EPISODE 939

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:00] JM: *Chaos Monkeys* is a book about Silicon Valley startups and Facebook. It is one of the most accurate books written about the modern technology industry even if it isn't exactly accurate on all the facts therein. It does capture both the negatives and the positives of software companies. It captures the zeitgeist of Silicon Valley in its modern form.

Antonio Garcia Martinez is the author of *Chaos Monkeys*. He wrote the book after going through a gauntlet of prototypical Silicon Valley experiences. Antonio founded an ad tech company called AdGrok. His company was funded by the startup accelerator Y Combinator, and during his time at the company, there were many dramatic events that Antonio tells in great detail. AdGrok was acquired by Twitter and Antonio went on to work at Facebook on its ads platform.

Antonio is a fantastic writer and what makes *Chaos Monkeys* special is that it reads like a book written by an author who found himself in a technology career rather than a technologist who opportunistically wrote a book. I hope Antonio writes another book in the future, because *Chaos Monkeys* was quite a treat to read and I really recommend it to anybody in the audience.

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Find Collabs is not only for open source software, it's also a great place to collaborate with other people on low code or no code projects or find a side project if you're a product manager or somebody who doesn't like to write code. Check it out at findcollabs.com.

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[INTERVIEW]

[00:03:45] JM: Antonio Garcia Martinez, welcome to Software Engineering Daily.

[00:03:47] AGM: Thank you for having me.

[00:03:49] JM: You're the author of *Chaos Monkeys,* which is a book that I really enjoyed. It's a book in which you document the process of starting a company and eventually getting acqui-hired and going to work at Facebook. What are the elements of Silicon Valley that you captured in *Chaos Monkeys* that had not been captured before that book?

[00:04:08] AGM: I mean this is going to sound very immodest, but I think most of – To be quite honest, I guess one of the weird on talked about things about Silicon Valley is that there is this sort of code of silence around talking about the inside of it, right? There so much boosterism inside the industry and I think there's such an opportunity cost of pissing people off or kind of

breaking that code of silence, but it's rare for someone to write – I hate using the term tell-all, because it sounds like very tabloid-y.

But sort of unvarnished version of the reality, which it doesn't not necessarily mean that it's gossipy and lured and whatever. It just means that you're not trying to convey a certain image and/or be a thought leader. You're just in a very realistic way telling exactly how things go down.

I think it's hard to – You have to go way back until you find I think a book comparable and which the inside basically just spill the beans. I think the last one I can think of is Startup by Jerry Kaplan that came out in the late 90s, which is like ancient history and probably close to the birthdate of some of your listeners, which makes me feel old. That book still feels very dated, but I think it's still a good book.

In many ways what I tried to do with *Chaos Monkeys* was try to extract the general lesson from the very particular thing that was going on with me. I should be clear, I didn't have that spectacular career or anything. I just think I was very emblematic of a general class of phenomenon. I went through Y Combinator. Had a pile of problems, got sued, couldn't raise money, raise money, cofounder issues, and then had your classic acqui-hire, which for those who don't know, it's when you get acquired but really it's just a juicy hiring package and it's kind of a failure to be honest.

The fact that most acqui-hires are basically failures is again one of those unacknowledged truths that everyone knows, but no one really says out loud, because everyone kind of wants to paint it like success, but it's not really true. That wasn't the goal of the company when you're raising money.

Then transitioning as a relatively early employee on the Facebook ads team and seeing what that was like before during and after the IPO I think was also another very emblematic experience. Yeah, I think – Sometimes you want to look at – If you want to take the entirety of Silicon Valley as like the lifetime of a company, I think I captured the very early stages, like the seed stage. A little bit of the early-stage acquisition stuff, and then somehow I just teleport to the IPO.

If there's anything I sort of fear that I missed was that sort of middle stage of scaling the company, because the companies in which I was in a mid-level startup never quite got to the IPO stage [inaudible 00:06:23] very much the early part and the last part of the sort of the company entrepreneurship cycle.

[00:06:29] JM: There's some comparison to be drawn between *Chaos Monkeys* and *Liar's Poker*.

[00:06:35] AGM: Yes. That's such a flattering comparison, but yes, I thank you for the comparison.

[00:06:38] JM: I think it's a fair one, and one point of comparison that I'm curious about is one thing that was funny about Liar's Poker is he wrote it as a critique of finance and other people treated it as a treatise of why you should get into finance, which is this really bizarre outcome. Do know if *Chaos Monkeys* had that same effect?

[00:07:00] AGM: Oh, yeah. I know it did. It absolutely did. For you listeners that don't know, because again it might be slightly ancient history. So Liar's Poker was Michael Lewis's first work, right? Michael Lewis, famous guy from Moneyball and the Big Short all the rest of it. His first book was this heavily autobiographical kind of gonzo satirical cake of the mortgage markets in the 80s, like the first credit crisis before the current one that I had some very small role in.

Yeah, exactly as you said, Michael Lewis in an interview said that what he wrote is sort of a cautionary tale became the sort of siren song for a generation of Wall Streeters, including me by the way. So I dropped out of a PhD in physics at Berkeley because I read Liar's Poker, which is like the gateway drug to finance. I suppose Michael Lewis, at least in his less cynical moments, was thinking, "This will scare them away." Of course, I read it and like, "Yes, I want this. I want the human piranha. The fucking frogs are going to fucking get fucked." Like literally every other word of fuck is like, "Yes, I want to see this."

Coming from the, shall we say, rather effete world of science academia. That seemed like a refreshing change. I partly quit the PhD and went to Goldman to work as a credit derivatives quant because of Liar's Poker. So then when it was my turn to write the book, and there's a

chapter in *Chaos Monkeys* by the way that's about what it was like working at Goldman Sachs during the credit crunch as sort of a transitional thing and as a sort of intertextual homage indeed Liar's Poker.

Yeah. No. I think it did, because it's funny, I don't get like recognized often. I think my audience is very much probably heavy overlap with your audience of being SF geeks and all that. But the only time that I was recognized like on the street is in San Francisco. Nowhere else, right? The writer's fantasy of meeting that attractive stranger on the subway reading your book to which you casually introduce yourself and then you go discuss your book over glasses of wine. That never happens, right?

[00:08:43] JM: There's always book two.

[00:08:45] AGM: Right. There's always book two. Who dies last. what actually happens is you're running through South Park here in Soma, late for a meeting or something and some dude is like walking behind you and you look around and like, "Dude, who are you?" He's like, "Uh, are you Antonio Garcia from *Chaos Monkeys*?" I'm like, "Yeah. Yeah. Why?" He's like, "Well, I got an offer from Facebook and so I bought your book and read it and now I'm totally excited to go there." I'm like, "All right, man. Best of luck. I hope you enjoy working for Zuck." Yeah. I think to a certain degree it did have that effect. Yeah.

[00:09:17] JM: There are places in *Chaos Monkeys* where you admit to deceiving other people. There's like deceit and you admit your slight dishonesty. When I was reading the book I wondered is he a reliable narrator? what I wondered is like are you lying to people in the book or does mean are you a trustworthy narrator? To what extent are you a reliable narrator?

[00:09:44] AGM: I mean, I put it the other way. If I hadn't said I was lying, would I be a trustworthy narrator? Because there is multiple levels of deceit that happens within a startup, particularly when it comes down to the nitty-gritty of doing a deal. The investors will lie to you. The M&A – What's it called? I've already forgotten. The team that actually buys companies inside Facebook, whatever it's called. Anyhow, it's some other business's euphemism. Anyhow, they like to you.

I think it's generally – The other question people usually ask me first, particularly in this book is like what was the reaction of people in the book? Have you been blackballed from the tech world? What was their reaction? In some sense, those are the people who actually participated. My cofounders were mentioned in the book and have a big press. I named all the name. I only use pseudonyms for some of the personal relations I have. Everybody else, I use their real names.

The general reactions are actually surprisingly positive. Of course, if they really thought I was an asshole, they probably wouldn't have reached out to me. So might be a biased sample. But I think most of the people I've talked to were like, "Well, it's obviously a heavily satirical, very Antonio take on things." But like it wasn't totally – I mean, the flavor of what you got was right. It was an incomplete picture and I say that. This isn't fact check reportage. This is first-person memoir, which has pluses and minuses. The pluses are you get one person's very personal experience of it.

The minuses are I didn't interview my cofounders to get their viewpoints of what they thought during the thing. I had to speculate, right? So that's the downside.

I think it's is true as any one man's experience of anything can be. It's funny, when you go back and reconstruct history, there's a certain workaday assembly of facts you have to do, which these days is either easier or harder depending on how you look at. Obviously, I had of email and texts and messages and whatever that go on to reconstruct history. My job, I was writing this book a couple of years after most of the events were portrayed. Human memories is very. Fallible.

You go back and you think, "Oh! Events happened in orders A, B and C." It turns out it was B, A and then C never happened, or C was actually a conflation of D, E and F, which you kind of have forgot about. So I spent two weeks going back and feeling like the longest Evernote note ever with just every day for three years on what happened there to try to reconstruct the narrative in a very concrete way.

I think in terms of things actually happening in the order that they did happen. I think I probably did get it down. But again it's very much one person's POV. There's definitely been feedback

from all the people that are like – I mean, yeah. I could see how you would look at it that way, but in fact all of these other things were going on that you didn't see. It's like I grant you that. It's true. I didn't interview any of the people in the book for it. It's not totally true. I probably spoke to one or two people, but I didn't sit down and try to reconstruct the narrative as a reporter would do. Yeah, it's necessarily flawed in that regard. But I think you gain something in the first-person memoir at the same time.

[00:12:35] JM: Had there been specific areas of the book where other people have said, "Hey, you memorialized this incorrectly."

[00:12:40] AGM: The one that comes to mind is when the company actually got sold. Spoiler alert or whatever, but at the end of the acqui-hire, the acqui-hire was ongoing and this happens more often than people actually admit, but often when a company obviously tries to create an auction and company A expresses an interest. Company B that you've had the back burner, you kind of restart that. Then out of nowhere, we management to provoke company C into appearing. Everyone interviews everybody.

Again, because these aren't not really – You're not really buying the corporate entity. You're buying a set of people. Sometimes not all the people make the cut. So very aggressive companies, Facebook for example, will look at founders 1, 2, 3 and say, "Hey, we'd would like one. We sort like two, and we don't like three at all. We'll make this offer for one and two or maybe just one and you guys figure out." Which is kind of dickish thing to do, but it's surprisingly common. People just don't talk about it." So that happened to us.

As I say in the book, for whatever reason, and I don't think this is a global statement. But for whatever reason, Facebook really liked me and wasn't interested in the rest of the company. Twitter liked the entire company. So it was this strange thing. I at the time, one of the few good calls I've ever made in technology was that like Facebook would go on. Now it seems like a foregone conclusion, okay? But this is five or six years ago when Facebook taking over the universe hadn't really happened yet. People still thought it was going to die like MySpace. To me it seemed pretty clear that Facebook was set for world domination. Twitter was not.

They gave me a decent, not outrageous offer, and I was just convinced that I had to go to Facebook for whatever reason. So I was trying to arrange with such that Twitter could buy the other founders in the company and I would go to this other company. Based on a president of another YC company that I mentioned by name in the book, that it also done the same thing.

Again, these things aren't that rare. They tend to happen fairly often. People just don't talk about it because it's kind of ugly. Anyhow, I tried that story along as far as I could, but then at some point I had to recuse myself from the Twitter side of the deal because basically I was effectively on track to become a Facebook employee and their competitors and all sorts of things. I think I skipped over a lot of the – I think my founders actually had a harder time than I thought to actually get the company sold after I left.

I assumed it was a slam dunk and like, "Okay, we're done here." I'm just going to walk away." We all walk away to the companies we want. Eke everything's cool. It turns out there was like a month of nailbiting left for them that I didn't realize. Of course, we weren't on speaking terms after that for all sorts of reasons. Corporate development, that's the name of the company. That's what it is, which sounds bizarre, but that's the part of the company the buys other companies.

The acquisition part I think Argurius and I are in good terms now. We chat and stuff. I totally believe that I kind of glossed over that in fact it was very difficult to the company and the deal almost fell apart various times, which would've left him in a lurch, which would've been terrible. Yeah, that's that's probably wrong.

I think my fly in the wall take on a lot of Facebook corporate strategizing, which is a big part of the second half, is probably kind of one-sided. I was kind of in a lot of the share hold meetings and a lot of the PM meetings, but I wasn't like a VP level person at Facebook. So I wasn't in all the meetings. I didn't hover – The mid-level PM. The person who's actually like in the trenches building the product. They're brought into that general staff level of the company as needed, but they don't kind of live there. They live in the bullpen with the engineers or with other lateral lieutenants so to speak. You're not up there with the generals.

I think a lot of the strategizing that was probably going on behind the scenes I didn't see or know about, but obviously I didn't see the very early Facebook. Some of the objection by early Facebookers were very protective of the company because obviously their own identities are understandably very wrapped up in it. Felt that I didn't betray the company's culture how things work that well, or at least how those things originated, because I just wasn't there. The feedback from – Well, you can figure out who it is, but the most senior person probably I mentioned in there was that it's just weird to read your book. From his point of view, I arrived late in the story and you're kind of writing the story of Facebook as someone who arrived in like the seventh-inning.

It's funny though, because I've actually heard from people inside the ads team now, like a friend of mine that I overlap with said recommended it to a new hire. Like, "Oh, no, no. That's like old Facebook. That's not relevant anymore." It's funny, startups are fractal. Literally, the first ten consider themselves to be early. Then you get to it size of 100 and about a time that is 10,000 employee, a thousand is like ancient history even though – Then it's a time they didn't feel like they're really at all. Who knows what it means?

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[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[00:19:10] JM: Here's something that I think you captured more honestly than I think most – In fact, I think any book that I have – Any mainstream book that I have read has captured. Although you still didn't capture it to a large degree, is the way that the ads business actually works, which is very murky sausage factory.

I mean, if people think that finance is shady – I mean, the thing is like there is a certain point where the smartest people, they were no longer going into finance. They started going into ad tech. In fact, a lot of the people who were X-finance people left for ad tech. That's why all the biggest ad exchanges are in New York. What are the murkiest parts of the ad industry?

[00:19:59] JM: Yeah, it's funny you mentioned that. That was my trajectory, right? I spent three at Goldman as price and credit derivatives. The credit world blew up and then I bailed for ad. Those who maybe don't know those worlds well, unlike you, usually ask, "Well, how do you go from finance to ad?" It's like it's exactly the same. What do mean there's no difference whatsoever? You're turning code and data into money.

[00:20:17] JM: Plus regulation.

[00:20:20] AGM: Exactly. There is even less regulation and less transparency.

[00:20:22] JM: You can make as much volume as you want.

[00:20:23] AGM: Right, and you don't have to disclose prizes. You can make up prices. What's this catchiest thing? I mean, broadly, and I know I'm going to sound like a fan boy saying this, even though again like I criticize the company a lot in the book. It's odd that companies like Facebook and Google get so much scrutiny, when in many cases they're the most aboveboard when it comes to that, because they have the most to lose. Also they have a direct relationship with the user.

In my opinion, this sketchiest people in the ad tech world are companies you've never heard of that I mentioned in the book, companies like Axiom, companies like Experian that can't to go six months without a data leak. Companies that sell your geo data from your phone that gets recycled and sold and resold without your knowing it. Carriers like Comcast that sell a lot of your browsing history and your geo data. That's what I find this sketchiest stuff.

The third party data brokers, right? By third-party, I mean people who don't have a direct relationship with you. The fact that you don't know these companies names mean they're a third-party. I'm most wary of that. I mean, broadly, I don't know how philosophically we want to get here, but I think first party data use where you have a relationship with the company, you give them data and in exchange they give you a service and you're trading office to an amount of privacy in exchange for convenience or a sense of community or whatever. I think that's kind of a fair trade and I think users are actually pretty good at like figuring out that tradeoff.

Where I think the private – There's a whole privacy Mafia out there that wants to agitate for privacy reform and privacy legislation and whatnot. I often call them like why do you question users tradeoffs? Well, because they don't know what they're doing and they don't know the dangerous. I think that's true for a lot of third parties that sell and resell your data, and I think that's the murkiest world. That probably should be regulated more heavily than it is.

[00:21:59] JM: What about bot traffic? Have you gotten into that stuff much? Do you have a sense for how big that –

[00:22:07] AGM: I don't have a lot of direct experience of that. So Facebook, one of the good things about it, because there's a whole user ops part of Facebook that basically kills fake

accounts. One of Facebook's innovation with having real identity on the Internet. It's ancient history rumor back on like USENET and forums. There's no real identity. It was all typically quite anonymous, and that means that people behave like shitty lead to each other when they've got masks on.

Facebook, and they're not entirely wrong here. Wants you have your real identity, one unique account. So they go out in these app all the fake account. By and large, Facebook – And because Facebook only service the vast majority of attached traffic on Facebook owned properties, it doesn't actually get a lot of bot traffic, or far less than like the wider world of the Internet and mobile apps. So they don't have a lot of the issues of – I'm sure you've seen these viral videos of a wall of phones in China or India or Russia where they're like running software that has people clicking on ads and they're getting ad revenue and it's all fake. That wasn't really an issue at Facebook.

As a result, they're weren't used to dealing with it. They didn't have massive anti-ads frauds team. In fact, if you believe the rumors, which I think are credible, they made one acquisition called Liverail, which was a video ad exchange and it basically imploded because the amount of fraud and there was huge. Facebook denied a deal with it among other issues as it just ended up dying.

Yeah, I don't have a lot of direct experience with it. I mean, Facebook in some sense gets antifraud for free by having real identity unlike most of the Internet. So I never really encountered it. I mean, not to say it's not a real problem. It is a real problem, but I think it's a much bigger problem on the wider Internet than it is.

Bot traffic and then ads code running where the user does not actually see it. One ad loads, but they hit three pixels and they charge three – All that sketchy crap. That typically doesn't happen on Facebook. Again, real identity is usually on there. Then they serve their own ads. They don't use third-party ad serving. So it's harder to cheat it. Yeah, I'm not familiar with it, but it is a massive problem. The problem is – One of those problems that nobody's incentivized to fix it. The only person who's incentivized to fix it is one with the least power to fix it, which is the advertisers who's dollars are being wasted, right?

[00:24:10] JM: Right. I mean, that's the funny thing, is you have this layer of interaction with the agencies who are actually spending the dollars of the advertiser. I mean, that's perversion and we really have to get into, but it's just funny, because I asked an ad tech person about this and they were like, "I don't think it really matters, because it's priced in to do the ads." I'm like, "I'm not sure about that, because you have this incentive misalignment between the agencies and the actual advertisers." It is an interesting markets question.

[00:24:40] AGM: I meant, the right that it's priced in, like the publishers and the entire ad tech stack between the publisher and the advertiser will allow as much fraud as they can get away with. If the fraud were so rampant that literally ad impressions did nothing. At some point, their budgets would go to zero and then they've killed the cow.

[00:24:55] JM: How do we know that? With brand advertising? If they're doing billboards and they're doing like –

[00:25:00] AGM: Yeah, with brand advertising. It's not necessarily true. Yeah, the pricing thing, that's just a polite way of saying it's overpriced just enough. It's still kind of worth spending money on.

Yeah. No, I agree. It's sketchy. I mean, again, that's why many cases Facebook which, is vertically integrated ad stack is in some sense say for more sane. I think that's part of the reason why they're so successful and mobile as well, because you have less of that bullshit sort of leaking into their ad stack.

[00:25:27] JM: You've given a little bit of the overview of the conditions under which you joined Facebook. When you joined, you were working on ad products. What was your sense of the company when you joined? What was your sense of the tribal ethos within the company and did you feel like you fit in?

[00:25:47] AGM: Yes. I'll address that two different way. One was a culture, and part of the reason where it convinced me that I needed to basically bail on a deal and go to Facebook was the vibe I got from the Facebookers that I talked to and just being at the company reminded me many ways of Goldman Sachs in a way, which I know people might have a negative connotation

about it, but Goldman Sachs at least at the time was the best investment bank for various reasons and they weathered the storm for very good reasons. They had corporate values that people actually followed. It was mostly run by the partners whose net worth is all wrapped up in the company. There was just this feeling of motivation, almost a militant feeling of like imperial domination ambition that it's kind of exuded Facebook.

There is a colorful scene that I'll mention. This is not FCC regulated. So I can mention it. But there's a scene that for some reason stuck with a lot of people, stuck with me. I was interviewing and the interview process was just like throwing you with 10 different people would just sit there and torture you and then like you didn't get a fancy lunch or anything. Somewhere in there I had five minutes and I ran to the bathroom and this is Facebook's old camp. It's not the current one, which is kind of a dump actually, like ratty carpets. It smelled like. It was not a nice place.

Went to the bathroom, used the bathroom, whenever. Two things, one, there's a guy in the toilet taking a dump coding while taking a dump on the toilet. I can hear the clicking.

[00:26:58] JM: It's a good sign.

[00:26:59] AGM: No. Exactly. It's a good sign, and it's not like chatting with his girlfriend like messaging back and forth. It was obviously like I could hear the several key macros of Emacs and shit going on. The dude was actually coding while on the toilet. I was like, "Man! That shit is commitment."

Then two, there was toothbrushes next to the sinks in the bathroom. I looked in the bin and there's like a bunch of them thrown, people were like literally living at the office and coding while they took a dump. It's like, "Wow!" Meanwhile I Twitter, they had like three kombucha taps and like tasteful design furniture. It was a different vibe.

[00:27:30] JM: What are the roots of that difference?

[00:27:32] AGM: I don't know Twitter enough to know. I mean, in the case of –

[00:27:35] JM: You can speak specifically about Facebook then, because I think most companies are not that way.

[00:27:40] AGM: Right. Again, I wasn't there when it was founded. I wasn't part of that founding crew, but the vibe I got is that it was still undergraduate engineers working in a dorm. That was still kind of the feeling and all of the good and bad that that meant. I'm sure that it's certainly in our current environment. I'm sure they've shut a lot of this down, but every team had either a Kegerator or a liquor cabinet. There was a decent amount of drinking going on.

There was swag from all the hackathons and everyone wore all these weird Facebook shit. People look like shit all the time. I remember, I had a meeting with Fisher, David Fisher, who is Cheryl's right-hand man, head of sales. An important guy, like a VP. My first VP meeting at Facebook. Of course, he's in sales where he scheduled meeting at nine in the morning. These are typical engineers who like stumbling at 10:30. Nothing happens at nine. But he wants to do it 9. Okay.

He books a conference room. Go to the conference room. He looked in the window and there's like four interns or something passed out in the four couches inside the conference room like asleep like at 9 in the morning. We're like, "Oh!" Well, I'm never going to wake up. So we went to a different conference room. I think it had that dorm room feel to it. I think it initially did and I just always maintained it and it just never kind of – Nowadays, I suspect it's different. But as late as 2011, it was still that way.

[00:28:54] JM: Do you attribute any of it to the leadership?

[00:28:56] AGM: Yeah. Yeah, totally. I mean, that company is a projection of Zuck's ego and taste in values without any question. Yeah, absolutely.

[00:29:03] JM: Could you go deeper on that?

[00:29:06] AGM: Again, I was in a few meetings with Zuck. I don't know him well. I don't know him personally. But from the vibe that I got from him and those around him, it's what he called the hacker ethos. It's an improvised all-in commitment to making shit work by whatever means

necessary. Yeah, just a very zealous commitment to the mission of the company. It's a very mission-driven company. It's very culty to be quite honest in many ways, which is not necessarily a bad thing. I think was Keith Rabois who said every successful will startup as a occult. I think he's probably right. Facebook was certainly no exception.

[00:29:37] JM: Did you bear witness to any of the competitive element, like what made Facebook and Google so such a bitter competitors? What are the roots of that competitive –

[00:29:50] AGM: Yeah. I wasn't part of the in between company conversations with Google and Facebook. I was there when Google+ launched, and that's like a big chapter in the book.

[00:30:00] JM: Right. I remember that.

[00:30:01] AGM: Yeah. Everyone who was there at the time remembers that because it was a big deal. So Google+, it's ancient history, but Google+ launched. It was competitor to Facebook. Kind of look like Facebook. Prettier in some ways than Facebook, and obviously integrated tightly with all of Google services, email, search whatever. So they had an obvious advantage.

Just one day out of the blue they do ship it and it's like Facebook which really hadn't had that many serious competitors at least in the US for a while was suddenly faced with this existential threat.

So out of the blue is accented to our email saying – Me, outside the aquarium, the aquarium is this glass wall, sort of conference room. We didn't really have an office, but that this conference room where we would take meetings. Meet next to the aquarium and for something. You never knew what. Zack would send these emails and just everyone show up.

Everyone just crowded around like the middle of engineering bullpen in the main building. Again, this is back before the current campus. It's kind of this dumpy old industrial building. We all gather around, and it's kind of rousing speech in which you Google+ is launched and we need to make Facebook the best it can possibly be to fend off this threat and then we're going to work in a series of initiatives. Then he's a fan of the classic since we cited kid of the elder or famous

Roman statesman who used to end all the speeches with – This during the Punic Wars between Rome and the Carthaginians, Carthage. *Carthago delenda est,* Carthage must be destroyed.

He actually cited that speech, and the Carthage must be destroyed thing in his speech, which totally roused everybody up. By the end of it, you just want to go and invade a foreign country, right? Literally waiting to like march off and storm the beaches. Instantly, the Facebook analog research laboratory which was the sort of the in-house propaganda arm that all these cool design posters and stuff printed in posters of *Carthago delenda est* with like a Roman centurion's helmet on it and there were just paper everywhere and they instantly all got stolen. I was going to steal one myself I managed do it before they all got stolen. But I do have a photo of one. Yeah, that was the feeling internally.

It's weird because people then ask me, "So then what happened? What did you do?" He declared a lockdown. A lockdown was a Facebook tradition going back to the early days where he would like practically lock the doors of the house and say, "Nobody's leaving until we fix this."

So he announced there'd weekend meal service, and it's basically 24/7 just improve Facebook so that we fend off this threat. I remember I came in, I was into it as everybody else. I came out on a Sunday and I had to look to find parking in the parking lot. Sunday, the parking lot was full. Then just out of curiosity, I got back on the one on one and shot South and got off in shoreline and went to Google just like out of curiosity.

[00:32:30] JM: I remember this from the book.

[00:32:32] AGM: The parking was empty and there's like, "Aha! I see who's playing to win here." It was like, "Aha! Well." Google *delenda est* as it were.

[00:32:44] JM: What aspects of Facebook's culture do people broadly misunderstand?

[00:32:55] AGM: The first one is the money. They think the average schmo looking at tech thinks that Zuck or the company is about money and revenue and monetizing your data. That can be like the furthest thing from the truth. I'm sure it's changed somewhat now that we're a public company and like Facebook at least, or the Zuckerberg has to at least vaguely think

about quarterly earnings and stuff. I'm sure he thinks about it more than he used to. But at the time, ads was like in a ghetto. We were like in the most remote part of the building way away from Zuck in his office, which is on Facebook's campus, geography is meaningful if you're close to Zuck, because he's kind of a micromanager. It means that he cares about their product in a deep point. If you're not, then it means he doesn't.

So we were far away from Zuck. Couldn't get his intention and priority on things. Yeah, the company –I mean, he said it in the S1 and nobody believe it because it sounds naïve. Again, this is part of the reason why I wrote *Chaos Monkey* is like, "You to understand, These geeks actually believe what they're saying. You think it's like some soundbite? It's like. No. No. No," which makes them way more dangerous actually. But he said it in the S1. We don't build products to make money. We make money to build products. That was priority inside Facebook and I don't think that's ever changed in a deep way.

Ads exist as a necessary evil to pay for things, but it's not the goal of the company. It's not the priority of the company. That's not how they think about the world. So I think that's one thing that the outside world gets deeply, deeply wrong.

Again, and as I wrote in my book, that makes the company even more dangerous, because a greedy businessman who wants cash, that person is very rational and understandable and predictable. But in a profit of a new religion along with the religious army of cultists that they have, I mean, who knows what that person is going to think or do.

[00:34:28] JM: What is the goal of the company?

[00:34:30] AGM: I think it's encoded in their original founding mantra, a more open and connected world. I mean, I think Zuckerberg and that executive staff wants to make the entire world stare into a Facebook property and be at the center of how humans communicate with each other. Whatever that might be, whether that's basically an instant messaging product like WhatsApp. Whether that's a vehicle for personal self-actualization narcissism like Instagram, whether in the future it's finding the time for virtual reality and its Oculus, whatever it is. Facebook wants to be at that exchange between technology and human social life. That is the goal.

[00:35:07] JM: What are your personal critiques of the way Facebook builds products?

[00:35:11] AGM: I think they can be criticized for being a little bit quick to ship, like shipping a kind of half-assed, has big product and just throwing it over the wall and seeing what happens and then fixing it along the way. I think it can be very aggressive about shipping things in their most aggressive sort of market penetration oriented type product. Then when it doesn't quite work out, they lose interest in it after six months and forget it.

If you look at, for example, the Cambridge Analytica scandal, which can be its own separate podcast episode, I'm very skeptical of most of the claims in Cambridge Analytica. In fact, I think they're totally overblown in terms of their impact on our political system. But I think in terms of one thing you can critique Facebook out of that and why it happened was they ship this thing called Facebook platform back in the day, which most of has probably forgotten. But back in the day, remember, there used to be like an integration with Spotify and you'd listen to a piece of music in Spotify and it would appear in your newsfeed and you'd annoy all your friends because you listen to that one song 12 times.

The idea was to like interject Facebook with all the stuff you do on the Internet and they have it be kind of the social layer around everything. That was the plan anyhow. It didn't really work out, right? Adaption wasn't great. People got annoyed by a lot of it and they had to tune down its distribution and feed, which is basically called the product.

But they shipped it with pretty loose restrictions around what apps and developers could do on the platform. Basically, anybody, any developer, like anybody, you, me, anybody can go and get a self-service app ID and launch an app on Facebook and you convince enough people to use it. Millions of Facebook users will be using your app and potentially opting into having your data use in all sorts of ways.

Facebook launched that way to be super aggressive to get people to adopt it and then kind of forgot about it and left the barn door open. When Cambridge Analytica, which was obviously a shady company, I don't think anybody would debate that, came along and tried to exploit that loophole. they were very slow to react to it. I think that's certainly something that you can

criticize that company for. They should've cut off Cambridge Analytica very early on. The moment they saw anything that they're doing anything weird and they noticed early on, they should have instantly blown them out of the water and cut them off, but they didn't. I think that's a real criticism.

[00:37:10] JM: Another element I like your book is in recent years, we've really seen such attention being drawn to the tech companies from media outlets. They're just chomping at the bit to report on these tech companies. Yesterday, I was reading, there is a recent wired piece about – I think it was called like four years inside Google's toxic something, whatever. You read something like this, and this is actually from Wired. You read it and there're a lot of anecdotes. There's a lot of stuff that's like definitely factual in there. But you still wonder like is this an accurate perception? Is this an accurate retelling of what they are retelling? Is Google really like falling apart at the seams the way that they portray it? To what extent are they selectively cherry picking stuff to make it look like this culture is just falling apart?

I spend my days talking to engineers that work at these companies, and the difference between what I hear from these engineers and what I hear from these kinds of stories is often just so dramatic. When I read your book, I felt like it was an honest retelling. I felt like it was a consistent – Retelling that was consistent with the actual engineers that I interview.

How is this disjunction going to be resolved? I mean, do you share my confusion at the kind of reporting and just a strange lens through which technology is being portrayed these days?

[00:38:58] AGM: Yeah. I'm not going to comment on the wired piece, A, because I haven't read it beginning to end. Then two, obviously I write for them, and so I don't want to comment [inaudible 00:39:05]. Yeah. Yeah, I write semi-regulate. Now I'm more semi than regulate for Wired. But I think your broader point still holds, right? Which is that there seems to be a major disconnect between how tech is portrayed even in relatively tech-centered or friendly media versus the reality [inaudible 00:39:24]. Yes, I think that's absolutely true.

I think as one of the few people whose worked in technology companies and also has gotten paid to write stuff. That Venn diagram intersection is pretty small. I think part of the reason why I wrote *Chaos Monkeys* and why I have no a small sort of intermittent career in journalism is to try

to close that delta, because I think the outside world doesn't understand the tech world very well and I think journalist –I mean, I've gotten to trouble in the past for criticizing tech journalists. So I want to not rekindle those fires. But I think a lot of journalists, not all –

[00:39:56] JM: Hey, you're talking to a tech journalist.

[00:39:58] AGM: Yeah. Well, right. Not all. I mean, there are some very good tech journalist that I read on a regular basis. But I think, broadly, it is the case that there is a difference of two cultures. There is a similar speech that CP Snow gave in the 50s about the two cultures, like humanities versus scientists. It's a famous speech. You can go back. It's on wiki, whatever. There's a different way of looking at the world, and I'm not saying it's exactly analogous to that split, but there's a split here that what am I talking about? Here's one thing.

There're two types of people in the world. You either hear about a piece of new technology that is innovative and foundational changes something about how the way the world works and you either reflexively say, "Fuck, yeah! Foot to the gas. Let's just see how far this goes," or you say, "Oh! No. No. No. No. Let's hit the brakes. Precaution. Let's let regulation catch up to." I think that, for example, the difference in that answer is part of the difference between the engineers, the product managers, that actual practitioners inside tech and the journalist class who comment on them. They have very different attitudes of like the average techie thinks technology is inherently good and that you should technology for technology's sake. If you break a few eggs along the way to mix a bunch of metaphors here, then that's kind of just the way it goes. I think journalists are like, "No."

I think for many tech journalist, they feel – I mean, it's clear from their writing that they feel that during the same relationship with tech companies in some sense that tech journalist during the financial crash were with the banks. We're here to sort of criticize to shed light on this murky world and to stand as the public's advocate or something. I mean, to be honest, it's kind of a savior complex that they have towards these tech companies. Their attitude is not, "Hmm. There's all these weird shit going on and there's a lot of word shit going on. That's for sure. I'm going to try to figure it out and explain it to somebody who doesn't live in it." I don't think that's the attitude that most of them have.

Most of them have the journalist's hero, little press hat sitting there trying to get to the bottom of what's going on and then get the juicy anecdote from some disgruntled employee and weave some narrative around that paints it as if Google, which is almost worth $1 trillion and I'm sure their stock has been up 20% this year or whatever is falling apart, which obviously it isn't, right? There's actually no real threat.

I am constantly chiding people who are like predicting the demise of Facebook. It's like you realize, "Oh, Facebook seems to be out of touch." No. They're not out of touch. They're looking at the usage and revenue dashboards and they don't see it crashing. I think it's funny, because here's the other thing about journalists and they seem so un-self-aware often, that like they criticize Facebook for manning this culture of like fake news of no consensus truth, but they themselves get fooled by their own spectacles than anybody else.

They're like, "How can Facebook survive the negative media cycle?" and they announce results and the stock is up 5% and they're just like, "Godsmack!" It's like you realize this little storage you're weaving has very little to do with any actual – Whatsoever." But it's the only reality they see. They have no reality check on their claims about the world. Like scientist do an experiment and like, "Oh, shit. The theory is wrong," or a product manager tweaks a thing and doesn't AB test and, "Oh, shit. Usage is down." But there is no such thing. There is no reality check.

You can swirl in this spectacle forever and then just not understand that in fact you've just diverged from the truth. So I think that happens a lot in the case of tech journalism and it's a shame, because I think there are real issues. The journalists were not totally wrong. I think tech will cause some disruptions that have negative externalities without any question. Yeah, I do think that – I mean, the other thing, and I hate to say it.

Again, journalists always hate when you say this because it sounds like it's a dick thing, but none of them have ever worked in tech – They're like, "Oh! But you only spent two years at Facebook." Yeah, that's two years more than like your entire class put together. Sorry. You have never sat in a product manager seat given a mandate. Look, here's a chart. Make this should go up in the next six months and like do it. There's like 100 tradeoffs, unlimited resources and so many engineers and a bunch of political shit going on. How do you make it happen? They've never done that. Almost nobody in that world has ever done that at all ever.

The fact that they haven't done that, I'm sorry, it's a real limitation. What other industry hires that way? Would VC hire somebody with absolutely zero background in the thing they're covering or talking about? Obviously not, and yet somehow in journalism, like I've seen the background of some of the journalists that are covering the company. It's like, "Oh! An English degree from Cambridge." It's like, "Well, that's great. But –" Yeah, I think that's – Again, it's one of these things you can't really say because you just sound like a dick, but it's true.

[00:44:21] JM: The other thing is the people working at these tech companies often feel as bamboozled by where the product is going and the effect it's having on society as the rest of us. That includes like the CEOs. They're like, "Holy cow! This thing is going crazy." Mark Zuckerberg probably wakes up every day and he's like, "I cannot believe this, that you're still going." What the heck is – What did I created?

[00:44:47] AGM: Yeah. That's one –

[00:44:49] JM: Not in a bad way, just like, "Wow! This is a force of nature."

[00:44:53] AGM: That's after having all critiques or journalism. Let's get back. Good graces and say, "This is where I think journalists also get it right," that I think not just Facebook, a lot of tech companies, are not very self-aware. This is a definite, very real criticism the journalists are totally right. When you're sitting inside – This was true even in 2011. I'm sure now it was like it's even worse. When you're sitting inside MBK, Menlo Park, the main campus, and you basically live there. You eat three meals there.

Everyone you know works there. You're on Facebook 18 hours a day, because a lot of that work at Facebook is through their own private internal Facebook, whatever Facebook or work. It's very easy to lose sight of the outside world and understand that the mission of Facebook and the behind-the-scenes thing, the huge security teams dedicated to catching child predators or illegal drug sales going on Messenger or whatever, the outside doesn't see that. You see that of course and you know all the things a company does to try to secure it as much as possible.

You often don't realize that, yes, what would be like literally a 1% or 2% thing inside Facebook is still to the outside world a big deal. Take examples, like some of the things at Facebook's been implicated like Myanmar and the Rohingya. Some of the ethnic minority, ethnic cleansing, or displacement or whatever you want to call it. I'm sure nobody Facebook could even denote put their finger on a map of where that was going on as it was happening.

Because, again, here's one of the difficult things about commenting or writing about a company like Facebook not having worked. I think is that you're not used to opening dashboards. Where things are denominated in units of billions, billions and billions of user actions, billions and millions who use, the scale is just tremendous, which is amazing. I think a lot of the people, if you ask Facebookers or at least ones I've asked. You've been here six years. You can easily get a job through something else while you're there. The impact that have is amazing. I launched this thing and even a failed Facebook product has 100 million users. There's just no other company where you could really do that.

But the flipside of that is it's very difficult to see things coming and it's very I things very easy for outsiders to say, "How do they not see that in Sri Lanka or whatever? Facebook was being used by some bad faith actor to do some nasty thing. How could you not see? That's like – I mean, do you realize that Sri Lanka is like .5% of Facebook usage for that to even come up on anybody's radar. It was just impossible.

I had numerous anecdotes of like weird shit going on inside the ads team or ads targeting that I just like, "Huh! I had no idea people do that on Facebook." I can give you one anecdote. I mean, it's kind of ancient, but one of the first products I've launched is what's called likes and interest targeting. So you can target ads by things that you've liked or interacted with.

Frankly, it's not very good targeting, but is still there and it programmatically goes through things you've interacted with and then semantically tags those actions. If you like a page about BMW automobiles, then you'll be classed into BMW and maybe fancy automobiles and whatever. It's just a way of targeting people that have interacted with that.

So we were working on the first time. Initially it was mostly page likes. I'm like, "Huh!" and then we're debating various ways to semantic tagging, this and that, and I just want to get a feel for like what are people liking on Facebook. What's the things?

I ran a query in wearing which I got like the top 100,000 or something most liked pages on Facebook and this massive lists. It was like a how did I do query where just shit out this several thousand line document. I was just flipping through, of course, gazillion languages. I speak Spanish, I noticed a lot of the Spanish ones. As I got down to some of that high but not super high, there was what were apparently the first lines of lots of jokes and I was like, "What the fuck? Jokes about Argentinians, or some like salty joke about divorced women, or whatever. Jokes. Street joke types. I'm thinking like, "What the hell is going on?"

So I would like cut and paste the page name and went to the page on Facebook and I'm like, "Oh!" Apparently at the time, and it probably doesn't happen anymore. In Latin America, for whatever reason, people would find like a funny joke because they didn't understand what pages are supposed to do. They'd create a page about that joke and then like and then pages would get a lot of traffic inside feed.

Someone would see a page with the joke like literally in page title, go to the page and see the punchline and then like it then it would be distributed in their feed and then I would go viral, because it was a funny, dirty joke. Whatever. Right?

So there was some joke again about, whatever, Brazilian grocery stores, or whatever. Like some dirty joke thing, and those are being sucked into the targeting engine and obviously semantically tagging random dirty jokes. God knows what that thing would output. Then that person was associated with that thing. Therefore we get target with that. It's just like, "Oh my God!" But how would I have known that in Latin America page like pages like this joke thing that like that's how it's being used. That's just one example.

I'm sure there's like a thousand Easter eggs kind of buried inside weird things that Facebook, because it's just – People don't understand. If you come up with a solution for a problem and Facebook isn't going to work in Amharic language in Ethiopia. Is going to work in this subcase and in that subcase? If it doesn't, then you're not really solving the problem. To really solve it for

the entire globe would stretch the resources even of Facebook. I think that's one of the things that I think people don't quite realize Facebook. I mean, it's basically a quarter through a third of the Internet outside of China. That's what Facebook is.

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[00:50:00] JM: As a programmer, you think an object. With MongoDB, so does your database. MongoDB is the most popular document-based database built for modern application developers and the cloud area. Millions of developers use MongoDB to power the world's most innovative products and services, from crypto currency, to online gaming, IoT and more. Try Mongo DB today with Atlas, the global cloud database service that runs on AWS, Azure and Google Cloud. Configure, deploy and connect to your database in just a few minutes. Check it out at mongodb.com/atlas. That's mongodb.com/atlas.

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[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[00:50:56] JM: There was an episode of This Week in Startups fairly recently where you were on it and –

[00:50:59] AGM: Oh, God! You've done your homework. Yes.

[00:51:02] JM: That episode was so good. I mean, I've listened to I think each of the episodes that you've been on on that show. I'm a huge fan of This Week in Startups. I love that show.

[00:51:09] AGM: Jason is a funny guy. Yeah.

[00:51:11] JM: That guy, he is such a podcaster. I mean, you guys have a very good rapport.

[00:51:18] AGM: Yeah. Not our first rodeo. I think I've been down there at least three or four times at last.

[00:51:22] JM: No. I mean, I found out about your book. I think I first heard about it on the his podcast way back. He did a great interview with you, because he's got this kind of literary bent to him as well.

[00:51:33] AGM: I mean, he started life as a journalist, right?

[00:51:35] JM: Right, exactly. But you guys had this episode about where you're talking about Libra. It was just very funny, because he owns it, Libra.

[00:51:42] AGM: Right.

[00:51:44] JM: It's so funny.

[00:51:46] AGM: Yeah, Jason has his finger in so many pies.

[00:51:48] JM: He does.

[00:51:49] AGM: How did he end up owning that domain, whatever?

[00:51:51] JM: But you had a pretty interesting point, which I think gives a lot of truth to it, which is the idea that Facebook's pursuit of this Libra cryptocurrency effort, whatever it pans out into, whether it turns it into a nothing bar or turns into something significant, is that it does represent some ambition that Facebook has in the company. How would you contrast that ambition with perhaps what you see in other top companies?

[00:52:20] AGM: Again, going back to your earlier question about what drew me to Facebook early on. I think one of the things was their ambition. When they thought – Sometimes it comes off as comical, but when they have a messaging product, we're going to have the biggest messaging product in the world. When we have a payments thing, it's going to become the new currency. It's going to replace the American dollar or something. It's always this Scott Han ambition, which is great, which is really great.

The interesting thing about why I think *Chaos Monkey* was interesting is that it captured that period, that transition between when Facebook went from big startup, like it's still felt very startuppy when I joined. I was the first product manager and adds targeting. The company was already making almost $1 billion a year [inaudible 00:52:58] from the IPO and there had never been like a targeting roadmap. No one had actually sat down and said, "What should we build the target at?" It just had never happened. The engineers had just built whatever.

So it's just incredible that that late they were still doing it. But watching the company go from that to politics, that's the bad side. Good side, more strategic long-term planning, like we're going to do this over the course of a year versus like, "Oh, just ship that shit and see if it works." That was interesting to see. But I think you also saw the beginning of a little bit of complacency set in. Certainly, people that stay there longer than me that I still talk with off the record about like, "Hey, how is it going inside the company and whatnot?" It seem like they weren't necessarily inventing the future in the way they used to.

Remember, they were the first one that had like upload a video, photo tagging. Newsfeed was an invention that they came up with that was horribly controversial. At the time, people hated it when it came out. Yet it seem like they had a special creative development lab where they had like really good designers and product managers trying to come up with new apps. So they launched like a Snapchat clone and like a flip board client. I forgot their names, but they're all forgotten basically. They just weren't – Like they weren't creating on the user-facing. The ad side was doing a lot of innovation. User-facing side, didn't seem like it was coming up with radically new stuff and I kind of feared like what if they just stop making the big bets?

Yeah, the Libra thing – Again, I'm not a crypto expert. I can't really handicap its chances in the wider crypto world. But if it becomes something – Yeah, to me it's reassuring that they can still take those risks because, look – Again, another radical thing to say, but all the scrutiny they're getting from regulators either in the U.S. or in Europe, at the end of the day, none of that really matters. I don't think that's really going to fundamentally change Facebook's prospects in a real way. It's going to fill the media cycle or whatever, but like who cares? But I think if Facebook stop taking the big risks, then I think that actually is an existential risk, because there's no –

Funny, there was this thing called the Little Red Book, which you can actually Google that parts of it are online. The designer who made it is part of his portfolio mention in the book. Somewhere in the beginning of I think 2012, we all got to work and there was like literally like Mao's Little Red Book, the famous book that he distributes. There's a little red book on our desk and there's a lot of corporate propaganda. It was produced by the same, I think, analog research lab that produced the posters.

On the final page was the sort of memento mori. It was a black page with white text that said, "If we don't invent the next big thing, our competitors will, and the Internet is a cruel place. You don't even leave ruins." That's it. That's where the book ends. You could can find online by the way. Just look up Little Red Book Facebook and you'll find it.

I think that sort of Roman sort of feeling of history and inevitable decline is something the company was always very aware of. So I think they've tried warding that off in various ways. One, acquiring obnoxious startup founders like me for a while. That was part of their plan to try to hybridize the entrepreneurial DNA with the bigger company DNA, which I don't think worked particularly well. Now I guess it's, yeah, it's betting big on crypto.

I mean, there're other reasons you can guess as to why they got to crypto. I mean, I think messaging is obviously the future for Facebook in many ways and there isn't a lot of history of companies monetizing messaging via ads. They're kind of intrusive. In the case of WhatsApp, you don't actually get a lot of data because we can actually read the messages due to end-to-end encryption. I think the part of the push with the crypto thing is just becoming a payments platform to monetize the messaging side of Facebook, which is very similar to what WeChat does. Yeah, I was heartened in the way that Facebook is still willing to roll the dice. I mean, we'll see of course if it actually becomes the world's reserve currency.

[00:56:32] JM: Yeah. Since you left Facebook, you have become a writer, journalist? What do you do?

[00:56:40] AGM: What do I do? I know. People ask what do I do, and I wish I knew. Yeah. I mean, I wrote this book and it did well and whatever. Then I have a semi-regular – Or used to have a semi-regular column at Wired. Written for Guardian, Washington Post, this and that,

tweet a lot, working on book two and thinking about – You know Substack? The company Substack?

[00:56:59] JM: Sure. Yeah.

[00:56:59] AGM: Yeah. They're getting pretty big. I know the founders. They went through YC and I'm sort of on there and they've been pushing me forever. In fact if Hamish, the founder or the CEO, reads this, he's probably going to nag me to start – I've been thinking about starting the newsletter in a more serious way. Yeah, I'm also thinking about maybe going back to tech potentially, but this business of being a blue checkmark guy who comments on things.

[00:57:21] JM: Here's what I think you should do, not to be your –

[00:57:23] AGM: Okay. Let's hear it. No. Tell me. Tell me. Tell me. Tell me.

[00:57:26] JM: I think you can do both. I think it's sort of like – I don't know if you've ever heard like this Warren Buffett quote, but he says like, "I like being a businessman because it makes me a better investor, and I like being investors because it makes me a better businessman." I think that's what it is with your – You should keep writing. I really think you should start a podcast and just do it concurrently with your business work and whatever you end up doing entrepreneurially –

[00:57:50] AGM: I think that's right. That's funny. I was complaining to my ex that the second book isn't going as quickly as the first one and I was getting bogged down. She's like, "Yeah, you know why? Because the book isn't about you. That's why." That's like you're such a narcissist. It's not about you and so it's not going as quickly as if you made it focused, or if your future book were about you, you'd get more focused on it. She might be right. I think you're probably right about that actually. Yeah.

I feel illegitimate when I write about things that I don't deeply know about. I've done a few reported pieces and I've done a few columns on domains that I don't consider myself an expert in and I get this terrible sort of imposter syndrome feeling of like, "I don't really know what the fuck I'm talking about." I particularly hate it. I mean, everyone gets that to some degree, but I

particularly hate it because I often trash people who comment about things I do know something about or feel I know something about, like ads, data and privacy, things that I've actually worked and understand. I see them writing about it and like, "No, this is wrong. No, this is just like patently false."

So I'd hate that to happen to me. So I've done some pieces on like autonomous driving. I did one on like deepfake technology and like, yeah, it felt kind of deeply – I mean, I consulted people in this space after the fact. I don't think I stuck my foot in it in a deep way, but it was still this deeply uncomfortable feeling like, "Do I really know what the fuck I'm talking about?" Yeah, I think I need to write about things that I'm personally involved in, otherwise I just can't do it.

[00:59:05] JM: Do you still spend a lot of time doing disaster prepping?

[00:59:11] AGM: Yeah. God! I don't know how that fucking meme has been associated with me for so long. It's not totally wrong. Okay, a little bit of bio. Particularly if any of your listeners read my book or follow me on Twitter or whatever. *Chaos Monkey* is the book. It was written up in the Northwest and what's called the San Juan Islands, which is this chain of islands that almost no Americans know about between Vancouver and Seattle. It's beautiful, very kind of remote.

On a whim, I bought a few acres of land up there right before the book came out. Then I've been homesteading it. By homesteading it, like putting in a well, putting in an off grid solar system, setting up structures of various sort, like a pioneery type thing, which I know sounds all very Oregon Trail and all very weird, but is actually in the rural West is not that unusual. A lot of people, just a lot of vacant land, you just buy land. You put a caravan or [inaudible 00:59:59] on it and then you work, and over the course of five or six years, you build a house slowly and you've got a house and a family and whatever by your 30s or whatever. It's very typical up there. Banks give you construction loans to do. It's not that unusual.

On the island I'm just known as like, "Oh, yeah. Another guys doing the weird land thing." But like to the rest of the world I'm like this preper survivalist or something and it's just weird. In the back of my mind and on the back of a mind of many people on the island by the way right are like, "Yeah, what if things just go sideways on the mainland, what would we do?"

Yeah, there's some thought to that. I don't think it's crazy to think that in the next 20 years there is a 5% chance of a major social crisis of some sort. I could see that happening. Yeah, there is some element of prepping to it. For a while, I was really concerned about the automation crisis putting everyone out of work. I've become less alarmist about it as the more I thought about and talk to people. I don't think we're going end up in a totally Elysium style future. Elysium is at film in which like the welfare of living in a spaceship and everyone's living in some hell's gate. I don't think we're going to quite end up there.

[01:01:00] JM: You read that book The Road?

[01:01:01] AGM: Yes. Well, actually, now. I've seen the film, which is actually a wonderful film.

[01:01:05] JM: Yeah, looks pretty good too. Yeah, I can't remember what. Maybe I've heard you an interviewer or maybe in the book you talk about it but I was like, "Well, he'd be all right reading The Road."

[01:01:15] AGM: I don't know about that.

[01:01:15] JM: Or maybe now.

[01:01:17] AGM: I mean, I'd be better than your average San Francisco resident on the islands, right? Yeah.

[01:01:21] JM: Anyway. Just a few more questions about media, so how have audiobooks and podcasts affecting the book business?

[01:01:29] AGM: Oh, hugely. Hugely. I am a big believer in whatever you want to call it, on-demand audio, whatever it is. To me, the difference between audiobooks and podcasting and radio at this point doesn't really matter. It's just the user experience of it.

I think it's a huge thing. I think this is like a megatrend statement, but I think we're coming more fundamentally oral and tribal cultures. Where the spoken word and oral communication and very personalized communication is the way forward, and I think if you look at – I'm not a total book

publishing expert or anything, but I've kicked around a bit. If you look at like the digital revenues of big publishers, like HarperCollins, published *Chaos Monkeys* or whatever, their big growth areas are not Kindle. Kindle sales are pretty flat. I mean, total book and tech nerds have the kindles and like that's going to be there. It's not going to go away, but the Kindle isn't killing paper books. Audiobooks are. Audiobooks are taking off in a huge way.

People just do things. They workout, they work, whatever. That doesn't take 100% of the CPU. They want something in the background, and podcasts and audiobooks are there and everyone has a network computer in their pocket now. It does everything. Yeah, I think audiobooks and on-demand audio are a big thing going forward. There's probably more podcast than there should be, to be clear. But that said, I don't think podcasts are going away.

By the way, I have as many reviews or more on audible than I do an Amazon. It's funny, I'm a writer but I really have listeners. I don't have readers. I'm sure somebody plowed through 500 pages of text of *Chaos Monkeys*, but I suspect probably most people – And obviously I have a somewhat biased democratic. It's probably early adapters and whatnot. But more people probably listen to *Chaos Monkeys* than read it.

[01:03:04] JM: What could the rest of the business world learn from Facebook?

[01:03:07] AGM: Oh God! I don't know. It's funny. When you do a book, like they make you do the mediatory things. I did a bunch of like radio, like random radio stations in Atlanta, like, "Oh! The small business radio shows talking to me and it's like, "What lessons do you have from Facebook for like someone who runs a Laundromat?" It's like, "I'm not really sure."

Yeah, I'm not sure. Facebook isn't such a weird business, but I'm not sure that there're that many lessons to draw. I mean, the level of focus and mission focus that everyone has, like there's definitely a feeling of cohesion inside the company. I think that – I mean, that's not the lesson really.

One of most alarming things about Facebook I think in the recent past is the number of leaks that have come out to the media and the fact that we're leaking to Facebook is a really bad sign,

because Facebook used to be really tightlipped and leaks didn't happen, but now they do, and that's not good.

[01:03:55] JM: Not good in what way?

[01:03:57] AGM: It just shows that there's somebody disgruntled internally or someone has some political axe to grind.

[01:04:01] JM: Yeah. I mean, the little red book level of tribalism. That's never sustainable. That's insanity.

[01:04:05] AGM: Why not? I don't know. Yeah, the question is can you scale up to 50,000 people? The answer is maybe no. Maybe you have to create –

[01:04:13] JM: Not a chance. The cult of Y Combinator breathing down its neck.

[01:04:16] AGM: Right.

[01:04:18] JM: It's a much more sustainable cult.

[01:04:20] AGM: Maybe, although – I mean, some would claim that its changes has gotten much bigger. I was at Demo Day a couple of days ago and it's very different than when went through it. It's much bigger. Yeah, that's the whole Dunmar's number thing, right? There are 150 people you've got in your head. That's like the basic hunter-gatherer tribe, which we've evolved to kind of keep in our heads. Even if we live in cities with millions of people, we still basically know 100+ people in our lives.

Yeah, it's hard to scale up beyond that. I don't know. I mean, look at the Roman Empire. Look at the U.S. Army in World War II. I mean, there are examples of large organizations, but those were higher stakes things than social network. So, yeah.

I don't know that most companies should be run like cults. I don't think they should be. The reality is that cult-like dedication, the 16-hour days, whatever, work in a domain in which you

achieve market dominance very quickly, like slowing down for six months is a difference between success or failure. That's not true for most businesses. Let's face it. The rewards of getting it right are immense due to the scaled nature of technology. Facebook's revenues went from – When I was there, barely a billion a year to what they are now, which is touching 60 billion in the span of five years. That's massive growth. What other business grows that fast?

In that world, I think you can live inside a religious cult and call it a business. I don't think most businesses – I don't think most people want to live in cults either, and I don't think most – There's nothing more pathetic than some totally regular company that really doesn't isn't not cool or exciting and shouldn't inspire that much devotion, trying to get people to believe in it.

[01:05:43] JM: People who want the religion more than the cult, I guess that's what YM is. You just go once a week. You have dinner. It has no cultural heir to it.

[01:05:52] AGM: Right, but has the set of common values, right?

[01:05:54] JM: Common values.

[01:05:56] AGM: There's a network there, right? Being a YC alum means something when you meet otherwise YT alums.

[01:06:00] JM: You can leave. You can downgrade.

[01:06:02] AGM: You can sort of leave. Yeah, you can choose not to participate and be that full of a person. I haven't met any YC people who hated it and wanted to leave it. Yeah, how do you maintain that unit cohesion? It's hard. I mean, humans bond over a common enemy and shared suffering. That's what they bond over. In your average business, you don't really have a lot of that. But in startups you do.

[01:06:24] JM: All right, last question. What do you think Facebook will look like in 10 years?

[01:06:28] AGM: Huh! Good question. I mean, with the Yogi Bear, things are hard to predict particularly the future. I mean, extrapolating from media trends, I think messaging is going to be

big. WhatsApp will eventually be bigger than Facebook.com or the Facebook the app. Messaging, and this is public, this is not some brainwave. It's just that Zuck says things and no one believes them or they don't understand the full repercussions of what he's saying. Then three years later when it comes true it's, "Oh! What a surprise."

He's basically publicly said messaging and privacy are the future, by privacy, it doesn't mean what most people mean by privacy. What privacy means is private groups administered locally within that group. Not necessarily filtered or admin by Facebook. Then point-to-point messaging or group messaging inside WhatsApp, which is how most people overseas – In certain countries, the biggest growth is not Facebook or newsfeed. It's WhatsApp. That's the biggest growth. So I think that's going to be big going forward.

Instagram is not going to go away. I think Instagram is for direct to consumer brands, influencers, narcissists of various stripes who just want to project a certain thing. Then a lot of advertising revenue is going to be pouring through Instagram because it's great obviously for ecommerce, for branding. I mean, it's made for advertising. I think Facebook is going to become basically Instagram and WhatsApp.

I mean, that's going to take less than 10 years. That's like 3 to 5 years. Then Facebook – I actually deactivated Facebook, but as someone who deactivated Facebook, the thing that I miss I think of the ones that are going to become the most critical, which is private groups, interest groups. There is a group on my island in the San Juans. That's like the public bulletin board. It's the only way to get information about the island and now I don't have access to it and I really do miss it. I think a lot of that is what's going to be Facebook in the future. Then of course is VR finally here.

Anyone who's been in tech for any period of time, it's always the year VR. Just like it always been the year for the next desktop and like neither ever fucking happened. So is VR finally here? Maybe it is. Maybe it is. If it is and Facebook actually manages to own that or at least the social aspects of that, that could be really big. Facebook might just end up being a VR platform for virtual socialization. WhatsApp for point-to-point messaging, and then Instagram for brands influencers and fashion and whatnot.

[01:08:37] JM: Antonio, thanks for coming on the show. It's been great talking.

[01:08:38] AGM: Great. Thanks. Thanks for having me.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[01:08:50] JM: If you want to extract value from your data, it can be difficult especially for nontechnical, non-analyst users. As software builders, you have this unique opportunity to unlock the value of your data to users through your product or your service.

Jaspersoft offers embeddable reports, dashboards and data visualizations that developers love. Give your users intuitive access to data in the ideal place for them to take action within your application. To check out a sample application with embedded analytics, go to softwareengineeringdaily.com/jaspersoft. You can find out how easy it is to embed reporting and analytics into your application. Jaspersoft is great for admin dashboards or for helping your customers make data-driven decisions within your product, because it's not just your company that wants analytics. It's also your customers.

In an upcoming episode of Software Engineering Daily, we will talk to TIBCO about visualizing data inside apps based on modern frontend libraries like React, Angular, and VueJS. In the meantime, check out Jaspersoft for yourself at softwareengineering.com/jaspersoft.

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