CHRIS ANDERSON INTERVIEW PART TWO

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Hello again, Ars Technica listeners. This is the second installment of a three-part interview with long time Wired magazine editor-in-chief, entrepreneur, and Washington DC punk rock legend Chris Anderson. We'll start with a re-run of the last several seconds of yesterday's episode just to get you oriented.

And here we go.

TRANSITION MUSIC

Repeated part in Green

Chris Anderson: So, rather than approaching a drone as a airplane minus a pilot, we approach it as a smart phone with propellors.

Rob Reid: That was philosophy of DIY drones community.

Chris Anderson: It wasn't obvious in the first day that's what we were doing but, a year or two we realized we're just surfing the way that the smart phone was created.

Rob Reid: And what was going on in the community in those early days where basically people ... essentially swapping recipes [crosstalk 00:26:52] was it hundreds, thousands of people?

Chris Anderson: Actually it started with a thousand, then the tens of thousands but, basically it was a fascinating interdisciplinary moment where you had software and you had hardware. So, some people were writing code and some people were spinning printed circuit boards and the recipe consisted of the following, hey welcome to DIY drones, you want your own drone? Well first, fab this PCB then solder on these components then load your tool chain and compile this code then plug it into some janky radio control thing and then good luck. Which I thought was like that's spoon feeding but, it turns out that regular people are like, come on. Can you just make it for me?

Rob Reid: Right.

Chris Anderson: And so I'm like, I thought well, yeah I guess that is kind of reasonable.

Rob Reid: You just had drilled down to what you just had said, so from your standpoint, this is cheating, this is easy. Instead of figuring it out yourself it's just a [crosstalk 00:27:48].

Chris Anderson: As opposed to writing the code you just have to download and compile the code.

Rob Reid: This is paint by numbers but, the truth is for me or civilians, they're like, I don't wanna do that stuff. Just like I look at Blue Apron and say, I don't wanna cook by numbers I want to have been cooked for. So people wanted actual drones.

Rob Reid: I want to have been cooked for and so people wanted actual drones and then that was the next big pivot, right?

Chris Anderson: Yeah. So then they had to make a ... Well, start with a kit where everything was kind of done for you and that kit was pizza boxes, assembled on the dining room table by those same children.

Rob Reid: By your kids?

Chris Anderson: By just the one's.

Rob Reid: So now you-

Chris Anderson: But we do everything once.

Rob Reid: You have now started a company than at this?

Chris Anderson: Well, no.

Rob Reid: No, you're still servicing the community and-

Chris Anderson: I'm servicing the community, prepping pizza boxes for Maker Faires, things like that.Classic Maker Movement stuff. But the problem is they sold out really fast and I'm like, that's fantastic. Our product's popular and the kids are like, whatever. And I said, "You know what that means?" And they're like, "No." "It mean, you're gonna have to make more." And they're like, "Not gonna happen." So I had to find help. And there was just this guy on the Internet, in our forums who was just the smartest guy around. He was flying a helicopter with a Wii controller. And his name was Ed Jordan Menunos and I'm like, "Jordan, you're super smart. You want to help make some boards?" And he's like, "Sure."

Rob Reid: And he was just somebody who's super active on the-

Chris Anderson: Yeah, I never met him.

Rob Reid: On the form.

Chris Anderson: Yeah in meritocracy. He had the best code. So, I said, "What are you gonna need?" And he says I'll probably need about $500 worth of parts. So I sent him a check for $500 and he just kept sending me these pictures.

Rob Reid: Where was he?

Chris Anderson: Well, I didn't know.

Rob Reid: You didn't know-

Chris Anderson: Eventually it turned out, I think at the time he later told me he was in Riverside, California. To cut the long story short, a couple of years in, which is now a company, is now making more drones in all of America's aerospace companies combined, has factories in San Diego and Tijuana, Mexico.

Rob Reid: This is the company that you would-

Chris Anderson: The company that Jody basically built with my $500 of investment and managing the community on one side while he did the hardware on the other side.

Rob Reid: So you co-founded it the two of you?

Chris Anderson: We co-founded it, but I met him a few years, then I went down to see him.

Rob Reid: Wait, you started the company and it was years later when you had this large concern that you met him for the first time.

Chris Anderson: Yeah, in a hotel and it turns out that I accidentally created a 21st century aerospace company with a teenager from Tijuana that I met on the Internet.

Rob Reid: Wow. You had no idea that he was that young.

Chris Anderson: No, by the time I finally met him, he was like 21, 22 maybe or something like that, but-

Rob Reid: The face of teenager, yeah.

Chris Anderson: Former teenager.

Rob Reid: Because we all are.

Chris Anderson: But when he first joined he graduated from high school, he was about 19. He was married, married young, and he and his wife were waiting for the child to be born, so they decided to move to the US to have their child born and so he had some time to spare. And so he built basically with just brilliance and

gumption, built a series of factories including quite a large drone factory in Tijuana.

Rob Reid: And this is still your company and it's still the 500 bucks that's running at this point?

Chris Anderson: 50-50 make[inaudible 00:30:55] no investment came in, running purely on cashflow.

Rob Reid: And how large at this point in terms of headcount or top line or whatever metric you find most relevant?

Chris Anderson: Five million in annual revenues, 40-ish employees.

Rob Reid: You and Jody from the 500 bucks?

Chris Anderson: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Rob Reid: And you're still running Wired at this point?

Chris Anderson: Yeah.

Rob Reid: Wow. So what year are we up to now?

Chris Anderson: 2012.

Rob Reid: 2012.

Chris Anderson: Late 2012.

Rob Reid: And that's about when you did eventually leave obviously.

Chris Anderson: Yeah, so at that point, once I realized that we were gonna do more than five million in revenues that year and that he de-risked the thing brilliantly and that it was time to go from bags of boards. We were still selling just basically bags of boards.

Rob Reid: So people were assembling themselves.

Chris Anderson: Well, they were the big triumph [inaudible 00:31:38] that we pre soldered components off the board. So it turns out people suck at soldering.

Rob Reid: Oh yeah, we do.

Chris Anderson: Yeah. So at this point he was back to the board was clear that it needed to be turned into a consumer electronics products-

Rob Reid: Which is out of the box.

Chris Anderson: Out of the box. Exactly. And we just weren't going to do that with cashflow and learning as we go. So we raised money to basically ramp up to a mass production move production to an outsourced operation in China, have a consumer electronics products and go big or go home.

Rob Reid: And that was 2012 when you totally-

Chris Anderson: That was the early 2013.

Rob Reid: And you raised the money and raising multiple rounds of financing.

Chris Anderson: Yeah. We did multiple rounds of financing and we ended up going head-to-head with an amazing company called DGI. Out of China and previously good product called SOLO, but we were targeting $1,500 as the price point. And by the time, six months after releasing it, the price had gone to about 600.

Rob Reid: The retail price-

Chris Anderson: Retail price of equally good competitive products, never seen a unit prices fall like that so basically demonetized at least the price declines of that industry basically forced US companies out of the consumer market. But fortunately there was another chapter.

Rob Reid: There was another chapter which we'll get to in a moment, but just to talk about this chapter so that your bill of materials at that point you were targeting a $1,500 price point. Your bill of materials I've seen was about 750,

Chris Anderson: It should have been 750, is closer to 850.

Rob Reid: Closer to 850. And you're selling against something that is literally priced at 600.

Chris Anderson: Yeah.

Rob Reid: That's tough. Were you selling throughout that period or was there a long period where you went dark when you stopped doing kits and started to-?

Chris Anderson: No, no, we kept telling the kits throughout, kits are the Bermuda triangle of the Maker Movement because it's very easy to make a kit.

Rob Reid: Yeah.

Chris Anderson: But kits have a customer support requirement that's just crushing, because people will assemble kits wrong.

Rob Reid: Yeah. Of course, they will.

Chris Anderson: And when they assemble kits wrong and there's lots of ways to and unless you make a really good kit and there are some but, I think-

Rob Reid: I'll assemble an IKEA bookshelf wrong, of course they're going to assemble a drone wrong.

Chris Anderson: So literally you wake, I would wake up in the morning, I'm CEO of this company, I wake up in the morning and there's 100 to 150 emails in my inbox directly to me saying, "You suck, the product sucks and I want my money back." And you look and you just realize that they had soldered it upside down or backwards or conjoined or it was just like ... I cannot emotionally handle other people messing up soldering because it's just no fun to wake up to those kinds of complaints where it was like, Okay, we're going to solder it for them. And then we are like, we're going to compile the code for them and then we're just going to stick it in a plastic box and just got to work and every time we took a complexity out of the equation, the tech support would drop by an order of magnitude. So basically I'm anti-kits and I'm not anti-kit because I don't enjoy making kits, I'm anti-kits because I don't enjoy supporting kits.

Rob Reid: When you were KIK hardware, what was your hardware revenue? Kits and incompleted drones. Did you get into the tens of millions?

Chris Anderson: Oh kits incompleted?

Rob Reid: Your whole-

Chris Anderson: We were at 100 million dollar run rate.

Rob Reid: You were on 100 million dollar run rate?

Chris Anderson: Yeah.

Rob Reid: Got pretty big.

Chris Anderson: Well, when I say run rate, we didn't complete that year.

Rob Reid: Yeah. But anyway, there was at least one month where you were in the 10 million dollar month rate.

Chris Anderson: Yeah.

Rob Reid: Yeah. Now you had an interesting idea at the time, and I remember reading about it, I think it was in the bookmakers, you've written three books, right?

Chris Anderson: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Rob Reid: The Long Tail, Free.

Chris Anderson: Long Tail is the sort of the concept of infinite choice kind of stuff. The Free was the second book, which is basically the business model of The Long Tail, which is the marginal cost [inaudible 00:35:23] charge you and then Makers, it's just The Long Tail of hardware.

Rob Reid: So open source software was very much out there as a concept. You talked about open source hardware and I believe it was in Maker, it might've been in an article that you were Makers. There might've been an article that you had written, could you briefly review the open source hardware vision as it was then because it was really compelling.

Chris Anderson: The reason Jody and I were able to do this, it's all because of open source hardware and software. So our first product was called, blimp duino.

Rob Reid: Blimp duino.

Chris Anderson: Which was an autonomous blimp based on Arduino. And second product was called Ardu pilot, which was an autopilot based on Arduino. So you can sort of see what's going on here. We're building a lot of this on the Arduino and the Maker Movement was very much built on the notion of open source hardware because the Maker Movement is really about the physical, the tangible stuff. So there were a number of projects in 2007 that were extremely influential. Arduino was one of them. I mean, 3D printing. There's something called the RepRap.

Rob Reid: British company, right?

Chris Anderson: It wasn't even a company, I think it was just a community, [inaudible 00:36:24] Europe maybe British. Yeah, there were a few others, but those two in particular were the most influential and they were open source hardware. And the notion of open source hardware was that the same deal that you could share designs that the people would remix and modify those designs and they would just get this virtuous cycle. And it worked brilliantly with both of those, Arduino and 3D printing. I believed at the time that, that hardware has every much as promise as open source software. I have subsequently changed my mind about that and I think actually opensource hardware was a brief moment in time, but it's not sustainable. And I'll say so with a lot of scar tissue, so opensource is based on the notion that you have very low barriers to entry.

Chris Anderson: Anybody can code and then if anybody can code then some people are going to be coding non professionally and there isn't a social incentive to share because you get nonmonetary rewards like recognition in participation. Now hardware not typically fallen, been part of that because barrier to entry to hardware it had been very hard. Most people just didn't have the skills, electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, etc. There was a brief moment around the 2007 for a phase when they were a couple chips that were out there. And the Arduino platform got out there with a kind of a reference platform by which you could

hand solder aboard it's called Through Hole, Through Hole Pin. So they're were little pins and the pins were big enough that you could hand sew them at and they were two layer boards so you could kind of edge them yourself or drill them or [inaudible 00:37:57] et cetera. And so it looked accessible the way hardware was. And so we all-

Rob Reid: The way software was.

Chris Anderson: Yeah, the way software was. Exactly. So we all got excited about that and Reprap was also based in the same sort of classic Through Hole pins. The problem with that whole model is that it was based on relatively slow speed or you're very kind of not very powerful chips, which is fine because it wasn't about the power of the chips it was about the power of the community. But as we started to use these things, we wanted more and more power. We went to more powerful chips and then suddenly you couldn't sell to them anymore. And the more you look like a smart phone in terms of the components, the more you look like a smartphone in terms of the complexity of the assembly. And now you're ... I'm going to nerd out here for a second.

Rob Reid: Sure.

Chris Anderson: Now you surface mount, fine pitch, four layer board, six layer boards, design tools that are no longer free and no longer accessible. And I can't do hardware anymore.

Rob Reid: The barrier to entry for contributors.

Chris Anderson: Exactly.

Rob Reid: Went right through the roof.

Chris Anderson: So now if you released your design, have a relatively sophisticated board, there's only one class of people out there who can use it. And this is basically Chinese electrical engineers who will very happily take your design and compete and create a product and compete with you. The people you wanted to continue to use the design where people were going to give back. Other people who are more driven by the social imperative than the financial one. So basically there was a brief moment when hardware, the barrier to entry for hardware was so low that you could get as the people who were using it would give back.

Rob Reid: The barrier to contribution.

Chris Anderson: The barrier to use. And the people who had social reasons to get back would do so and then the hardware got hard again and at that point it was too hard for the amateurs to use and get back.

Rob Reid: You wrote a piece in Wired in 2012 and maybe it was sort of your commencement piece. I'm not sure. It was probably right around the time you were leaving and you said, If we get it right, it'll be a fantastic model for companies of all sorts if we get it wrong an instructive failure." So instructive.

Chris Anderson: Yeah. So look, I think consumers benefited hugely.

Rob Reid: Immensely.

Chris Anderson: Yeah. So let's just take our own products. So we created our autopilots and put them out there and today autopilots costs 30 bucks they're really good and you can get from China and that's great. Now we don't make them anymore and I don't think anybody can make a business out of them and certainly on venture economics anymore. But it's a consumer paradise. So the Chinese called the [Chinese 00:40:23] which is the notion of sort of copying and remixing and et cetera.

Rob Reid: Mashup kind of.

Chris Anderson: Which is mash ups exactly, is great for consumers, but one of the things about [Chinese 00:40:33] is it open source has a kind of implicit compact that you will give back, sometimes the explicit compact in the form of a license, like a GPO that requires you to give back. And [Chinese 00:40:44] does not. You can take without giving back and many people do and that breaks the cycle.

Rob Reid: Got it, got it. And so there was, I think that you described your model to me in an earlier conversation is you kind of thought there would be three phases. There'd be a design phase and then a consumer phase and then a B2B phase essentially. And the consumer phase instead of lasting three to five years basically lasted about six months.

Chris Anderson: Yeah, exactly.

Rob Reid: And your competitor in China is a big part of the reason for that, right? I mean, they're an extraordinary company, aren't they?

Chris Anderson: Yeah. It didn't last longer than that for them.

Rob Reid: Yeah.

Chris Anderson: So, there was going to be the core technology which went great, and by the way, that that core technology we built, lives on very happily in the Linux foundation, there's something called drone code, which is the industry consortium so all that open source software is there and used today by, by hundreds of thousands of vehicles. Very proud of that. The consumer phase, went straight to China, commodified at the speed of light. It'd be easy to regress

to the old trope that Chinese just copied and they made it cheap. They didn't actually, I lived in China for four years with the economist.

Rob Reid: Oh really?

Chris Anderson: Yeah. So my family is in Hong Kong, but I was mostly in Guangdong province and I saw the emergence of modern China and this was a Huawei and companies like that at the time. And I knew that they had amazing engineers and they weren't just copying. What I didn't know, although I suspect it is that there's other elements of being a global giant marketing distribution, customer support designed software, et cetera. It wasn't guaranteed that they would do that, but it's certainly possible. So I was expecting a giant, I was expecting good things from our Chinese competitors and I was prepared to compete with them because we had one thing that they didn't have, which is open innovation.

Chris Anderson: which is to say we had essentially, we had harness a community, whereas the Chinese model and we can talk about this. China to this day has not really embraced open source. Well, they certainly use it, but they haven't embraced the-

Rob Reid: The ethos.

Chris Anderson: The ethos exactly. So we thought that was our core assets and that would be sufficient that the community would innovate faster that any one company, did not turn out to be the case.

Rob Reid: Even If the community had though by dint of its open source in this, would you not have been obligated to share the community's innovations with the world and airgo with a competitor?

Chris Anderson: For sure, but the notion would be that by owning the community you would have unfair advantage through some method.

Rob Reid: Yeah.

Chris Anderson: Yeah, it had been done before. There's plenty of companies out there, WordPress, for example, automatic. Yeah. They've gone to my [inaudible 00:43:23]. And there's no reason why where we're a pure software companies and it's not a reason why we couldn't have done it, but unfortunately with the hardware side of it, you need to, you have an extremely expensive production process and you get that wrong. And now you're underwater.

Rob Reid: You're sitting on all this stuff.

Chris Anderson: And DGI innovated really well. They did not copy. They went global first. Very few Chinese start global, Chinese companies start global and they did, they raised, I don't know, something about 10 billion evaluation. They had 6,000

employees, they're brilliant. They had great marketing you. No one has ever competed with it. I don't think anyone outside of China has competed with the company as good as DGI until DGI, even the great Chinese companies inside China, the we chat with ten cents and Baidu is now Alibaba, et cetera. They tend not to be big outside of China.

Rob Reid: Right, right.

Chris Anderson: Even like great hardware companies in China like [inaudible 00:44:19] tended not to be big outside of China. And DGI was the first 21st century Chinese company that kind of took the Apple model and applied it outside of China first.

Rob Reid: And lucky you to be the one to compete with them.

Chris Anderson: Yeah.

Rob Reid: Yeah, yeah

Chris Anderson: But I won't-

Rob Reid: It's almost like you were competing with ... No, not at all. It's almost like you were competing with China that you might've anticipated was 10 years out.

Chris Anderson: Yeah. No, I mean, every time I talk to people they say, "Hey, yeah, so we're doing this hardware, software pro and we're doing this robot thing." I'm like, "You do realize that there's lots of smart people in China doing this." And they're like, "That's okay. We've got, I think three to five years before they catch up and it's like three to five months."

Rob Reid: Trust me on this one.

Chris Anderson: Yeah, exactly. They're already working on it right now. You just don't know about it.

Rob Reid: Now the year of the mighty pivot for this company was 2014?

Chris Anderson: Well, so the pivot was actually sort of the end of 2015.

Rob Reid: Okay, got it.

Chris Anderson: So this is when the consumer price has plummeted 70% in nine months. And what we'd expected would be a gradual bridging from consumer to commercial, from drones to data turned out to be a sort of elite from one cliff to another.

Rob Reid: Drones to data. Tell us what you mean by that.

Chris Anderson: When you have to justify why are you fiddling with these, with these toys, you have to come up with the answer. And my justification with sensors in the sky, we hear you and me and every body else around us, whether we know it or not, has essentially one job and that job has extended the internet.

Rob Reid: the job of silicon valley.

Chris Anderson: The job of silicon valley, the technology industry, extend the internet, extend the internet into your home, int to your desk, go into your pockets, onto your wrist, into your car, into the city. And my little bit of that was extending internet into the air. The air is weirdly empty. It's empty because we put humans in harm's way by having them fly. Which God did not intend. When you extend the internet into the physical world, you do two great things. Number one is that you measure the world so you can manage it better.

Rob Reid: Yeah. That's good.

Chris Anderson: And the other is that everything you stick out there is smarter by dint of being connected to the internet. So the world gets smarter and the internet gets smarter.

Rob Reid: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Chris Anderson: You don't see markets, talk about blue ocean strategy, you don't see very many markets that are ubiquitous and empty. And the air is kind of ubiquitous.

Rob Reid: It's true. It's everywhere. It's everywhere. Yeah.

Chris Anderson: And you look up and there's rarely something up there. So that was the plan. Censors in the sky and so that census in this guy means it's not about the drone, it's about the data it gathers and then we get into questions of like, well what data is it gathering and what's good for and how do you use it? And that's where we are today.

Rob Reid: And so you were looking at a variety of markets to pivot into and one of them was agricultural. I remember. And you've decided ... Well, actually tell us what you decided on.

Chris Anderson: Well, again, recognize that I'm sort of justifying the notion that we're going to measure the world. I don't really know what part of the world to measure. We have satellites as one example and we have sensors in the ground is another example, I don't know, traffic cams, if you know nothing about the physical world because you live in your basement and you code, you sort of look out there and you sort of think, well, what are the big industries? And the biggest industry in the world is agriculture. And then you say, what do we know about agriculture? And the answer is, well, we need to feed more people and we need

to be more productive and then you do a little more work and you realize that today agriculture is industrial scale and we use monoculture.

Chris Anderson: We use lots of chemicals, fungicides, herbicides, pesticides to keep productivity up and pests disease at bay but there's a big environmental consequences of all that. By the way, nobody works on farms anymore because of reasons. So you think, well, it sounds to me like if you measured ... Once upon a time farmers used to walk in their fields and they would know everything, but now the fields are too big to walk in, there aren't very many farmers, so we need to substitute for that kind of information awareness of the classic farmer with sensors.

Chris Anderson: So maybe we should just measure agriculture and we should like, hey, let's not spray pesticides prophylactically. Let's just wait till you get an outbreak. Lower the chemical load in the food and water, et cetera. Increased yield, passes the cocktail party test. "Hey, what do you do?" "I make drones." "What are they for?" "We map crops to feed the world."

Rob Reid: We reduce pesticide use by X percent because we know where it's needed and where it's not.

Chris Anderson: Totally.

Rob Reid: That would be a hit at a cocktail party.

Chris Anderson: Clean the environment, feed the world.

Rob Reid: Yes. So that was a candidate.

Chris Anderson: That was a candidate.

Rob Reid: Did it fail a subsequent posts cocktail party test?

Chris Anderson: It did fail.

Rob Reid: What tests did fail and why?

Chris Anderson: The whole do farmers wanted [inaudible 00:49:03]

Rob Reid: Really, why do they not want it? They must spend a lot of money in pesticides and these things?

Chris Anderson: They do. It's like the number one input cost is all that stuff. So it turns out that first of all there's no one agriculture that rice is not corn is not cows and they're all different in different regions are all different in small farms, big farms, et cetera. So that's one problem that you can't just sort of say, "Hey, I have an agricultural solution." They want to know, very specifically do you have a rice fungus?

Rob Reid: What are you doing for sorghum?

Chris Anderson: Right. And having calibrated against the right specialists. So, again, if you don't know much about it, I guess that's a hard answer to come up with. And even if you do know a lot about it gets so hard to answer. The next thing is that it turns out that farmers do not feel pain the way you and I would feel pain. So let's just take yield. We assume farmers want to grow more food, we would think not always the case. Sometimes there's subsidies, sometimes there's crop insurance, sometimes there are government policies that discourage them to plant for fear of who's going to lower the glut, the market and lower prices and things like that. You might assume that farmers would want to lower the chemical load in the ground and water then you would be wrong. That's a negative externality and that's-

Rob Reid: It's free for them to put-

Chris Anderson: It's free for them to. I mean, I'm not saying farmers want to-

Rob Reid: Yeah, but nonetheless they don't feel the pain of over plasticizing.

Chris Anderson: Exactly.

Rob Reid: Other than the cost of the pesticide, which has got to be non trivial.

Chris Anderson: Right. Right. But you're getting them into the groundwater and moving down into the food chain is not necessarily their problem.

Rob Reid: They're not charged for that.

Chris Anderson: You might also think that in the middle of a drought that a farmer would want to conserve water, but if they have water rights that were secured decades ago, they might not.

Rob Reid: Right. As we found in California, oftentimes the ability to rest water from the farmers can be very, very constrained because of these ancient rights.

Chris Anderson: Basically I made the assumption that market forces were at play-

Rob Reid: But it was very [crosstalk 00:50:51]

Chris Anderson: In agriculture and it's a very distorted market.

Rob Reid: Got it. Got it. And then you'd have to understand each and every one of those distortions on a local basis, on a crop cop base.

Chris Anderson: It would help to be in Kansas.

Rob Reid: And it would be hundreds and hundreds of weird micro markets that are subject to lobbying or something.

Chris Anderson: Exactly.

Rob Reid: So you came to the built world for lack of a better world.

Chris Anderson: I did.

Rob Reid: Let's talk about that reality capture.

END INTERVIEW ELEMENT OF PART TWO

Fear not Ars Technica listeners - we WILL talk about reality capture. Just not today. We'll pick up right where we left off in the third and final installment of my conversation with Chris Anderson tomorrow. Of course, if you can't wait to hear the rest of it – or, if you'd like to browse my other 36 episodes, just on head on over to my site, at after-on.com. Or, type the words After On into your favorite podcast player.

Before wrap up, I'd like to note that throughout October, Medium.com is running a series of essays that I've written on the subject of existential risk. Which is to say, the grim, yet perversely fascinating possibility that our technological creations might just annihilate us.

Although I'm of course biased, I do think I have a novel take on all this, and present some arguments and analytic lenses that are new to the discussion about existential risks. If this might interest you, please go to Medium.com/@RobReid. That's medium.com; then a slash, followed by the @ symbol; followed by RobReid. There's also a link to my medium page on the Ars Technica page that's hosting this audioplayer. At least three, and probably all four episodes should be up on Medium by the time you here this.

I should note that Medium is running this in their editorially-curated, paid, members-only section. The goods news is, they give everyone access to a few free articles per month with essentially zero friction.

That's it for now. I hope you'll join me tomorrow for the conclusion of this conversation with Chris Anderson.

OUTRO MUSIC