourselves and have them date like thousands and thousands of other AI people and have that as a way to turn out potential candidates? Like I feel like that's going to be, what's the, what's the, what's the point of like meeting 20 people if you're like, oh, but if we just had our AI versions of ourselves interact, they'd be like, oh, your, your method of conflict is not going to match or what if the AI version of you like sleeps around with all the other AI's and becomes famous for that. And it starts this on only fans. And then it become, and you're like, what did you do? You come back home, you'd realize like, I don't, I didn't want to create a monster, create a monster.

I mean, do I get a cut? Exactly. That's the question I've asked. But I think it's definitely like, yeah, the human technology interaction is really interesting because I feel like I don't love any of the machines that I have in my life. Really? You haven't, you haven't, I mean, I don't love my phone. I touch it all the time and it's there and it's like constantly, it's a constant presence, but there's nothing in me that feels like, oh, I love this object. Like I kind of despise it.

That might be the way you show love. I don't know. Yeah. That's a deeper, that's another psycho analysis thing. So you don't, there's not robots whom you've taken apart that you miss?

No, they're all terrible. I mean, I have objects that I built that I love.

None of the robots, I think, but that's also because it was a different, that was a different era where I wasn't really putting a lot of care into the projects I built.

So the more care you put into the design to actually make it look, to make it functional and look good, that's where you put the love in?

Yeah. I mean, it is. It's like, I feel like any technology company that figures out a way to get you to actually genuinely love your Roomba or like love it in the way that you would love a pet, is a lot to be gained. Yeah. And I think it's scary, depending on who the company is,

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because then they can manipulate you. Yeah. If you love your Roomba and all of a sudden, your Roomba starts telling you to buy stuff. Yeah. Or it's leaving.

To put lotion on Jeff Bezos' head. Yeah. I don't know where the lotion came in, but yes, maybe buy something. I just imagine my Amazon Echo being like, hey, Jeff Bezos is really a great guy.

But even though you haven't, do you think it's possible to fall in love with a robot?

Yeah. I mean, people fall in love with things all the time.

Well, people have fallen in love with your shitty robots, probably.

I guarantee you there's people listening to this that are a little bit hard-broken saying that you've never fallen in love with your shitty robots. They're like, but I had a really emotional connection to that robot. Like the one with the parent, Patsy on the back.

Oh, that one. That one I do like. I like that one a lot. That's probably my favorite shitty robot.

Can you explain it?

So it's a machine. It was my friend, Daniel Beauchamp, and we had this long-running joke about a proud parent machine that you could give a quarter and a Patsy on the shoulder and says, proud of you. So yeah, I still have that hanging on my wall in my workshop. So that one, I'm really happy with. I just think it's a really funny concept. And also, I executed the build wall.

So it's an arm? Like what's the build?

Yeah, I built it off of an old lamp arm. Yeah, basically it's just a motorized arm and this kind of torso of a person.

So it's actually a hand, right?

I don't remember it correctly.

It's like a laser cut. It's just laser cut plywood and it kind of has like, it looks creepy, which I like.

Yeah, the creepy helps with the...

And yeah, it says proud of you son because I just thought that sounded more funny than proud of you daughter and also proud of you son just immediately communicates that it's a parent.

It's not just like a colleague or something. It's like proud of you.

It charges you a quarter for it.

Yeah, but he added like chat GPT on top of that and fine tune it on conversations you've had with your parents and all of a sudden you have a thing they can fundamentally transform your psyche.

Yeah.

That's all it takes. That's a beautiful creation. How'd you come up with that creation?

That was my friend Daniel and I who had a long running joke about it.

High level. Can you speak to your creative process?

I think a lot of it. I mean, it's changed...

For the shitty robots. That's actually separate.

For the shitty robot. Yeah. I mean, it has a lot of overlap.

So it's identifying everyday problems and in the shitty robot era, I would kind of take an everyday problem like, oh, I have a hard time getting up in the morning and I would have solved it in the most ridiculous spectacular way I could think of.

So if we're waking up in the morning, it was having an alarm clock that slaps me in the

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face with a rubber hand and what I'm doing now is still identifying everyday problems, but I'm actually trying to product design my way out of it.

What in your experience was the funniest thing? Is it violence? Like the hand slapping you? Food eating? Or is it just a case the better?

I think the funniest is... No, I think it's more like the proud parent machine. It's not violent. It doesn't. There's no... Nothing is just emotional and it's kind of a commentary on this fraught relationship that we sometimes have with our parents and they're proud of us. Sometimes, every time.

Sometimes. My dad visited like last week and he was like,

I just want to say I'm so proud of you and for the life you've built for yourself.

And that was really sweet. Yeah.

I'll put that on the back of my autobiography too.

Yeah, it's not your fault, Simone. It's not your fault.

Some stuff is my fault.

What was the longest one to complete for the Shady Robots that you remember?

Because you spent on a few of them, you spent quite a long time.

Which is also inspiring when you take so long on a project.

Yeah. I think even the more fun whimsical department rather than Shady Robots,

I built recently this music box. So like a small music box that kind of has a barrel with little spikes and it plays a song. But I did a large version of that that pops a sheet of bubble wrap and then like plays tones into a pan flute. So yeah, you can actually program it to play different songs. That won't kick my butt in so many creative ways and it was such a pain.

I think that is probably the like weird, funny project that's taken me the longest and like the biggest engineering effort. Where's the sound coming from?

So it all came from me realizing that if you pop bubble wrap and you pop it right in front of the opening of a pan flute or like one of the pipes, you can have it play different tones.

So that's what it does. So I built this music instrument off of that.

Okay. If it's okay, can you describe something like how it works, some of the technical details here? Yeah. So basically, I mean, one of the big issues that I had, so I worked with as of a year and a half back, I hired an engineer stew. So we were collaborating on it. But a big issue that we had was feeding in the bubble wrap sheet and like making sure that it feeds in straight and doesn't get skewed because you need to make like the popping feet, which is where you program this

barrel to pop different bubbles need to be so perfectly aligned on the bubble of the bubble wrap for it to pop in the right location. So there's a feeder for the bubble wrap. That's a challenge. And then you have to have a barrel with the little baby feet on it that pops the bubble wrap. So making that barrel was a pain as well. I had to get this rotary setup for my CNC and yeah, it was a lot of work. But that was really fun. And it's just like, this is probably my favorite privilege of my job is that I can go down any rabbit hole, I think find interesting.

Did you have a lot of joy from popping the bubbles?

It's a lot of self soothing. And like I got to spend, I think I spent a week trying to figure out the best material to pop bubble wrap with because if you have two, if you kind of put them to through or through, if you put a sheet of bubble wrap through two rigid tubes,

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the air kind of just escapes from one side of the bubble into the other. So what I realized was that if you have a squishy material, like kind of a yoga mat material in between it, it actually, it prevents that and pops it a lot more reliably. But like increasing the pop reliability was a huge effort as well. You have to pop a squishy thing with another squishy thing. Because you don't need a lot of force. Like you just need it to not, the air to not be able to escape anywhere. But then also we had, there was different qualities of bubble wrap where there was a lot of transference between different bubbles. So instead of the bubble popping, it would just seep the air into a neighboring bubble and that like membrane would kind of, so you know, I just like getting to spend weeks on weeks of just studying bubble wrap. Did you ever think about like publishing academic work on bubble wrap?

No.

Wouldn't that be epic? Because nobody's done this. I bet you nobody's done squishing material on squishy versus squishy for popping.

I bet somebody has. But you know, I always, I thought I was going to go into academia. Like I was such an ambitious student. I loved school. I actually applied to MIT, but then I pulled out because I was like, no, I don't want to do it.

But now I realize it's really good that I didn't because I'm too much of a spaz.

Too much of a spaz. Now I'm distracted. I'm thinking there must be papers about when you have two bubbles. Yeah, you would need to know the physics of two bubbles.

When you have two bubbles colliding, one will pop first and there has to be good models of that.

But that's very, that has to do with chemistry and whatever the material the bubble is made from. But then, no, there's materials in here. Somebody must understand bubble wrap deeply, like deeply.

So I'm just going to take a quick restroom break because Lex is on his own train now and I'm just going to leave you to talk about bubble. I actually don't need to go to the restroom.

I'm going to insert like a two hour instructional here with like a blackboard.

Right. It's the skill of a podcaster. I feel like I could throw you any topic and you could just go on about it. I don't know if I have that skill. I just love bubble wrap.

Okay. Bubble on bubble interaction. Go.

So you did mention MIT. You went to college for physics for one year and you dropped out.

What do you learn from that? Who do you think should and shouldn't go to college?

I think first of all, you shouldn't listen to me.

That should be the name of your autobiography.

First of all, you shouldn't listen to me. I realized that I was there for the wrong reasons.

I had this deep, I got completely like starting to get grades in school, which in Sweden at that time we started getting it at eighth grade. So when I was 14, it just kind of hijacked my brain because I realized that I could put a number on how smart I was and I got obsessed with it.

And I wanted to study mechanical engineering because I was like, I like machines, but then physics was kind of the hardest thing you could do when I had this like deep need to prove to myself that I was smart. So I started studying physics, realized I wasn't that smart. I realized, or I mean, just mostly that I like, I love math, but I don't love math 10 hours a day. And also, I think I am a generalist through and through. Like I'm decent at a fair amount of things, but definitely not a specialist in any ways.

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And this, it was such a specialist type of area that I felt like the other parts of my brain kind of just dwindled and died. So I think, I think most of all, if people are thinking about going to college, and especially if you're here in the States and it's so fucking expensive, really, okay, there's two things I want to do. One is actually go to a workplace where people are doing the job that you think you want to do if you want to become a doctor, be at a hospital and try to see how doctors work and if you actually like it because I feel like people have a lot of ideas of what it's going to be like and it just doesn't match with reality. And then I think when people figure out what they want to do, there's kind of, that's two separate questions or there's two questions that you can split out of that. One is like, what do you actually want to do? That for me for the last 10 years is building stuff. But then there's a second part to that question, which is what context do you want to do that? Do you want to build stuff at a startup or at a big corporation? Do you want to build stuff for an art gallery or for the movies or for YouTube? And I think that's often like people only learn how to answer the first question, but then it's like the context means as much because I was building stuff that punched through design and I wasn't getting that like deep fulfillment. Like I felt like I wasn't fully using myself and like hitting all of my gears because I just wasn't that motivated about building stuff for other people and I changed the context and everything changed. And so sometimes you do need to consider resume and stuff like that for depending on the time. But I think people consider that way too much, especially modern times. I feel like you don't need to go to college just for the resume. I feel like the biggest benefit of college, I mean there's a bunch, but one is to do hard things. But you could do hard things anywhere. But some people need to be, I was probably one of those people, to be forced to do hard things. And the other is to meet fascinating humans from all walks of life that have all kinds of different passions and allows you to learn, depending on the major, you can learn generally and you can search if you're doing it efficiently about what actually inspires you. And the other thing is the resume thing. But ultimately, you don't need college to find your passion to run with it. I mean, I have so much college from although, like I think it's, I chose a different set of experiences. And when I applied to MIT, I was, I think I was 24 because I was like, oh, maybe I should become an electrical engineer because I really liked electronics. But then I remember seeing that the average age was 18. And I was like, fuck no, I can't hang out or like be in a room filled with 18 year olds who are smarter than me. So I think I definitely like missed the train on having that experience. But at the same time, I did so many other things and I chose other experiences and I wouldn't trade them. But I still like, I mean, I'll go to on a campus and I'll be like, oh, yeah. But I think it's also because I have a dreamy idea of what it is because I never had to do it in practice fully. Exactly. It's the FOMO. Yeah. Yeah, a lot of people really struggle with that burden. They'll go, it doesn't matter how long you go through. If you don't go all the way to the PhD, you, a lot of people have the FOMO. It doesn't, it's a silly, silly, silly little notion, I think. Because I think you should be doing college or school until you find something that that lights your heart aflame where you're like, fuck, yes, I want to do this. Yeah. And run with it. I mean, you can, you can find that in other contexts as well. I've, I found it. Yeah, definitely. Yeah. But it is a buffet of experiences that you can have. What about, what was the most fun robot to make or musical artistic creation

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where the process was the most fun? They're all painful in different ways.

So pain. Yeah. Do you find pain fun?

No, but it's definitely the pride of me getting to pull something off or like managing to pull something off even when it was really difficult. This is very satisfying.

What was the difficult thing that you pulled off? You were like, yeah, this is cool.

I like working on jigsaw puzzles, but I don't like how much table space they take up because I like just have one big table where I can do it. And that's also my dining table.

So I made this mechanical table where you can switch between two tabletops.

And that was an incredibly painful project. And I'm really happy with the outcome and like so proud that I managed to pull it off. How does this switch tabletops?

It's a tambour mechanism. So like tambour, like you'll have on like old record player, like these like thin slats of wood with fabric on the back and you can kind of

get them to go around curves. So basically one of the tabletops or table surfaces is

tambour and then there's a little crank and you can kind of roll it off to the side and it reveals another tabletop under it that you can then lift up because it's on cams.

So you can switch between the two. I think that one was both really difficult to pull off and it's also one of few projects that I use in my everyday life. Like I use it almost every day.

You know what a really cool one was that that was part of your TED Talk.

Where there's a rotating thing that you wear on your shoulders.

Was that hard to make? So for people who haven't seen your TED Talk, they should of course.

But it's how would you describe that? Oh, the cut out the best joke.

How would you call that device? Sorry. I don't even know. I never used it beyond the TED Talk really. Yeah, but basically it's the shoulder rig and it has this like almost like Saturn ring looking platform that goes around. I can't even remember what the problem proposition was that I was trying

to solve. Variety, probably. Introducing it to your life. Maybe. And an element of surprise because you can put popcorn as you did on it and it goes around as a little hand. Why is it like a tiny hand funny? I don't know. But it just slams whatever is on that thing into your face.

Yeah. I don't know. Was that easy to make? Yeah. That one's fine. I can't. There was,

I mean, my TED Talk was so, yeah, for one, once again, they cut out my best joke.

What was the best joke? My best joke. They didn't even ask me about it.

So there's this whole lead up where I built a chopping machine. So it's a machine that chops vegetables and has two giant knives and it goes dink, dink, dink, and it's kind of terrifying.

And I show a video of it and then it ends on this gif of it chopping up a banana and I'm

kind of scrunching up my face being like, ugh, ugh. And the whole reason I show that project is because I'm leading it up to the punchline of, oh, and as a bonus, this gif right here is the

perfect response if anyone ever sends you dick pics you don't want, which brought down the house.

It does it every time. And they caught it out without asking me because they were like, oh, but we wanted people to be able to show it in classrooms. And I was like, I have abandoned

the hope of being shown in classrooms for years ago. I think that's a good joke.

Thank you. That's a really good one. You're okay going sometimes a little bit edgy.

I say that I'm crude and wholesome because I can be very crude, but I also try really, really hard to be a good person. And to like, I'll say shit and fucking all that stuff,

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which I don't even think is crude. But yeah, but I really, really try to wield the power that I have in a thoughtful way. So no, I wouldn't call me edgy because I'm not, I don't think it's edgy. It's all like sex. Chopping a banana with knives and saying it's a good gif response to anyone that sends you dick pics is definitely not edgy. You're correct. Yeah. That's a funny joke. That's pretty funny. I feel bad that Ted cut that. I mean, it's fine. It's like, it's a decision that I made really early on where I was like, what I'm, I think often people misinterpret what I'm doing as being for children, which I think is part because like my projects were always really colorful and fun. And I think it also has some sprinkles of sexism of being like, oh, it's a woman doing something. She must be doing it for the children. And I'm like, fuck the children. I'm doing it for myself. So I think I, I was just really early on decided of like, oh no, I'm not going to try to cater to that, which like still, I mean, I get a lot of messages from parents being like, can you please stop cussing in your videos? And I'm also like, I get it. But also that is not what's going to mess up your kids. It's like, I really try to be thoughtful and a decent enough role model. But I'll also acknowledge that humans fuck. Yeah. It's okay. Somehow that you being able to say the F you to the, what word? Word? What? Do it. I can't. I can't. I can't. I can't. I can't. I can't. Yeah. It sounds better when you say a few. It's, it's, it's a dance. I should, oh boy. Have you ever made a robot that dances with you? No. Okay. You need a dance partner. I get lonely sometimes. I get lonely sometimes. Yeah. I feel like that's the theme of this whole podcast. Yeah. What's the most embarrassed you've ever been on your podcast? So I don't know if you've experienced this, but I generally embarrassed by most things I say inside my head. Yeah. So like when I say something, like now it's just, there's a voice inside my head that goes, like what? Your disappointment. Like that, the parent petting in the back, the hand stops working. Yeah. Just slows down. Yeah. And then there's an awkward silence. You don't know what to say next. That's really embarrassing usually. I used to work as a journalist. So I know how to sit with a silence and try to drag it out of you. See what I did there? You gave up. I quit. I quit. I was sweating. I was literally sweating. Okay. Also because you're in a full fucking suit. What is that? Like how did that come about? Actually, it was probably MIT is because everybody was dressing in like sweatpants, very chill wear. And I was like, I like taking everything seriously. It just felt like it was my way of saying F you to the way things are because I like, I always admire Richard Feynman. I like it how there's like a classiness to it. So I don't know if it's for visual purposes, but it's just how I feel when I put on a suit. It makes me feel like I'm going to take this really, really seriously. And if I embarrass myself, it's all my fault because I tried. There's no excuse. I tried 100%. The interesting thing about your TED Talk to go to a dark topic. This is what happened when I walked off stage? No, what happened when you walked off stage? You found out that I had a brain tumor. Was that not where you're going? There's something else dark about what? Yeah. Well, yes. I thought you knew through the TED Talk you found out right after. I mean, the reason that I found out was partly because of the TED Talk because my mom came into town to be there for it. And my right eyelid was swollen and it kind of been swelling over a while. And I even got in comments about it on my YouTube channel. And I thought it was allergies because I was like, oh, it's just pollen allergies. It's just affecting my one eye because

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maybe I sleep mostly on that side. I don't know. And my mom came into the States and then my cooover for my TED Talk and she's like, Simone, you have to have a scan or see what's up. Well, we have to go to the doctor and she really pushed me to do it because I was like, I'm fine. And I had an MRI scan on like 5 p.m. on a Friday night. My boyfriend at the time was there and I remember

like halfway through an MRI scan, they kind of pull you out and they put inject contrast fluid or this thing that just gives them another type of scan. And the nurse looked at me in this way and was like, how long have you had symptoms for? And that's what I knew, that they'd found something and then they shove you back into the machine for another 20 minutes. And my ex was just seeing them zooming in and out of my scans. And there was this obviously something that just looked wrong in there. And they sent me to the ER and I found out that I had a brain tumor, the size of a golf ball that probably been grown since I was a teenager. So it'd been growing over like 10, 15 years. And yeah, I had surgery to remove it. And then it kept on growing the parts that they couldn't remove. And I went through radiation treatment. So that was like two years that just was kind of dedicated to just getting better and getting back to where I am now. And I remember like I was so stoked about 2020 because I was like, this is the first year that I'm not held back by my health. And I'm like finally going to be able to do everything I've feathered. And then the pandemic happens. And you're kind of just like, okay, just in the backseat of what's happening and things that are out of my control again. In your public, you made a couple of videos about it. I have a brain tumor, my brain tumor is back. You kind of, you know, you name your tumor Brian, you kind of make it a lighthearted thing. But so you don't reveal much of the darkness. But were you scared or some low points? Of course I was, of course I was scared.

I mean, it's terrifying. It's like, and also when it's in your brain, like, you know, I was like, take any other part of me, but don't take my brain.

No, it's this unfathomable thing that happens. And you're like, I'm healthy. I've had, how can this possibly be a brain tumor? Like my eye is swollen. Like there's nothing there. I haven't had any seizures. I haven't had any cognitive issues. I haven't had any headaches even like how is that even possible? So you go through a lot of different stages of just trying to understand what it is. And I think I remember being hit like right as I found out when we're in like an Uber, poor Uber driver from where I had my MRI scan to the ER where they sent me. And I was really both really grateful that I've gotten so much more out of life than I ever thought I would. Like I've had a hell of a life. And even if it would have ended really early, I would have done so much more than I ever thought. But I was also really, really sad that I hadn't had kids yet. Like that was my big grief of like, fuck, I haven't had time to have kids yet.

But no, it's terrifying. I mean, the prospect of somebody cutting up your head, like that's terrifying. But it honestly wasn't as bad as I thought it was going to be.

What about the radiation treatment? What are some things that, you know, people should, you learned about it, about the process and about yourself through that that people might be interested about? I think surgery was both harder and easier than radiation treatment because it was harder because it was so much more intense. And it's such a dramatic thing, like going to the hospital that morning and being like, I don't know, and you feel so awful when you wake up. And but then the recovery from it was pretty linear. Like almost every week, I would get a little bit better. The thing about radiation is that it was

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not linear at all. And it kind of drained me in this weird, like it was so hard to predict. And also they put me on these, I spent months feeling like I was high out of my mind. And I couldn't process reality in a way that I normally would, like everything just felt off. Like I felt, yeah, I felt like I was high on drugs. And I kept on asking my doctors what was going on. And they're like, no, I don't know, I don't think it's anything related. And I was on this Alzheimer's medicine that they put you on to prevent dementia from radiation treatment. Like kind of as a preventative. And I found all these subreddits of people using that Alzheimer's medicine to get high. And people be like, oh my God, bro, I was like 20 milligrams yesterday, and I was high out of my mind. And I'm like, I'm on 30 milligrams a day. Like of course it feels weird. And that was honestly one of the scariest parts of it, because that was the first time where I felt like it genuinely affected my way of processing reality. And yeah, I was so relieved when I found out that that was what was causing it, because I felt like I was going crazy. But even after surgery, like I woke up and I felt like myself, like everything was, I got no brain injury. So obviously this is like my experience from somebody who came out of it pretty unscathed, who didn't get any brain injuries and didn't have to do any of that recovery. It's more just the recovery from like the physical act of somebody cutting your skull open and taking a large chunk out.

Did you research all the things that can go wrong during surgery?

No. I honestly, I'm a bit surprised by how I acted.

It's pausing for you to pour. You're welcome editors.

So commercial.

This is like work injury from being a YouTuber. It's all like freeze if there's audio that comes in. Yeah, sponsored by tap water. I was surprised by how little I was willing to think critically about what my doctors told me to do. Like I very early on, the neurologist that I worked with, he was the one who was on call at the ER the day where I came in. And he was the one who ended up doing my surgery. And he kind of became like my rock in this. And I just 100% trusted him. And he turned out to be an amazing doctor and like did a great job and was just like, and so I got so, so lucky. But I remember my mom being like, oh, but we should like talk about second opinions and like we should try to do more research. And I was like, so unwilling to do that because opening up to the idea that there are multiple ways or multiple things that might be right or wrong was so terrifying. Like I wanted there to just be like, no, this is the only option. This is what we need to do. And if I started questioning that, then I don't know if I would have been able to go through with it. So yeah, it was a strain. I just really wanted to trust the doctors that I worked with. And I was very scared to question them in any way. How did that process change your relationship with the death? Are you afraid of death? You ponder your mortality? Yeah, I think it took away a part of youth for me. Like the innocence? Yeah. I mean, you kind of think of terrible things as something that happens to other people and death and illness. So I think it kind of fast-tracked that for me. But it mostly changed my relationship to life. It changed. It's made me so much more gentle with myself. Like going through illness, it forces you to redefine what it means to be good. And before being good had been pushing myself really hard. It had been working and I don't know, just being really hard with myself and disciplined. And when you're healing from

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something, being good is listening to your body. It's resting. It's like really being in tuned with what your health, where your health is at. And I think that is something that's kind of stuck with me since then. I'm like so much more gentle and delicate with myself. And with others? I think it definitely, it's like when you're young and healthy, it's really hard to know what it feels like to be ill. And I remember, you know, you like go to yoga class and you'd be like, Oh my God, this is too slow. Like I want it to be, I have so much more energy. Like I need to. And when I was recovering from my brain surgery, there was this yoga studio nearby my house and they had a yoga for seniors and I was so stoked because I was like, Oh, this is the yoga class I'll be able to take. And I think that was really eye-opening of just like, there's no, you kind of imagine that it's just like, Oh, just push yourself harder. But no, that's not it with age or sickness or it's just, you got to be so gentle with yourself and you have to cater to people where they're at. Yeah. And just a appreciation of this like biological vehicle you get and you should take care of it. Being sick sucks. It's awful. And I really, I'm really motivated to postpone that for as much as I can. And also I was so tremendously grateful when I got ill that I felt like I had so much to take from, like I had so many energy or us of wars. I'd spent my life taking pretty decent care of my body and like exercising and eating well and like not wrecking my body in any way. And I felt like this was the first time where that was so critical. And I felt like my body was ready for it. You know, I thought you're going to go the other way. Like you can, you can take care of your body all you want. And it's bad stuff happens. So you should, you should go on drug binges and go wild and do crazy things. And I mean, I also had that, that thought where I was like, I fucking floss every day. How do I have a brain tumor? I've been good. Like, why does this happen to me? But more so, it was like my body was so resilient and ready for it. And I was, I was really, really proud of it. It's amazing that the human body is able to recover from even the harshest things. Yeah, it's, it's wild. And my brain, so after, after surgery, because yeah, I had a brain tumor the size of a golf ball kind of behind my right eye. And after brain surgery, you kind of just have this big hole in your head, like this void. And usually your brain stays that way, like it retains the shape even after the brain tumor is gone. But for some reason, my brain was feeling really ambitious. And it has completely flopped back. And I have almost like a normal looking brain now where doctors are like, Oh, we would almost not be able to tell that you had one. So yeah, that just blew my mind. When did it was that way? I had all those headaches after surgery. It's just my brain being like, try working. Yeah. Oh, pretty cool thing I want to ask you about is the everyday calendar that you worked on. That was a long time. That took a long time. Yeah. So basically, I designed this calendar, like I wanted to start meditating every day. But it's really hard to meditate every day until it kind of build that habit. And what I would do is I would make these grids in my notebooks where I could like check a box for every day, like I just wanted like a little ding, I did it and like this thing of accountability. But then I was like, this is I don't want to have a notebook that I do this in. Like I want an art piece that I can hang on my wall, like accountability art. And I made this thing called the everyday calendar, which has an entire year on it. So 365 days. And if you tap any of the days, you light it up. And we turn it into a Kickstarter campaign. And it's now a product that I'm selling through my product business, the Yetch Store. What's it called?

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The Yetch Store. And that for people who are confused is the right way to pronounce your last name. Which does it? It's right, but it's so wrong. It makes my last name is spelled G-I-E-R-T-Z. Who does that song? If loving you is wrong, I don't want to be right.

Yeah, I'm pronouncing my last name yet. That's what that's all means because what's his name? From the office, he covers it from the British office, which is the better office.

Okay, tangent upon a tangent upon a tangent. So you said you created the everyday calendar to make a more beautiful in quotes and more sacred gold star system on a wall, not a notebook that gets thrown into a drawer. Yeah, well said, past me.

You said that making this calendar taught you a lot in quotes. I feel like a real investigative journalist. You've said in 2018. Yeah, I'm waiting for the gotcha.

Can you share some of the lessons you've learned? What do you mean you've learned a lot from making

this calendar? What are we talking about? As somebody who builds things, manufacturing something is such an unrelated process, like making one of something and making 10,000s of something. They're not even distant cousins. It's completely different beasts to tackle.

Yeah, so that was one of it. Everything takes so much longer than you think it's going to.

I did a Kickstarter campaign that we launched in 2018 after my surgery. It's just, you know, you think you're so generous with the timelines. We still ended up being a year late, but we shipped.

We're good. But yeah, I mean, I'm trying to get my product business off the ground. We launched in May and it's just, yeah, it's just a pain. As somebody who's terrified of disappointing people, I'm like, why have I chosen some of the jobs where it's the easiest to disappoint people?

You can disappoint people at scale now. Yeah, I can disappoint people at scale and also them actually haven't paid me money to deliver on something, which is a terrible transaction.

I'm just stoked to realize that I love the job still. I love the product development aspect of it. I love trying to design stuff for manufacturing and figure it out and anticipate

how people are going to use your products. The everyday calendar, I mean, we've sold thousands of them now. They're all over the world. It's like people actually finding something useful that I made and implementing them into their lives. It's just mind-boggling. Especially because this is tracking habits, good habits. Or bad ones. You can do it wherever.

You can use it however you want. I went in a drinking binge again today.

Kicked another kid. What does it take to a mass manufacture something? What did you learn about that? Can you elucidate the gap between the one, the prototype versus the product development

for mass manufacture? I mean, for one of it is the manufacturing, the tooling that they use in manufacturing and to do things in a cost-effective way is really different. I can make a one-off.

Then it's going to take me 17 hours, but obviously you can't spend 17 hours per calendar when you're

doing something in the factory. I think it's that quality control is such a beast. You cannot trust anybody telling you that things are going to be okay. You have to have such trust issues.

It's also terrifying. Somebody who's doing everything independently, I haven't raced any capital for it. It's all self-invested and we're doing it all in-house. I could buy

10,000 calendars, but then what if all of them have a manufacturing issue? It's just terrifying because the risks are so high, but also I got to this point where for one, this is something that I wanted to do for a long time, but something that going through health problems taught me

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is how fragile my business model is because I'm basically running an influencer business where I make videos on YouTube and then I have an ad spot and I talk about a brand.

I'm a human billboard, which is fine. It grants me a lot of freedom to play around, but if I am not well enough to be on a stage giving talks or be in front of a camera, everything stops. It's such a pillar of a business and it can topple over at any given moment or YouTube could change the algorithm. Legislation could catch up and change how you're able to advertise on the internet. It's so frail and I really felt like I need to diversify what I'm doing and also just to keep it interesting for myself. What I decided was to start a product business because also it's this perfect combination of businesses where I can turn my YouTube channel

into an R&D department because I have a reason to constantly be exploring things and turning out new products. I can also do that as early audience testing and see what people are actually excited about. If there's something that I think would make an interesting product, I can pass that over to the product business and then once I'm ready to market that and sell it, I can pass it over to the YouTube channel. Once I realized that YouTube didn't feel like an end goal for me, I was like, okay, then I can use it as a tool to accomplish these other things that I want to do and this was one of them. It's a lot that went into it. One of the tools like you said is R&D but it's also kind of advertisement for the cool stuff that you're doing. I think MrBeast is one of the creators that's also starting to understand this power of this reputation that you've built of people trust you. They love you to do cool stuff. They trust that you put your heart and soul into a thing and they feel your pain and the struggle too. For example, say the everyday calendar, there was issues of manufacturing something like this. They would feel the pain of that and they would still support it. I mean, that's the beauty of it when you have the actual person right there struggling with their lows and highs. That's a decision that I made really early on where I was like, the yet store is supported by me but it's separate for me.

It's not merchandise. You don't have to know who I am or care about who I am to be interested in this product. If you go on the website, I'm on the about page. You have to go to the about page to find anything about me. It's definitely not like this is the most brand and I think anybody who's followed me for a long time will see that my personality is sprinkled into it but it's still clean off of me and I think that's also because I wanted something that was separate from me. I'm also running out of narcissism, believe it or not. I don't feel like I don't want it to be about me and I want it to be something that can also run independently of me and I want to be able to retire my face and still do the other stuff because I think it's fun but I don't want that to be the core of it. What other kind of stuff have you worked on?

What have you worked on for the product design for yet?

A lot of the products, I decided to launch the store with a really small roster of products because developing products is such a upfront heavy like cost-wise and just investment. It's very big upfront investment and I knew it would take a while for me to kind of find the right tonality and visual language for the brand so I just wanted to launch it, have it be out there, start working on it, start learning more about what it entails even if we just had a small roster of products. We've released it with, we have a puzzle. Yes. This is just a whim but I wanted to release a puzzle that has one piece missing so it's actually, as far as I can tell, it's the world's first officially incomplete puzzle.

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You get 499 out of 500 pieces. I keep the 500th piece so I have a box in my workshop with everybody's missing pieces and I don't know what to do with it yet but someday it will come to me.

Profile and artistic statement.

It is something. It's definitely something and I'm surprised by how many of them we've sold which I'm also like, I kind of wanted to have that product out there because I was like, can you imagine having a pitch deck if I do have a raised money of being like, you know how good I am at selling things? I sold people 5000 incomplete puzzles.

Also have, you know, it's like a lot of the products I call them basket fillers. They're kind of just like stuff where I'm like, yeah, this is like easy to throw into your basket.

I mean, we have these rings. I'm wearing them. There's a screwdriver ring which is a Phillips head screwdriver and then a screw ring that kind of has a recess like a Phillips head screw. I have these sawdust socks that make you look like your feet are covered in sawdust like you spend all time in the all day in the shop without having to put any of the actual effort in.

But then we have four more products in the pipeline that we're working on and that are kind of the more the big ambitious products that are more in line with what I want the brand to be. Like the tagline is unique solutions to everyday problems and it's just a lot of like trying to develop novel takes on existing products.

So something where the function becomes a bigger, bigger part of the design.

And so what's the process of creating something like that? Like even the everyday calendar.

So like what are some challenges that are interesting along the way? So you have to sketch it out. You have to like brainstorm, draw things out and then create a schematic and see how do you know what it's going to look like visually?

Don't. So the everyday calendar, the first, so I just built it for myself first.

Like that did not come as a product idea first. And that's kind of been the process that I've had for a lot of things. Like I make it for myself and then I'm like, oh, maybe other people would find this useful too. So the everyday calendar, the first prototype I made, it had actually physical mechanical toggle switches. So 365 toggle switches that you could flip. So if you worked out that day or meditated for me was meditating, you can just flip that switch.

And that was great. But when I started evaluating it as a product, it's

if you have 365 of something in a product, like the runaway cost is crazy. So the cheapest option, most reliable option we could find was capacitive touch. So basically it's a touch interface. And the front plate is a circuit board itself. So it's this like circuit board

that's designed in this really fancy way. So it looks like a beautiful piece of art,

not to do my own or too much. But it's actually a circuit board, which I also thought was really interesting of like using this that people usually hide away in products. And it felt like a nod to

my career in electronics as well, being like, no, let's make it pretty. Let's make it put it front

and forward. But yeah, I mean, what I'm realizing now more and more is like, there's so many of, like I would love to turn the puzzle table into a product. But then it's like, that would be a

\$7,000 table. And I don't want to sell a table for \$7,000. So you're kind of limited to the

price bracket you're in. And it's like, your margins are tough, like maintaining your margins are really, really tough. And as somebody who's like, I would love to sell the stuff that we're

doing cheaper, but you just, it's just not feasible. Like you need those margins to survive.

And well, one of the genius things in the conversations I've had with Elon is the ability

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through sort of systematic questioning of how things have been done in the past to discuss what is the lowest cost way to solve a problem. And so he's very good at getting to like with Optimus robot, for example, the humanoid robot, how do you get the cost down? And that seems to be like one of the essential things to do in any product that you have to mass manufacture is constantly discussed like, how do we simplify, simplify?

It's definitely a design limitation. It's interesting. It's both hard and interesting to work within. And that's such a different thing as well. It's like, because I talked about before, like what is the context and what you're creating things? Like I'm still building things. I'm still inventing things, but I changed the context and it has a very different set of limitations and constantly trying to simplify your product to make it cheaper. And yeah, it's a really interesting and different type of design process. You can lose some of the magic though, right? Like people can do that a little bit too much. I think Apple is famous, like Johnny Ives is famous for sort of focusing on design first and not worrying about the cost later because you don't want to sacrifice. There's some stuff that's going to cost more, but it keeps some of the magic. I think it's for some of the products that we're working on, it's like, I'm like, let's just make it the best we think it can be. And then we can scale back from there. Like just like, let's not impose these limitations on ourselves upfront. Like let's just make it the most beautiful version of itself. And then we can decide what we want to compromise with or compromise on. Yeah. That's what I say every day when I look in the mirror. And then we can compromise. So you put on that suit. Yeah.

And then see how shit goes wrong later. All right. I'll back a little bit to the robots, just actually to one of your more epic projects. I mean, they're all epic, but trucklet. Yeah. You're cutting into a Tesla and turning into an epic truck. What was that like? Where did the idea come from? The idea came from that I really wanted an electric pickup truck. Like I've only really driven electric because I got my driver's license pretty late and I'm like one of that first generation drivers. It's like probably never going to have a gas vehicle. But yeah, this was in 2018 as well. 2018 was a big year. Yeah. Yeah. We're 2019. I can't remember. And I figured that we could just make our own. So you took a Tesla? Tesla Model 3. Model 3. And you cut off a piece of it and you turn it into a pickup truck. It looks pretty badass. So what are some of the challenges of doing that? Unlike other projects you've done? Yeah. It's very much outside of my realm. I'm not a car person. I haven't worked on cars before. So we brought in a big team and had another project manager for it and stuff. Because also cars, you definitely don't want things to go wrong. There's no part of me that wants to fuck around and make something that's going to be really unsafe for me or for other people who are driving with me. So yeah, it was about a year of planning and then we got the car and then we spent a month just tearing it apart and trying to make it. I was so set. I really wanted the car just for its function. And I was like, I'm so fine with it if it's really ugly. But then we managed to make it actually look really good. So that wasn't part of the discussion? How the final thing looks? I wasn't that fussed about it. I was like, I just want it for its function. I really want this car. I don't want it because it looks cool. But then it ended up looking pretty cool as well. And even now, a couple of years later, when there are some more options of electric pickup trucks, I still stand truck law. Rivian, Ford F-150, they're all great,

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but they're giant. You're sitting there on a porch in your cowboy hat drinking whiskey and saying... With my cattle dog. Shotguns. I wanted a small 90s pickup truck. Back to shitty robots. You reuse parts of previous robots a lot. What's a memorable example of that? Is just the graveyard of parts in the workshop? I've gotten better at keeping projects intact. In the beginning, I used to disassemble every project because I was also much more stringent budget. So if I needed a motor, then I would like seal it off of an existing robot or a previous robot. But I've got a really good at not doing that now because I'm like, maybe one day I want to have a museum exhibit and then it would be nice to have all of those machines intact and not having to rebuild them. Centuries from now, you can look at Benjamin Franklin's house. Oh yeah, no, we're just gonna look at my house. Yeah, just house. Just some weird shit. Yeah, that goes great with my idea of myself.

With the autobiography. Yeah. You said that people keep requesting in the comments. Did I put a dildo on it? Yeah. I have... Wait, was that actually what you were gonna ask? Yeah, I have dildo written in my notes. I thought I just made it into a raunchy punchline. Dildo. You were actually gonna get there. Yeah, that was in the early days in the city, robot days, but now I have a filter on my YouTube channel for every possible spelling of dildo. So I mean, people want to probably sexualize robots, right? Or they put...

They want to sexualize my relationship with them. Yeah. Oh.

You know, because I have majority male followers and they're so sweet and so respectful, 99%. But I realize that society hasn't taught men how to have female role models. And the way that people channel it is through being like, oh, it's because I want to fuck her or I want to date her or I want to marry her. And I'm like, I don't think you want any of those things. I think you actually just admire my work. But you don't know how to look up to a woman. Yeah. That's beautifully

put. What about weapons? Do you get requests to put weapons on a thing? Yeah. It's interesting. I kind of started in robotics. That's just like a happy camper who is really into like tinkering. And now I'm kind of seeing some of the darker parts of it. I remember first time I went to a proper factory and I saw like big industrial robot arms that work. And I was like, oh, wow, this is what it is about. You know, and it was almost scary where I was like, oh, I've just been like playing around with these tiny versions of this. And I'm like, oh my God, everybody, robotics is cool and fun. And then you get in there and you're like, this is kind of terrifying. You were platforming the very things that will destroy you. You're making it fun and entertaining.

I'm the mouthpiece and I'm like getting people into robotics and engineering and we're all just building our demise and accelerating speed. No, but I mean, I had that and like the same with also with like companies who are saying that they're never going to put weapons on their robots and then have military contracts and stuff like that. You're like, this is dark and scary. Fortunately, I haven't gotten a lot of requests for it. Yeah. Drones are terrifying, especially. Drones are fucking terrifying. And it's really everything. I mean, we humans are so good at creative ways of killing and fucking each other. It's like almost everything goes like, and it's, yeah, I'm terrified of the future where we are going to use more robots to kill each other. And come up with new and new creative ways to kill and hurt each other. Yeah. Emotionally, psychologically, physically.

Yeah. Speaking of which, what are your thoughts about, I don't know if you've been paying attention,

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but Chad's GPT, the investment in language models and artificial intelligence. Have you added speaking capabilities to any of your devices? I have, I have a theory on, yeah. I used to have an Amazon Echo in my house, but then I removed it. It just freaked me out that I could whisper from my bed and it hurt me. Yeah. I'd be like, Alexa, play Spotify. I feel like playing Spotify. Yeah. Fuck. I think it is a powerful tool that we are not fully ready for. Yeah. And I don't know. I think the internet is kind of a parade of us using powerful things and harmful ways. And I think chatbots are really, really exciting. I'm stoked to have a personal assistant that's like a virtual assistant that actually does a good job and can solve problems for me. But yeah, it also feels like it can get dark really, really quickly. Yeah. Because you can form close connections like we're talking about with it and then it can be used to manipulate you. Manipulate you in terms of what is true and manipulate you in terms of getting you to buy stuff. Yeah. Or maybe because, at least for now, it's centralized, getting everybody to think the same way. I mean, it's the same in like algorithms being used to radicalize people or kind of having that as a consequence of the way that they work and combine that with a really advanced language model and like you can control people's world view in a way that you could. I mean, it's just, it's wild. And I think we're not ready for it. And I don't know if we ever would be because we're very impressionable little squishy flashbacks. Which takes us back to the one the squishy flashbacks interact, which one pops first still. Yeah. The bubble wrap. Bubble on bubble, new paper coming out. We're talking about, oh, what about consciousness? So you never anthropomorphize the robots? Did they ever come to life for you? Or you kind of thought? No, because they built them and I know how they work. So that prevents you from being able to see the magic? I don't know. Yeah. But I think it's like, I definitely, when I did a lot of the shitty robot stuff, like I wanted them to move like a human or like in a more organic way and not just like point A to point B, which is the easiest way to program stuff. So I wanted other people to anthropomorphize them, but I don't think I did necessarily. I'm trying to think of a piece of technology that I've kind of projected feelings upon, but no, I can't. So sometimes what makes me anthropomorphize something even though I built it is there's an element of surprise. So especially with machine learning, you're surprised by the kind of things it does. Have you ever been surprised by a robot? No, because they're all pretty dumb. Like also the robots I built, it's like they're all just servos moving from. I mean, I don't think I've built anything with a huge amount of sensors or like they're just moving in a pattern that I program them to move. What's the most complex thing you've built? I mean, probably truckload. Truckload. Yeah, was complex just for the sheer scale of it. And like the, I mean, I think that was my biggest project both in terms of build scope, but also in terms of impact that it had, like that project just went wild. But then yeah, then I don't know the bubble wrap music box. I don't know. They're all complicated in different ways. That one is epic. How does the bubble wrap connect to the flute, by the way? How does that work? The flute is just right where like mounted right where it pops it. Okay. Yeah. So fascinating. Funny enough, in my deep investigative journalistic research of you, it says you're used to be an MMA reporter. How, how, how did that happen? How did you get into it? I was really into martial arts. I was like a huge UFC buff. I mean, this is 2010 maybe. You practiced martial arts yourself? I did. Yeah. I was mostly stand up. I did really, I did a lot of Muay Thai and then some Brazilian jujitsu and just, yeah. I was really, the thing is I, I get really intense

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about my hobbies and I was so into it. I was all in. Awesome. And I had worked a little bit as a journalist and I was like, oh, I should like do MMA reporting. And I emailed this MMA website in Sweden and I was like, Hey, can I come and write for you? And they were like, oh, actually we're going to an event in Gothenburg tomorrow. Do you want to come? Yeah. And I was like, wow, this is a lot. It's like 11pm at night, but sure, I'll come. And I went there to their office. I'd never really met them. And I'm like, this is kind of scary. Like I'm a 20 year old girl and going there and group of men were the group of men and they were so rude. I went there and I was like, Hey, what's up? And they were all kind of ignoring me and just like not looking at me or interacting with me until they realized that Simon was a girl because we'd only talked over email. And they're like, Oh, this guy named Simon is going to come. And then they were like, Oh fuck, Simon. It's actually Samo. And it's a girl. So I kind of like slid into that in a very, very strange way. And I did that for a year, but then I got kicked out of an interview with Alexander Gustavsson. And I was like- Your pronunciation is so good. And then I just kind of never went back and I was done with it. And now I'm not allowed to do martial arts because of brain stuff. So I've kind of put all of that behind me. And it's interesting. It's like, I definitely see the athleticism in it and the skill that goes into it. I think as the older I get, the more concerned I am about the health impacts of the sport and of the people who are practicing it on an elite level. And I'm just not as, cannot as 100% just cheer as somebody beats somebody else up into a pulp. Yeah, especially considering the effects it might have on the brain. May I ask why you got kicked out? Is it the Dustin Smith interview? Is anything fun? It's embarrassing? What happened? No, it wasn't. I didn't, it was not, I didn't intend to get kicked out. I didn't realize I was going to get kicked out. So it was Alexander Gustavsson was going to fight John Jones. Yeah. And he had just, he was kind of like this golden boy in Sweden. And he had just come out to the press that he had actually been to jail for violent crimes. And all I wanted to ask, all I asked was what was the reason that you wanted to bring that forward now? And apparently that was completely like blacklisted, but I hadn't gotten briefed about it at all. And the PR man had a PR of the UFC was just yelling at me and they kicked me out of Grand Hotel in Stockholm. And I immediately called my mom and I was like, mom, you will not believe what just happened. I got kicked out of an interview at Grand Hotel because in the 90s, she got kicked out of an interview with Mel Gibson from the Grand Hotel. So that's like runs in the family. So I was just like, yeah, no, it was just this weird generational skip where we both got and kicked out of interviews at the same hotel. You spent quite a bit of time in China as a student. Is that something you could speak to the differences? And culturally, maybe even from like a student in the engineering perspective between China and US, maybe even Sweden, those are like technologically speaking, just such fundamentally different places. I mean, I moved to China when I was 16. And I went there as an exchange student. So that is before I had ever touched upon those things. And it was, and then I went back when I was 19 to work as an English teacher for a little bit. It was it was incredibly challenging to be there. The language barrier, the language, the culture, all of it. I mean, I was like, now when I look at 16 year olds, I'm like, you're a baby. And I moved, sorry, 10 to 16 year olds listening to this. But like, I just can't believe I did that. And yeah, I didn't speak the language. I got placed in like a small city with almost no

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foreigners. It's just a constant audience of people staring at you because they haven't interacted with a lot of foreigners before. And yeah, definitely. And then after that, I moved to Kenya. And I think that was one of the reasons why it was so interesting to move to the States, because people were like, oh, isn't it like hard with the language barrier or the cultural difference? And I was like, this is nothing. And I could speak the language, like I could speak English well, and I could kind of pass as an American, even just as I moved here. And it was such a relief where I was like, wow, I'm like an undercover foreigner, because I got to a point where I realized like, it doesn't matter how good my Mandarin is, I'm never, people are never gonna fully accept me here. So yeah. And you moved, you went to Kenya, you've spoken about this after your parents got divorced? Yeah. When did I talk about that? Didn't realize I told that story.

I know. I know so many things. What do you think this is?

Is it from when I have my Amazon Echo installed? Yeah, so I came home from China first time I was there for a year. It's one of the most turned upside down days of my life.

I spent a year there and I was so excited. I had really rough year. And I was so excited just to come home and like be a child again. I remember thinking and just like feeling like I belonged. And then I came home and I found out that my parents had separated when I was gone and they hadn't told me because they wanted to like not affect my stay there, which I think was 100% the right decision of them to make. But I kind of came home to a house that was starting to get picked apart. And it's a big shock to your world. It was both yes and no. I think I remember I just sat down on my bed and I was like, well, this isn't what I expected. But I guess I'll move to Kenya because I was one of the few, there were a few Swedish boarding schools in the world. There was one in Brussels, Paris, London, and then one in Nairobi. And I didn't want to miss more school because I'd taken a gap year when I went to China. So I was like, I guess I'll go to Nairobi. And I'm thinking now like I think if my parents had stayed together, granted, it was amazing that they made the right decision in every way. But my roots kind of never grew back after that. And I think I just kept on moving abroad and moving around and being really restless.

Have you ever been able to find a home spiritually?

I don't have a home. Yeah. I mean, I have a home

in the people around me and I have a lot of different homes. I think what I'm realizing more and more is like you cannot live without consequence and compromise. And sometimes I can envy people

who have that like same friend group that they had their entire life or that just really belong in a place. And I realized that would be amazing, but I've chosen different experiences. And one of the upsides of that is I can feel home almost anywhere. One of the downsides of that is that I cannot feel fully at home anywhere. Oh, it's deeply and darkly poetic.

Do you feel at home?

Probably the way you put it is really beautifully put. Yeah.

No, I have to find home in the people I love. Yeah.

What advice would you give to young people

that look at your stellar life, the trajectory of your career as a human being, as a creator, as an engineer, as a designer, as an incredibly interesting personality who's working on an autobiography? What advice would you give them?

Like how to make their way in this life? Maybe high school students, maybe college students on

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how they can have a career they can be proud of or a life they can be proud of?

Oh my God, Lux.

You know, this is not the advice, but there are very few moments in a career that feel as good as you think they are going to. And there are very few moments of feeling really proud of yourself. Like I feel like I often just feel like I'm not doing it well enough or big enough or I know I just had one of those moments like hearing you say that. I'm like, oh, I'm actually doing okay.

I think my main advice is enthusiasm is a much more potent fuel in life than duty.

And just because something is boring doesn't mean that it's important. I kind of realized for myself that like I'm so much better at the things I enjoy. But school doesn't really teach us how to stay excited about something and how to stay enthusiastic about something. And if you can find that, then like you got a goldmine of potential. So I kind of had to reprogram myself to be like, just because this is fun doesn't mean that it's not important. Because I had so much guilt about it in this weird way or where I'm like, no, this is too fun. This can't be work. And I'm like, no, it's still work. The boring stuff isn't more important. And the vice versa, as you said, just because it's boring and hard doesn't mean it's the right thing to do. That's interesting. I'm going to have to take that advice and think through it. Because my genetically I'm built a little bit like if this is really unpleasant, it's probably good for me. And it's a dangerous thing to think sometimes it's true, sometimes it's not. Yeah. No, and it's like what comes really easy and where do you have that kind of effortless momentum and enthusiasm and that is kind of the sweet spot. I think that I'm also really happy that I spent time trying out so many different jobs. I mean, I've had so many different jobs before I did it and I would do things for a year and then I quit. And it feels like I tried on a bunch of different pants. And you're like, okay, I can kind of wear this, but they're not super comfortable or I don't love the look of them or whatever. And now I feel like I found this pair of pants that just like fits me perfectly. And that perfectly caters to my strengths and my weaknesses. I used to work as an editor for the Swedish government. And I remember thinking like, oh, I need to be okay that not a lot of things are happening and that things are moving slowly and that the work is kind of like monotonous.

And then I realized like, or maybe I should be in a workplace where it's a benefit or strength that I want a lot of things to happen and that I can handle a high speed. And I think that is really such a good question task as well. Like what are my strengths? What are my weaknesses? And in

what context are most of these things strengths? And if you know that, if you know the measurements,

you can find the right fitting pants. Yeah, or the right suit, as Lex will tell you.

What do you think is the meaning of life? Oh, I don't think there's any meaning.

Is the meaningless void? No, just that it doesn't have any meaning doesn't mean that it's meaningless.

I don't think that there's this big grand meaning. I think a more important question is what brings you substantial joy in your life. To me, it's the relationships with people that I have. Love? Yeah. I mean, love in all different kinds of form. I'm really working on figuring out how to build more community, especially in a society that isn't really made for it.

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I want more passive hangouts with people where I just want people who are there. Together? To get high? No, together. To get high? Together? Yeah. I mean, I think seeing somebody for lunch and kind of shooting the shit and what's the latest with you is great. But what I want is somebody to just roll up and sweat pants and open my fridge and be like, what are you going to do? I don't know. Maybe I'll read a book. Yeah, I think that- Just sharing silence.

Sharing silence, being alone together and just that type of community, I think, is what I'm really seeking out now because I think, yeah, and also working on a goal, on a joint goal together with other people. I think being a YouTuber can be really lonely. I mean, as much as I'm working with a team, it's like, yeah, I just want to work in a bigger project and kind of have that sense of wow, we're doing this together because I think that accesses my pride a lot better than just being proud of myself. It's so much easier for me to be proud of a team than for me to be proud of myself. That's probably good advice for people who are doing creative work on YouTube to work on a team. Yeah, and just choose, try to do things, take it from the queen of shitty robots, but try to do things with integrity, former queen of shitty robots. Do things with integrity, like anything you do on the internet is kind of, I think of things as tattoos on my internet and on my internet sulfon. I'm really happy that I said no to some things early in my career that I know that I would have regretted now and just think of it in the long term. Going viral is overwhelming and so stressful and so fun, but so intense. I'm really happy that I managed to build that into a more long-term career than just have it be something that passed.

And come down from the viral moment and maintain your humanity.

Yeah, and also really deliberately defining what success means to you because there are so many reasons or so many definitions that other people will give you. And especially when you're working on the internet, there are just numbers upon numbers that are like, you're doing well, you're not doing well. And something I'm really happy that I did was early on, I really tried to think of like, what does success look like for me? And I realized that it's not having the world's biggest YouTube channel. It's being proud of the projects that I put out and having full say in how I spend my time. That is the most important thing to me. And if I had a huge YouTube channel and I was making so much money, but I kind of had this machine run me rather

than the other way around, like to me, it's so important to be able to wake up in the morning and be like, I don't want to do this anymore. And for that to be okay. And I think I defined that for myself early on and I've really tried to live by it and made decisions after that. And I'm really happy that I did that.

And also with the store, with the design you're doing now, you're putting a little bit of love in the products that create a scale. I mean, that's what Johnny and I did. That's the cool thing. So you could create something beautiful and then people could share that love at scale. It's terrifying and beautiful and I'm so here for it. I'm here for it too. I'm a big fan. I'm a big fan of who you are. I'm a big fan of everything you do, of putting yourself out there, putting your love out there in terms of the designs you create. Also, just because I'm a fan of robotics, I think you inspire a lot of people. I think the shitty robots are actually incredible robots. And it's incredible engineering. That's all. That's the best combination of design and engineering and fun, all of it together. So

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thank you for doing that. I'm a big fan. You're an inspiration and thank you for sitting down with me. This is awesome. Thank you so much for having me. Thanks for listening to this conversation with Simone Yetch. To support this podcast, please check out our sponsors in the description. And now, let me leave you with some words from Kurt Vonnegut. We have to continually be jumping off cliffs and developing our wings on the way down. Thank you for listening and hope to see you next time.