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Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one-to-one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today I'm joined down the line from Brooklyn, New York by Isaac Saul, founder of Tangle News, the independent US politics newsletter, website, and podcast, that shares the very best arguments from across the political spectrum on the news of the day. Yahoo News named Isaac as "one of the 16 people who shaped the 2016 election". In 2020, Forbes named him as "one of the next 1,000 upstart entrepreneurs redefining the American dream". A politics reporter who grew up in Pennsylvania, Isaac previously helped build A Plus, a solutions journalism media outlet alongside actor and entrepreneur Ashton Kutcher. He travelled and worked in Colombia, Iceland, India, and Indonesia before founding Tangle in Brooklyn. Isaac, thank you for joining me.

Thanks so much for having me on, Paul. I'm excited to be here.

Well, I'm excited, but you seem to have done an awful lot for someone so young.

Yeah, I would say I have not had a traditional media path, although I think maybe the journey that I went on is one that, more people are going to traverse behind me, I think, in the near future — and right now, in terms of, you know, the journey, young journalists are going to take to get to a stable and I guess kind of lucrative and more reliable job, given how tumultuous the media industry has been the last 10 or 15 years.

So come on then trailblazer, tell us how you did it. I mean, superhero as an origin story, what were the first steps along the way? I mean, you've had an incredible career, even in the few years that you've been doing this. I mean, tell us, how did you get started and what's happened since?

So I would say, I sort of think of having two genesis stories. The first is that I, as you mentioned, grew up in Pennsylvania, more specifically in bucks county, Pennsylvania, which traditionally speaking, is a political bellwether county. So that means, in US politics, it's a place that often, I guess, not so much dictates as predicts who the next president of the United States is going to be. So the county I lived in, if it went 'blue', that was usually a sign that a Democrat was gonna win the presidency. If it went 'red', that's a sign of Republicans going to win the presidency, but on the ground, what it meant was that my friends, my family, the people I went to school with, my teachers: all incredibly politically diverse. A really strong mix of Republicans and Democrats, which is something, frankly, that the United States does not have very much of anymore.

And so when I was coming up, I just heard a lot of political debate. Every election was a huge deal where I lived. I had lived amongst people who argued a lot about politics, sometimes civilly, sometimes not. And so when I came into kind of the political media space, my first job was actually at The Huffington Post, which you may know has quite the reputation for being a left-leaning news outlet. I was pretty shocked at just sort of the kinds of people that populated the newsroom, the kinds of discussions that were happening there, the kind of representation that existed. And I didn't take the job at The Huffington Post because I was a diehard lib, but I took it because I applied to 40 places and they were the only ones who gave me a job. And it's really hard to get a job when you have an English-writing journalism degree. And what I learned, kind of the second genesis moment, was that once I worked at The Huffington Post, I was tagged immediately by readers who were consuming my content as being a liberal, no matter what I wrote. And I realised that I can make the same argument in The Huffington Post and publish the exact same piece in Fox News and just based solely on where this news was published or this opinion piece was published, half the country would believe it, or take the time to read it. And half the country wouldn't. If it was in The Huffington Post, there weren't many conservatives reading The Huffington Post, and if they were, it was just to criticise it. And if it was published in Fox News, there were no liberals reading that — and if they were, it was just to criticise it.

And I just came to understand, you know, 2013, 2014, that we were living in these political bubbles, these political silos, which at the time was not something that a lot of people were talking about or was not so commonly accepted. Now, today, it's sort of common knowledge. Everyone has their social media feeds, their social media

bubbles that they're creating for themselves. And we view this as kind of a threat to democracy and political polarisation and the unity of the country and all these things. But back then, it was kind of like we were just figuring out how the Facebook algorithm worked. We were just figuring out how the Twitter echo chamber worked. And I was just seeing it up close and in person on the front lines with my content and the way it was being produced and handled and how people were reacting to it.

And then, I freelanced for a bunch of places. I worked for a few different media outlets. And as you mentioned, eventually my path took me to a company called A Plus, which was a company Ashton Kutcher founded, who's obviously a famous actor, but also a really successful VC entrepreneur. And he had this vision of a more elevated kind of media company that rather than spending all its time, focusing on, you know, bus crashes and the broken political system and all the things that were horrible in the world, he really wanted something that was like, feel-good, good news, kind of a little bit of that Upworthy tint, but instead of being, you know, cat videos and parents reuniting or something, a real hard journalism angle. So a focus on people who were fixing things and solutions to the biggest problems our country was facing that kind of stuff.

And I ran the political section there, the political vertical for him, and I was one of the first full time editorial hires. And so when I came on, it was like we were building totally from scratch. And that gave me a bit of the... I got to see how to put something together, how to launch a product. And I was there for about six years. And in the end, when I left A Plus, they were sort of transitioning. They had been bought, there was an acquisition, they were moving more into a video space, which I wasn't very interested in. And I knew from all my experience writing, and after about ten years of covering politics, I knew that there was something really missing in the political space. And there were a lot of people thirsting for this thing in the political news world, which was just the diversity of views, plain and simple.

And in one place, people want to be able to read what the right's saying, what the left's saying, what are the big arguments? People who are religious readers in The New York Times now are more and more aware that they're getting a little bit of a slant on every story. Same goes for people reading The Wall Street Journal that they understand they're missing a piece of this information that's out there. Otherwise, you know, they would better understand why Donald Trump gets elected or why certain progressives, like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez believe what she believes. And I

had the idea for this newsletter called Tangle where I would just cover one big debate every day in the political world. And I would explicitly tell you here's what the right's saying, here's what the left's saying. And then here's my opinion transparently. Here's my view on this issue.

And, you know, I sent it to 50 friends and family for the first time, about three years ago and just said 'here's my idea. Here's a sample. I'm looking for feedback. Tell me what you think.' And we were kind of off to the races from there. I got a lot of people writing back, saying, 'I love this. I would read this every day.' And so I just slowly started to build this, this newsletter out on the subs stack. And today, three years later, we have 40,000 daily readers. We have a podcast, we have a website. We have over 6,000 paying subscribers. So we're making money, I'm hiring people, part-time employees, I'm gonna be hiring full-time employees soon. And it's just sort of this burgeoning media company that I think is fulfilling a need a lot of people in the US and frankly abroad, you know, a lot of people all in Europe and Canada in Africa, in Asia, read Tangle to get a really holistic look at what's happening in US politics. And I think that's sort of a fundamental thing, create something people need, produce good content and you'll get a lot of traction.

Well, it's a bit like a field of dreams. Isn't it? If you build it, they will come, and they have. I think you've shown that in an age of extreme polarisation, Tangle frankly shows there is an appetite for ad-free, non-partisan, digested issues that matter. What fascinates me is you promise no sizeism, and yet, obviously you don't give equal weight to conspiracy theories. It feels like a genuinely balanced assessment of the arguments of the day.

Yeah. I mean, this is one of the big challenges is if Democrats say the 'sky is blue' and Republicans say 'the sky is red', how do you handle that? How do you navigate a scenario where, you know, even as the most objective viewer, you can make yourself believe one side is kind of telling a lie. And my solution to that is I am not here to silence or censor, remove certain elements of either side from the conversation. I'm here to make it clear to you what both sides are arguing about, a specific issue. And then I carve out this space in every newsletter where I get to share my own opinion, where I get to call a ball or a strike. And in the context of the newsletter, my voice is just one of seven voices. Typically I do, you know, three opinion pieces from the left and three opinion pieces from the right that I'm sort of summarising and quoting. And those pieces will typically span the more moderate

left and right, all the way to the more fringe left and right. That way, you're getting this full look at how each side is presenting the news, and then you get my take. And so it's just here. I am one person, I'm observing this. I'm trying to be as honest and transparent about my views as possible. I'm not trying to hide my views. You know, I have political leanings in each direction on issues. I actually happen to be a pretty moderate American, but, even if I weren't, I think it's really important that I'm just being honest about like 'this section is just my opinion and just my thought', and that gives me the space to get my toes in the conversation if I want.

And people really like that because I think a fundamental issue that our country and our media faces right now in the United States — and also, you know, I think this is happening everywhere. It's happening in the United Kingdom. It's happening in places in India, it's happening in Australia — people are feeling like they're just not getting the full story. And they would rather be told the full slate of arguments, even if something really fringe or something a little bit outlandish is included in there, then get a very narrow set of arguments and be blindsided by an opinion they may not like, or may not understand, or have no context for. So I'm very much a believer in 'we can talk about things that are on the fringe', 'we can address these conspiracies', or 'we can address things that maybe are not commonly accepted ideas, but we can do it in a way that doesn't equate them to something that's, you know, maybe more mainstream or more conventional wisdom.'

We can just say 'look, this is out there and you can take it or leave it, and you can understand it better by reading about it.' But if we just let all those views exist in these sort of dark corners of the internet, siloed and without any dissent, I think that's a much more dangerous thing for the country. I think, what happens is sort of what we've seen in the last few years, which is political views on both sides become really radicalised because people are operating in spaces where they're never ever facing dissent. They're never facing scepticism. You know, the most classic example in US politics is just removing someone like Donald Trump from Twitter now, very controversial decision. Obviously Trump violated some terms of service that Twitter has - obviously Twitter, as a private company, has a right to decide what users it wants on its platform.

But you know, Donald Trump didn't go away. He's just not on Twitter pissing off a bunch of liberals in the US anymore. He's speaking to a million-plus subscribers on Truth Social, he's going on Fox News. He's going on News Max. He's doing rallies around the country. He's just connecting with his people in places where there's no

dissent now. And I actually think that's worse. I think that's more dangerous for the country because there should be a diversity of opinion in the public sphere, in the public square. And that creates more balance and better understanding of politics in our country. So my goal with Tangle is to bring all these views under one roof and then to court a diverse political readership as well, which is what we've done. I mean, we have a pretty close to fairly even split of Democrats, Republicans, conservatives, liberals, centrists, people who are sort of more far left, people who are sort of more far right. And they all really trust the product that we're putting forward because they see themselves represented in the views and they see ideas that they don't agree with. And I'm a firm believer that that's really important for the country right now.

Absolutely. Could you paint a picture for our listeners about how you go about doing this? You know, what does a typical week look like for you as editor-in-chief?

It's a lot of work. I often have people write in and ask me how I spend time with my family, or sleep, or do any of those things that are critical to having a life outside work. So I'll tell you, I guess the hard part first, which is: we're a daily, so I'm publishing a newsletter every day, Monday through Friday, the newsletter goes out at about 12 noon Eastern time. And so, today is Monday as we're having this conversation and I will be right now, typically, in a typical day, already working on Tuesday's newsletter and already have a pretty solid idea of what we're gonna cover on Wednesday. So me and my team, I have some editors, I have a couple interns, we're doing research and we're collecting the best arguments we can find about those topics right now, and I'm pouring over them.

In the most simple sense possible, I'm reading and consuming as much news about a topic as I can in the allotted time that I have. So most of the content that we share is from written publications. So, you know, I'm reading a lot of news, which is typically what it is. But I also listen to a lot of political podcasts and if I encounter really good arguments there, I'll transcribe the podcast to include it in the newsletter. I watch some television news, some of the big anchors who do nightly opinion pieces. I'll tune in to see what they're saying. Those news networks do me the favour of often transcribing those television shows. So I don't have to write as I watch, but I can pull the transcriptions from the websites later. And I'll include some of those if I think they're really powerful arguments that are kind of, you know, part of the discussion

that we're having, but the first thing is picking a topic, which is basically, you know, what are people talking about?

What's trending on social media, what's on the front page of the major newspapers in the country. What are all the late night shows talking about? What are the primetime lineup political hosts talking about? So, you know, on a day like today, we covered an election in Texas, which is just, you know, there was a big race there. Somebody won the election and that changed the dynamic of what people think is gonna happen in the midterms. And everybody's talking about that dynamic. So we covered those arguments. I will spend, I would say, anywhere from 8 to 24 hours of work time researching a given topic, depending on how familiar I am with it. So that's one-to-three work days of just reading and parsing out arguments and making some phone calls or emailing experts to ask for clarification about certain issues.

Sometimes when it's a topic I know really intimately, well that I've covered a bunch, the leg work and the run up to that is much shorter because I don't have to do as much background work because I just have a lot of institutional knowledge about it from my career as a reporter. And then the really hard part is sussing out which arguments I think should be included in the newsletter. So I do that by choosing what's representative, which is an argument that a lot of people I see on the right or the left making a lot of commentators are making. A lot of people I talk to in political circles are making an argument that's really compelling. So personally, you know, just the gut check for me when I read this, does it move my opinion in one way or the other, if it does, then I know it's well written.

It's well articulated. It's an argument that I find powerful or someone on my staff says, this piece really changed my mind about it. That's a good sign to me that my readers should hear it because in the end we want stuff that's thought-provoking. We want stuff that's compelling. And then, you know, the third gut check is, does this just pass the sniff test? Are they really cherry picking statistics or using information that's outdated? Are they saying things that are outright false based on information I have access to? So I want to make sure I'm not just feeding my readers something that's like a totally misleading representation of an argument, or if it's a little bit misleading, I'll include something that speaks directly to that argument from the other side that sort of balances it out so people can see 'oh, here's one way to present this data, and here's another way to present that data.' And then we make it as direct, short and as digestible as possible in the newsletter. We hope most of our newsletters are

around a ten-minute read. So this is not your two minute, three minute Roundup of, you know, you get one story. What happened in two sentences? We want people to spend ten minutes with us and really understand an issue better when they're done. So it takes a little bit more of an investment and we're a little bit more in depth than most other political newsletters. And then I spend a few hours on the day, the newsletter's gonna go out, fleshing out my little mini opinion, mini editorial, the newsletter goes out at 12 noon. I go to work out. I have some lunch and by 2 o'clock I'm back online, finishing up the next day's newsletter, doing all the things a solo businessman entrepreneur has to do - doing payroll, doing podcasts like this, sharing the product posting on social media.

I have a team, I have a social media editor. I have editors, I have a couple interns. So I get a lot of help from people who are also working to spread tangle and get the news out there. But it's a long day. It's a grind, it's typically a 10-to-12-hour workday. So that's the super hard part. The great part is that I'm my own boss. It's so far been a really successful endeavour because my last job in media was I was getting paid \$70,000 a year, living in New York city. And in the span of two years, I basically doubled my own salary by going independent. I found my own worth. I started employing people. I'm running this company, that's bringing in enough revenue to hire other people and invest back into the growth and start paying for ads in other newsletters and doing all those things.

And so it's been an incredibly fulfilling thing to both have a really stable and successful and more lucrative job, but also feel like I'm doing something that's a little mission-oriented, which is I'm getting people out of their political bubbles. I'm helping Americans and people across the world understand American politics, I think in a more nuanced and holistic way. And I feel really good about that. But when Friday afternoon comes around, I'm exhausted every week. I'm ready to have a drink and pop down on the couch and turn my brain off and relax for a little bit. And it takes a lot of discipline to, you know, take care of yourself and get to bed early every night and get your seven or eight hours of sleep and eat well and work out and spend some time away from the news, you know, for a couple weeks, every quarter, and just give yourself some of that space to regroup because I don't want burn out. I don't want to do this for one or two years. I want to do it for 10, or 20, or 30 years, because I really believe in the mission, in what we're doing. And so it's important for me to maintain some semblance of work-life balance and not just run myself into the ground here too early.

No, absolutely maximum respect - as a fellow entrepreneur, I've never had a job and I always start on the premise that I'd rather work 80 or 90 hours a week for myself than 37 hours a week for someone else. And yeah, it is tough, isn't it? And there is no, the book does stop with you, but it is invigorating, isn't it? That you know, the opportunities that it can present. So yeah - maximum respect to you, 'your chief cook and bottle washer.' That's what I used to say when I was starting out.

I like that.

So, obviously you promise no sizeism, but how do you deal with topics like gun control and abortion, where I know what my views are. You can probably guess them, it's a woman's right to choose and I ban old guns, but, like we do have in the UK, it's one of the things that puzzles those bricks about you guys is that you give anyone a gun, even those suffering from mental health, um, it's absolutely insanity, but you know, how do you find middle ground in such polarising extreme topics like that?

It's a great question. I mean, fundamentally the first thing that I just wanna make clear is I'm actually not trying to find a compromise necessarily. I'm not telling people to come here to moderate your views and become a centrist. It's not a 'holding hands kumbaya' thing. I am very first and foremost. The thing that I'm trying to solve it's not that Americans don't respect or don't agree about a certain issue that you know, that someone on the other side of the political spectrum has; it's that they don't even know it. They don't understand it. I don't think most Democrats in the United States can clearly articulate the standard Republican perspective or point of view on something like gun control. They actually don't know what those most compelling Republican arguments are and the same goes vice versa. I think most Republicans see Democrats and they think they're just trying to come for our guns and they want government tyranny and all these things.

And it's like, 'no, they don't.' They just see the statistics about how more guns equals more deaths in America and they want to limit the amount of guns to limit the amount of deaths. And I have a lot of conservative readers who just don't even encounter those arguments. And I have a lot of democratic readers who just think every Republican is a gun nut when the reality is a lot of Republicans actually share some end goal ideas about how to reduce gun deaths in America that Democrats have.

They just have different ideas about how to get there. So I don't want to make it seem like, 'you know, we are just looking for a middle ground centrism'. I think being a centrist is an ideology of its own. I happen to think it's actually kind of a bad ideology.

If you just try and look for the middle ground on every issue, there's an old joke. You know, a Republican wants to, or a Democrat wants to build a bridge. A Republican says it costs too much. A centrist says let's just build it halfway. And it's like that. That's not a solution. That's not the best way to go about this. But I can tell you, on gun control I can give you a tangible example. I mean, the way that I covered that piece is I wrote: 'you know, here are the arguments, the left's making about how to reform things'. Here's what the right's saying. Here's a little bit of common ground, you know, actually right now we're seeing this play out in Congress, but there's actually a good deal of support from both Democrats and Republicans for things like red flag laws.

The difference is that Republicans worry about the due process of that. How quickly do we take someone's gun away from them? If a family member reports that they're mentally ill, do those people get a day in court? What happens if someone lies and, you know, gets someone's guns taken as an active vengeance, because they're an ex-boyfriend or girlfriend or whatever. And Democrats need to have an answer for that. They need to have solutions for that in order to get Republicans on board. So we flesh out some of those differences. And then in that piece specifically, I told my personal story, which is that I was 14 years old the first time I shot a gun. My family in rural west Texas are gun-owners. And I wrote about what I remembered from that experience and the way that moment was framed to me as a teenager, which was like, 'here's an opportunity for me to show a sense of maturity or a sense of responsibility' by being given this opportunity to experience something the adults around me are experiencing.

And it was taught to me with this huge sense of levity for this moment and this huge or not levity, this huge sense of responsibility for this moment without this kind of levity around, you know, 'we love guns and we're gonna pose with them in front of our Christmas trees and everybody should shoot all the time and we should make jokes about how we're gonna go buy more guns after every mass shooting', which is what you see in a lot of more extreme gun cultures right now. And I just wrote about how gun cultures changed in America, from what I remembered growing up and how

it's frightening. I find the current state of gun culture. So I think for people who are gun owners, or maybe even people who subscribe to that gun culture, I'm coming forward as a friend, as somebody who's saying, 'I get it.'

You know, I like shooting guns. I think it's a fun sport. I understand that in some places in the US, owning a gun is really important for individuality because you have police officers whose station is 20 miles away from you and they're the nearest cops. And if your home's being robbed, or there's a dispute, or you're in danger, you can't just call 911 and have them show up at your door. And I get that. But I also understand that we can't look around with what we're having in the United States and say that this is okay. We can't see the number of not just homicides, but also suicides, the number of mass shootings, these things that are happening in the United States at rates that are much higher than they're happening elsewhere, and just accept it and say 'this is fine.'

And when I come forward like that, I think a lot of people are more willing to listen to my argument. And it's not about both sides of them because I'm not there to say the right argument is better than, or equal to the left argument. When they're abusing statistics in a misleading way or something, I'm there to just say 'here is what the right is actually arguing here, here's the most compelling argument I can find from the right about why gun control won't fix the issue of mass shootings or won't fix the issue of homicides. And here's the left's most compelling argument.' And when people see them side by side most of my readers can really suss out what they think is a more convincing case. And then I always get that space to just say 'here's my view.'

Here are holes. I see in each side's argument. And I think it's just a kind of refreshing new way to look at it. And the process, this news and the result typically is that people leave saying, you know, feeling like the temperature's been turned down a little bit because they just get it. They can get their hands around it. They can better understand what's going on. It doesn't make them so crazy to not understand the other side. And I have a lot of readers who say our newsletters move their positions on things, which I think is increasingly rare in today's political landscape. I don't think people change their minds nearly enough. Is that the special sauce that you speak about? Yeah, you know, I think it is. I think the special sauce is that the format allows people to approach a new argument and take in a new argument without immediately putting their defences up.

The social psychologist Jonathan Haidt has a great book about this called “The Righteous Mind”. And he talks about, you know, the elephant and the rider is the analogy he uses, which is the elephant is the emotive response that most people have in a split second, when they're presented with a political talking point or some kind of moral quandary, and 90% of the decisions we make are driven by that elephant. But the rider gets control about 10% of the time and can sort of nudge that elephant in certain ways when the emotion and the emotive response isn't set off immediately. So when you come forward and you say ‘Republicans don't care about children being slaughtered in elementary school, that's why they're not gonna do anything about gun control’, you've now set off the elephant on the right immediately.

And no amount of statistics or information is going to be able to change their mind because you've already triggered the elephant and you've sent them in a direction where they have a defensive emotive posture. And they're just not going to hear you, but if you come forward with, you know, I understand these certain sides of perspective, here's like some things I see that you're saying that I understand that are, you know, reasonable points of view to have, but also, I don't think they outweigh this, this and this. Now you're talking to the writer and you have a chance to sort of move someone's opinion. And this works both ways on issues. So our newsletter, I think, is speaking to the writer, it's allowing people to see themselves represented, seeing their views represented. And then also seeing those views sandwiched in opinions that they might not agree with opinions that are different than theirs. And it just gives them space to hear it and to see it without feeling attacked and to really take it in. And I think what ends up happening then is people are more willing to change their minds about certain issues. And at least when they leave, they'll have a better understanding of people they don't agree with, which I think is the first step in sort of fixing some of the craziness that we have in the country right now.

I mean, you've been doing this for a while now, tell us about the journey in terms of what's gone the way you expected and have there been any surprises along the way, like pleasant or unpleasant.

Wow. Yeah, that's a great question. I mean, first of all, when I started this, I did not know whether there was gonna be an appetite for it. I was convinced that I knew a lot of people who would read it, but I didn't know how representative they were of a

larger population of Americans that were sort of interested in stepping out of their political bubbles. My expectations were very mixed. I thought there was an opportunity for this because I had this kind of anecdotal evidence of my friends and family saying 'oh my God, I would totally read this. If you did this every day, this is a great concept', but I wasn't sure how big that audience was going to be. So I think in terms of what surprised me, I've been surprised by just how often I approach people with this concept, whether it's in person or whether it's through advertisements and, you know, earned media opportunities like this, where people are so receptive to it.

There's such a thirst and hunger from Americans. And again, from people all across the country, all across the world to get a more holistic view of US politics. So that has been a bit surprising to me because it made me realise we're not all as we're being presented. There's a lot of people out there who are just very, very ready to step off the ledge and hear the other side a bit. What I did expect was that once people saw this format and experienced this format, they were going to feel better about the news. They were going to feel better about the state of politics in the country. I knew that that was going to happen because right now I think the most common thing that happens in both left leaning media and right leaning media, it's a tactic where you highlight the craziest, most out there, most fringe people on the other side — and you try to frame them as being representative of the entire movement as a whole. So, you know, if you're a left-wing liberal or whatever, there are a lot of conservative provocateurs out there. Someone like, I don't know, Charlie Kirk at TPUSA, who is 'boombastic' and says outrageous things, and is intentionally offensive, and likes to simplify stuff in order to make a point on social media. And he, to a lot of people, is just representative of what your average Republican is. That is when a lot of liberals think about Republicans, they think about someone like him. But the truth is, his views are definitely more on the fringe of the party as a whole across the country. I think most Republicans are much more moderate, and reasonable, and approachable than his politicians are. And what happens when someone reads that is they see those voices represented in really influential, conservative places.

They see these writers and these opinion makers and these pundits who are articulating a view, that's a lot more reasonable and a lot more approachable. And they say 'okay, not everybody on this side is as crazy as I thought it was.' And here's an argument I can even understand or relate to. Maybe I disagree with it still, maybe I don't, but it just makes me feel like the temperatures just turn down a little bit. And I hear that all the time from people, I hear people write in and say, you know, 'I just feel like your newsletter's kind of AAL on all the stuff that I'm reading on social media

and the stuff I see on TV', which is often sensationalism and clickbait and tweets that are meant and designed to be retweeted, to get people all worked up in the most, you know, extreme way possible.

Sometimes obviously that stuff is justified. You know, I don't wanna say everything's good. Everything's better than it seems. In some cases it's not, there are real threats out there for people, depending on what political side you're on. There are really scary things happening out there right now. And we try and make it clear how real and how scary those things actually are. But I knew when we came up with the format and we came up with the concept that people were just gonna feel a little bit better when they read our newsletter, versus the way they were gonna feel when they went on social media, where I think a lot of people are acting for those social media rewards. They're saying things for those social media rewards for the likes and the retweets and the attention, and that often leads to a lot more extreme and kind of out-there politics being elevated.

So those were sort of the two big things. It was like, I didn't know if there was an audience and I wasn't totally expecting that that audience was gonna exist. And it surprised me how easy it was to sell to people. But I did know once they were in the door, that they were gonna like the product and feel good about it. And I think, just on a day-to-day note, it's been more work than I ever imagined it was gonna be to do this. But it's also been a lot more fulfilling, you know, I really thought when I went independent, I was going to miss a lot of things about being in a newsroom and working at an institution and all the things that, you know, having a support system creates for you. But honestly, I frankly don't, I don't miss it at all. I mean, this is by far the best job I've ever had. I love it. I feel grateful for it every day. And I, more than anything can't imagine ever working for somebody ever again. So that, that was kind of a surprise for me was that I, I thought that, you know, this was going to be a really tough transition. And instead I found that actually, I really love working for myself. And I mostly just see the upside of it.

Do you have a medium- and long-term plan? Like where do you see tango being three to five years... It sounds like a job interview, doesn't it? You have an interesting resume. Where do you see yourself sort of three, five years from now? And dare I say, ten, 15 years from now, will you be bigger than The Wall Street Journal or punch ball? Will you be buying them or will they be buying

you? Come on, you know, share with our listeners, your evil master plan of world domination.

Yeah. So it's a really good question. And it's something that I've just been thinking about more in 2022, this, last year. I mean, only this August will be the three year anniversary of us launching. So I would say only in the last six months, have I been, you know, totally a hundred percent certain, this model's going to work, we're going to keep growing. You know, I'm sitting on a golden egg in some ways. So it took me a while to get there. I think most good entrepreneurs will tell you that if you're feeling kind of satisfied or you're feeling like you're just treading water, that's sort of a dangerous place to be. And I've maintained this mentality that I really can't rest on my laurels until we hit these certain benchmarks and get to these certain subscription levels and revenue levels and reach levels where I'm like 'okay, this product is proven and it's working.'

And that only happened, you know, for me, I think sort of six or seven months ago, where I'm looking back on the last year and saying like, 'okay, this growth is real. It's consistent. This isn't a blip, we're doing this. And here's, I can see now where we're going to be in two or three years'. I do not have any plans or interests, frankly, in becoming the next Wall Street Journal. I don't want to have a newsroom of 200 people and this giant team to manage and this big sort of, you know, web of red tape and who can say what, and all these things that I think kind of undercut the success of some newsrooms today. I want a small really well-paid, really nimble team. That's my goal is to continue growing this team to a point where we have seven or eight full-time employees who are really good at their jobs, are really happy at their jobs, are making above the market price for their role and are really committed to the mission that we're after.

And once we have that, I think, not only will the product be the best version of itself, the newsletter and the podcast, but we'll be able to reach a lot more people. When we have someone who is dedicated only to growth, you know, right now I do everything - I'm doing the ad deals, I'm doing the growth, I'm writing the newsletter, I'm researching all these topics. I want to have somebody on my team, who's doing that stuff for me. So I don't have to worry about it and is taking this thing to the next level, because I believe there's a huge market out there for it. And I don't think we've even really scratched the surface in terms of, you know, I think that's more, the two to five year plan is to get to this point where we have this full-time team built out.

Everybody's making a lot of money. Everybody loves the job, loves the mission and we're perfecting the product. And I think, once we do that, the expansion for me is, there's sort of two or three avenues I think to go. One is we take Tangle and the format, which I think is really unique abroad. So I get emails every day from people in the UK who are saying, 'you know, I love Tangle. Does anything like this exist in England or Ireland or wherever?' And I have to say, 'no, it doesn't, but that's something we'd love to do one day.' So, you know, if I have \$80,000 in the bank, I can hire a version of myself who lives in the United Kingdom and wants to do exactly what I do with Tangle for the UK for a year and say, 'here's a contract. Here's an \$80,000 salary.'

So global domination is part of the plan?!

Yeah, let's get this thing off the ground. And if in a year you have an ex-subscriber base, then we can do a revenue share of the profit and you can make this thing into whatever you wanna make. And every time somebody subscribes to Tangle UK Tangle the business that I created gets, you know, 15% of the revenue because we helped you launch, and you can get the rest, and we'll build this team out. And I think that is a sustainable, potential path for us. I think we could do that internally in the US, too. I think we could go to swing states instead of expanding out to other countries. I think we could create weeklies in Pennsylvania, or Florida, or Wisconsin, or these places where the politics are really divisive and people are really interested in it.

And then kind of the third idea is to jump verticals, which honestly is the most exciting for me sometimes to think about, which is, you know - there are debates happening in culture. There are debates happening in sports. We could create a 'Tangled Sports' where every day we cover one major debate in the sports world, 'should the United States soccer team get paid as much on the women's side as the men's side', you know, 'who's the greatest basketball player of all time', and then do the exact same thing we have now with the format and have a really well dialled-in sports write, who's playing my role.

What about if subjects overlap, for example, you've got a sports issue that then becomes a political issue like with transgender athletes as it were - if

you'll forgive the pun, what about the brands and the topics becoming tangled?

Yeah, no, it's a good, it's a really good question. I think this idea is enough of a germ that I don't really have a clear coach and answer for that, but I'll tell you that it's happening now. I mean, I've written about Lia Thomas, the trans swimmer at Penn in Tangle in the politics newsletter, because I think that's a deeply political issue. And you know, maybe the answer is just, will we send the same newsletter to two different groups of people and they just get the same thing one day when it crosses over like that, because these intersections are happening and we don't need to pretend like they don't happen. But what happens to me on my end is I'll get an email from somebody like, 'hey, could you please cover the Johnny Depp-Amber Heard trial?' And I'm like, 'you know, that's not a fit for Tangle.'

This is like a cultural thing. I know there's stuff there about domestic violence and laws and you know, liable stuff. But so much of that trial was really about their relationship. It was about this kind of cultural entertainment space and toxicity between the two of them and all these things that just didn't quite feel like a fit for a politics newsletter. And so I just said, 'you know, this is out of my lane. I'm not gonna cover it.' But I thought in my head, 'you know, if we had a tangled culture section, this would be a perfect topic to go into because it had everybody's attention.' And it was so interesting. So, you know, long term, I think that is a potential avenue for expansion. And I'm pretty confident that a lot of people would subscribe to a version of tangle that was either, you know, for a new, different country or for a new vertical, a different kind of topic centre. Yeah. Or both. Yeah, exactly.

No, you're right though, because I didn't watch a lot and read a lot of the Johnny Depp trial coverage, because it just felt salacious. It felt like it was contrived public interest and we were all just nosing in on their relationship and it felt like a tragedy for both. It just depressed me, whoever was in the right, and I'm not on either side, I'm sure there's right and wrong on both sides, but I just wanted to leave them to it because I wasn't that interested, but just felt like I was some kind of gaul.

Yeah, no, I got the same sense of that whole thing. You know, I think in some of those email responses that I gave to readers who were asking me to cover it asking for my take on it, I just said, 'look, I've barely watched the trial, but from what I've

read about it, my perspective is like both of these people have deep issues and they had a really toxic relationship, and I find the whole thing just really sad and kind of depressing.' And you know, it doesn't seem like something that should be for public consumption in my opinion. So it was just a, you know, I felt like I needed a shower after reading some of that stuff because it was just really dark and upsetting. On top of not feeling like it had anything to do with politics or what I typically cover, I also didn't have much interest in writing about it.

Who are your journalist and editorial heroes? Who do you have a Google alert out for to see what they're doing in terms of, you know, you have an interest in their career, but also potentially modelling the good and bad aspects of what they're trying to create for your own venture?

Whew man, that is, that's a really good question. You know, I think there are a lot of really independent-minded people out there who are writing in ways that I think are just above the fray in terms of being honest about their own mistakes and things like that. The folks at Breaking Points, which is a really popular political podcast, Krystal Ball I think is great. She's one of the few liberals out there who I think is really interested in connecting with people on the other side of the political spectrum and also very much accountable. She corrects her mistakes. She comes forward when she's changed her mind about issues. I find her, her whole demeanour, really inspiring. Conor Friedersdorf at The Atlantic is somebody who writes a lot about the toxicity of both political parties today. And he's somebody who, you know, I read his work all the time and frankly, I don't even know where his politics are because he shoots so many shots at both sides, in a way that I find really refreshing. He's somebody who's writing I'm always reading. Matt Taibbi is another guy who I find really interesting. He's traditionally been more liberal though these days, he's sort of stepped into this liberal critic space, which I think there's some flaws in that too, you know, kind of the obsession with just 'wokeism' or whatever you want to call it or political correctness. I think some people have just beat that horse dead and it's, you know, there are more interesting things to write about, but, I love him because there's no topic that he won't touch. He'll write honestly and straightforwardly about even the most sensitive issues that are out there.

And I think that's really important. I mean, he inspires me in the sense that he shows what can happen when you have an independent and subscriber-supported audience, where you can really touch whatever you want to touch, because your

readers are interested in it. People want to hear it from you. And you know, if you get in a little bit of trouble or you step on some rakes or whatever, that's all part of the learning experience. And he often writes that way where he will accept when he kind of screws up or says something that was maybe over the line or whatever. And I like that about people. I like people who are reflective and critical of their own writing. And those are often the kinds of journalists and writers whose work I'm most interested in reading. Frankly, there are a lot of people out there who I think have really big platforms and are really influential, whose work I see deep flaws in and I find really upsetting and frustrating, which is part of the reason why I created Tangle.

And I don't want to, you know, step on some high horse thing here and say 'I don't have any heroes or editorial people I look up to.' I mean, I just named a few, but I do actually feel as if it is hard these days to find people whose work I find really inspirational and really worthy of just total admiration, because so many people are backed into their ideological corners right now that I'm not seeing a lot of intellectual honesty out there, which is why I think what we're doing at Tangle is really important.

Right? We've just got in at the ground floor of an elevator. I've asked you what Tangle does. It is the World Trade Centre, though. So you've got 90 seconds. Go.

The elevator pitch is: when was the last time you changed your mind about a big political issue? And if you struggle to think about that moment or an instance recently in the last six months in the last year where you changed your mind, my proposition to you is that you are not right about everything. And that if you haven't had a change of heart about an issue, that's probably because you're only reading content out there that is reinforcing your own political beliefs and your own political views. And I think that that's really dangerous. If I told you I had a friend named Jared, who knew everything about politics, he was always right about everything, and anytime, I heard him get into a political debate, he always won the debate because he had the best information and he understood how the world worked, you would say, 'this guy sounds made up. That doesn't sound real.' You wouldn't believe me and you'd be right. But the problem right now is a lot of people feel like they are Jared out there. And I apologise to all the Jareds listening to this. A lot of people feel that they are Jared. They feel like they have it figured out. They feel like they understand how the world works and they don't change their minds. And the only way to really change your mind on an issue or to evolve as a person is to constantly challenge your own

views and hear perspectives from across the political spectrum. So my pitch is that if you haven't changed your mind about an issue recently, you are probably living in a little bit of a political silo and a political bubble. And if you go to readtangle.com and subscribe to our newsletter, you have a shortcut, a low effort, ten minutes of work a day to get out of that bubble. And I think it'd be really good for you.

I thought that was an awesome picture. And I was about to chastise you for not giving a call to action. Like how do people get hold of you, but you even did that at the end, which was brilliant. Isaac, that was a hugely interesting conversation. Obviously we wish you the best of luck with what is a very worthy and incredible project. I'm a paying subscriber. I think our listeners should know that anyway. I think you're doing an absolutely fantastic job. I wish you the very best of luck. Thank you ever so much for your time on the podcast.

Thank you so much, Paul. It was a blast.

Well, wasn't that amazing? It was created and produced by Podcast Partners. They're really lovely people and rather good at all this podcasting guff. Find out more at podcastpartners.com.