

# **Comprehensible Open Hardware**

**on building the Open Book and friends**

**Joey Castillo, FOSDEM 2024**

# About Me

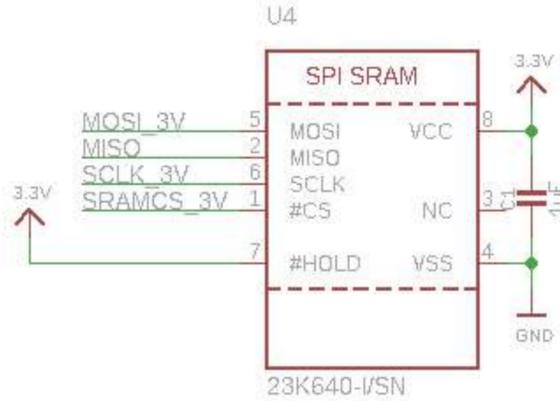
- Technologist in Residence at Cornell Tech in NYC
- I make things under the banner of Oddly Specific Objects
- Background: Journalism, not tech
- Learned by doing and making (and cribbing notes from open source designs)
- **True believer in Open Source Hardware**

# The Open Book

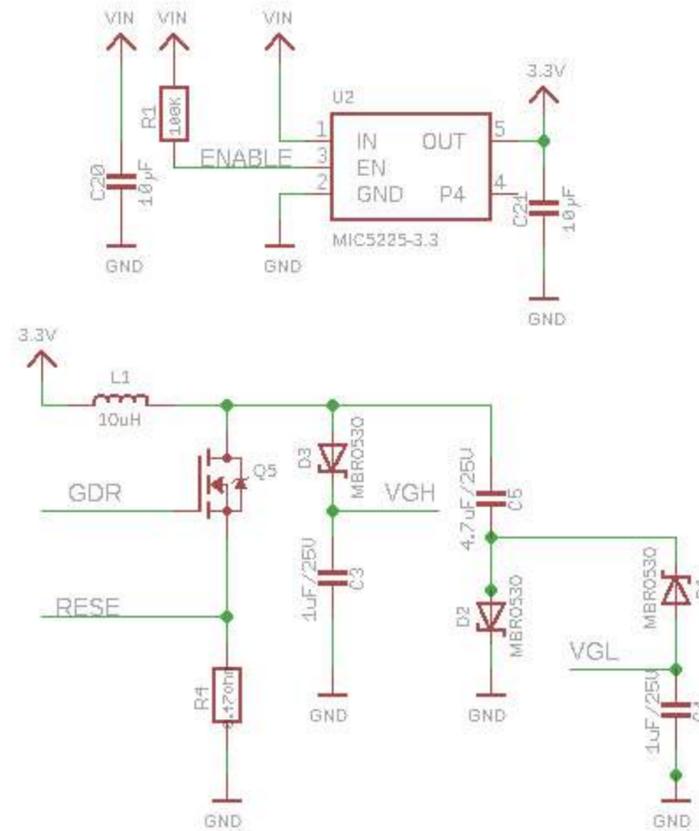


### FRAMEBUFFER SRAM

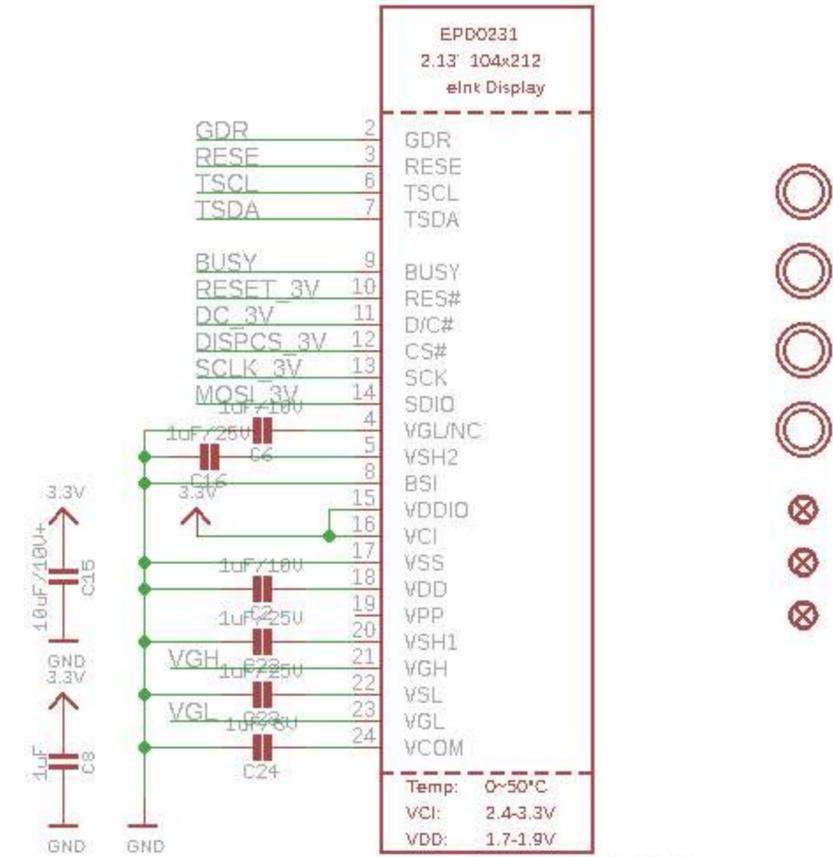
SPI SRAM can be used to store the screen data if the MCU doesn't have 6KB free SRAM



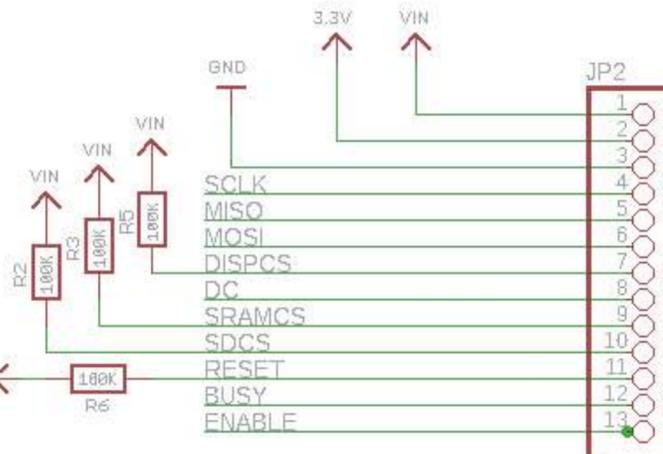
### VOLTAGE REGULATOR



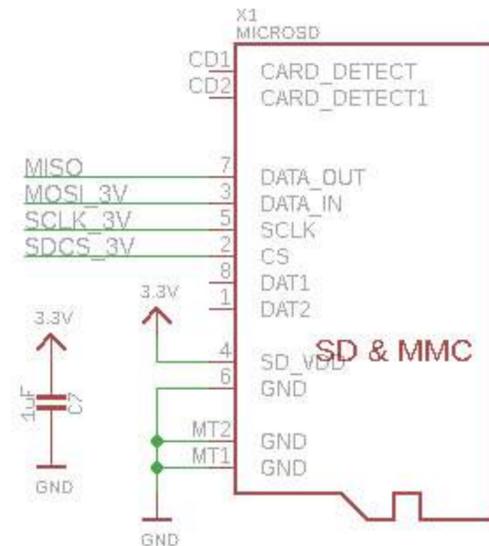
EINK1



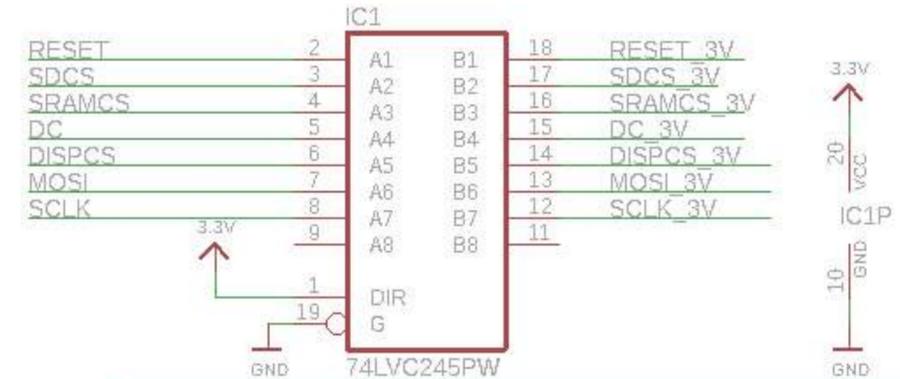
### HEADER PINS



### SD CARD



### 3/5V -> 3V LEVEL SHIFTING



1.54in RedBlack eInk rev E

7/15/2018 11:41 PM

Sheet: 1/1

Drawing: >AUTHOR

Adafruit Industries





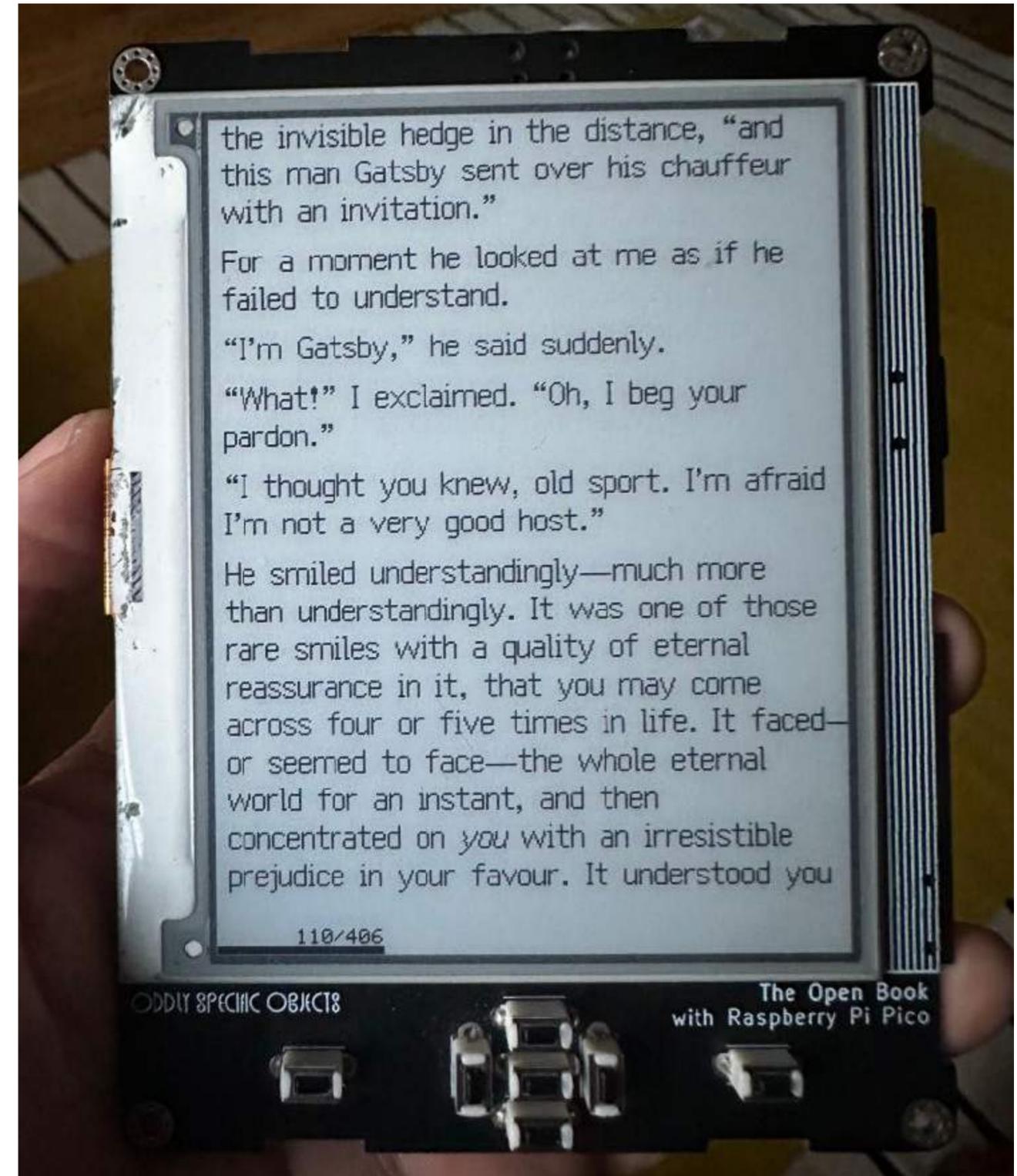
ODDITY & SPECIFIC OBJECTS

The Open Book  
with Raspberry Pi Pico

# The Open Book

## Goals

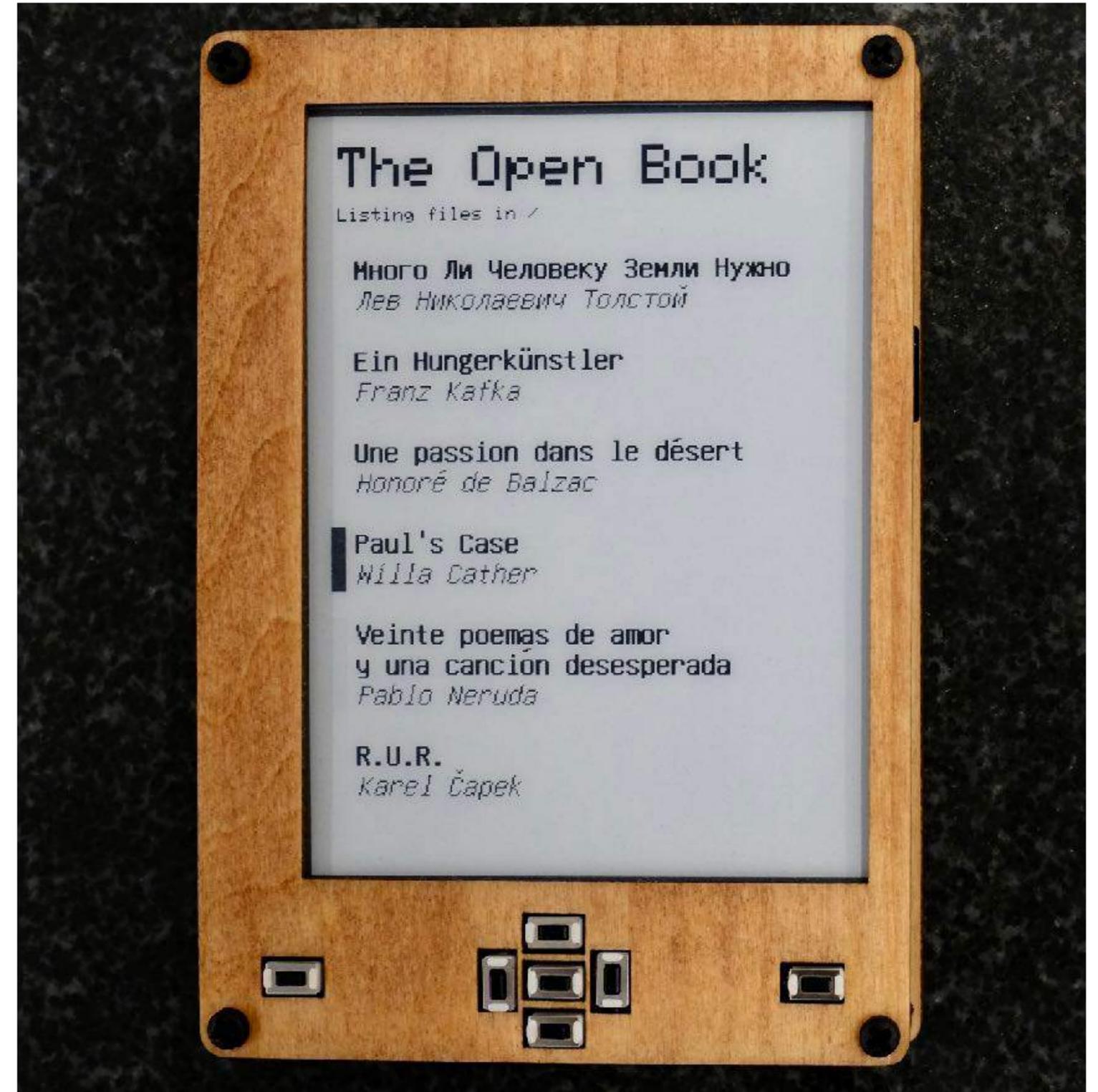
- Function as an open hardware ebook reader



# The Open Book

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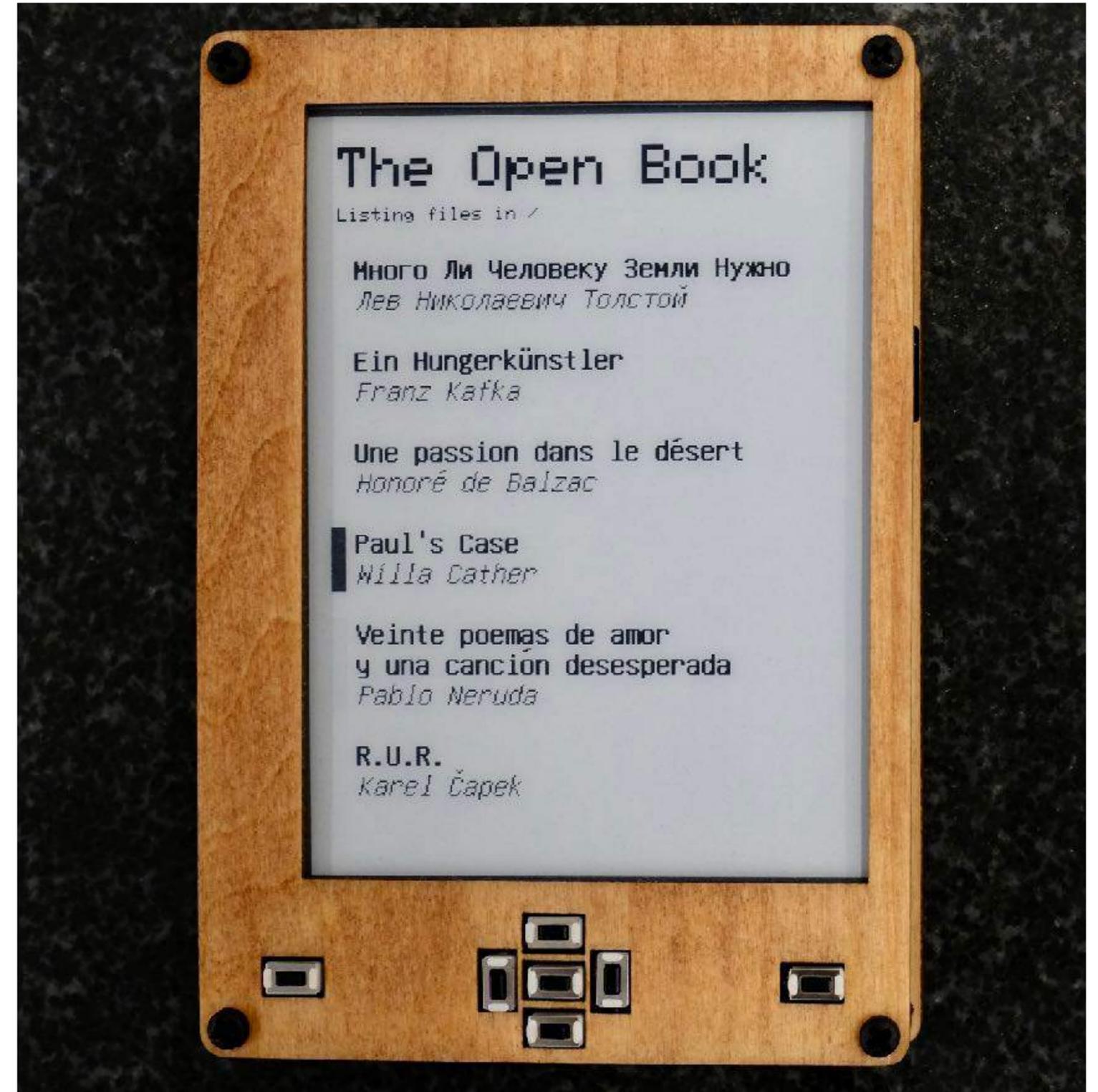
- Function as an open hardware ebook reader
- Support reading texts in all the languages of the world



# The Open Book

## Goals

- Function as an open hardware ebook reader
- Support reading texts in all the languages of the world
- Be affordable, accessible and DIY'able



My Library

3.49 V 

Много Ли Человеку Земли Нужно

ألف ليلة وليلة

孫子兵法

Οδύσσεια

The Weary Blues

Little Women

The Sun Also Rises

Paul's Case

The Gun

The Picture of Dorian Gray

The Great Gatsby

The Machine Stops

Frankenstein



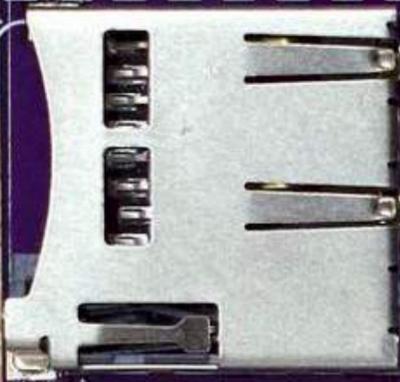
### POWER SUPPLY

D1&Q1 conspire to let only the higher of VBAT & VBUS reach 3.3V regulator U1. C1 filters regulator input; C2 & C3 filter output. R1 pulls EN high to keep the regulator on.  
**BATTERY:** U2 is a LiPo charging controller. Powered by VBUS, it charges the battery at a rate determined by R3. C4=filter for VBAT, R4&R5 limit current to CHG FUL LEDs. R6: voltage dividers to gauge VBAT and VBUS on A6/PB01 and A11/PB00.

#### R3 Values

10K = 100mA ← RECOMMEND!!  
 5K = 200mA    2K = 500mA

WARNING: OVER 100mA, BE ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN THAT YOUR BATTERY SUPPORTS THE DESIRED RATE OF CHARGE! PLEASE DON'T CATCH FIRE.



### MICROSD

Uses the main SPI bus (MISO, MOSI, SCK). SDCS is D4/PA14.

### SAM D51 MICROCONTROLLER

Lots to unpack here. For starters, the Feather pinout is mostly identical to the Adafruit SAMD51 boards you're familiar with, PWM & analog pins where you expect them (minus "extra" pin D4).  
 SERCOM0: Serial (RX/TX = D0/D1 = PB17/PB16)  
 SERCOM1: SPI (MOSI/MISO/SCK = D27/D26/D28 = PB23/PB22/PA17)  
 SERCOM2: I<sup>2</sup>C (SDA/SCL = D24/D25 = PA12/PA13)  
 SERCOM4: SPI for the display: MOSI1/SCK1 = D41/D42 = PB15/PB13 (no need for a MISO1).  
 For CircuitPython, use pin names (i.e. SCK, D8, A4). Arduino: number after D is digital pin number (D4=4), & for analog pins, use number with 'A' prefix (A0). Most folks can ignore pad names (PA12), but they're useful for firmware development.

### BATTERY AND CHARGING



# ODDLY SPECIFIC OBJECTS THE OPEN BOOK

### STATUS LED

NEOPIXEL=D8 PA15



C7&C8: filter caps on VDDCORE, output from the chip's voltage regulator.

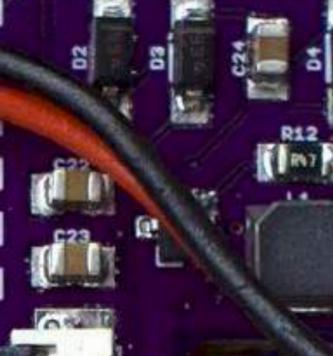
THE OPEN BOOK IS OPEN SOURCE HARDWARE! CC-BY-SA 4.0 plz don't steal the bear tho.

### A PORTS (JST-PH)

enter port provides an I<sup>2</sup>C interface. The other ports provide access to pins A8 and A9 (PB03 & PB05 respectively) via current limiting resistors R15 D5 & D6 are 3.6V zener diodes to protect pins from voltage: they shunt excess power to ground when voltage exceeds their breakdown point.

### SERIAL PORT

TX GND RX



### E-PAPER DISPLAY

Pins: ECS=D44/PB07 DC=D45/PB05 ERST=D46/PA00 EBSY=D47/PA01

### PORT-A9

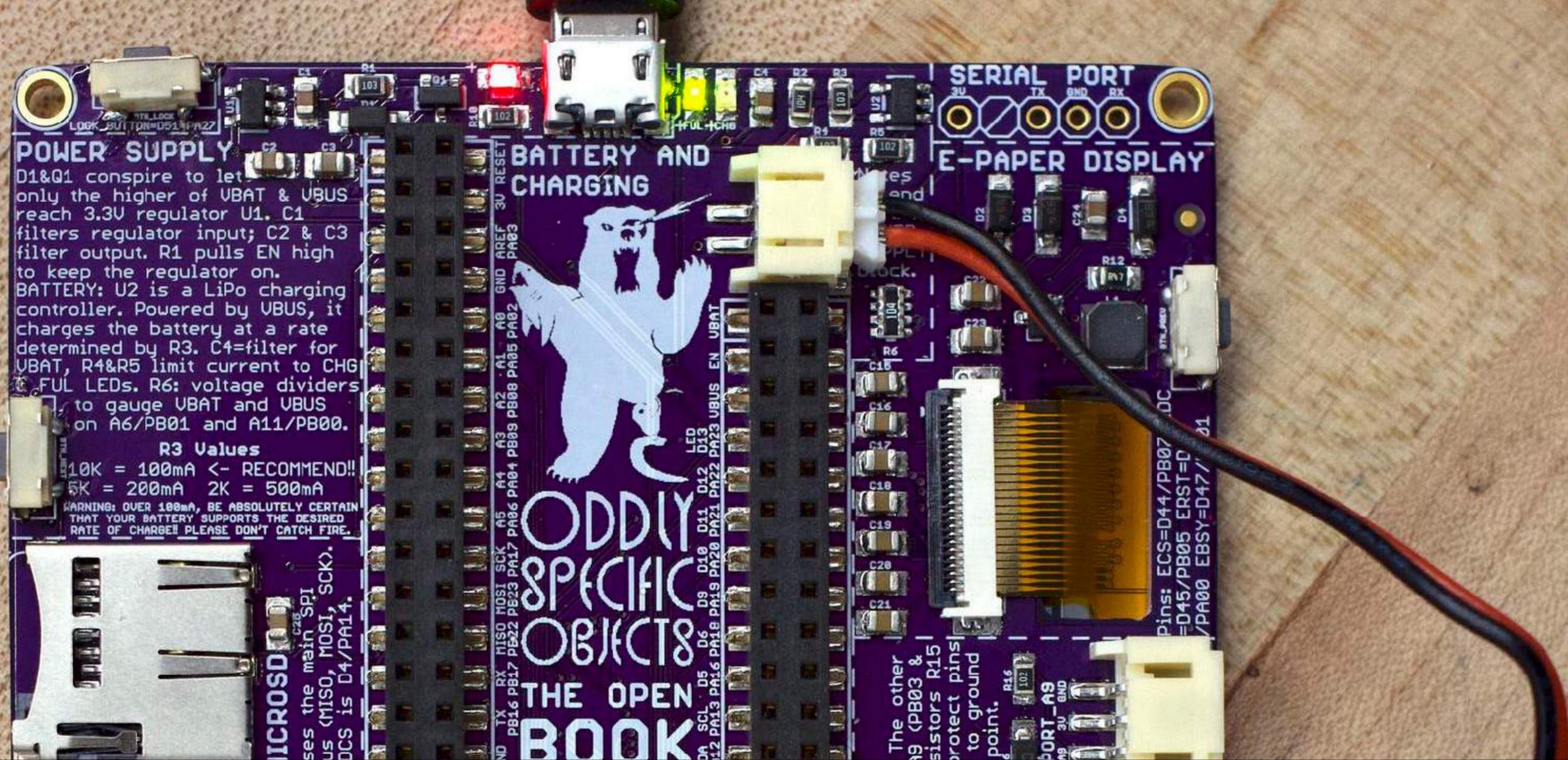
A9 3V GND

### PORT-I2C

SCL SDA 3V GND

### PORT-A8

A8 3V GND



**But, why?**

# The Problem

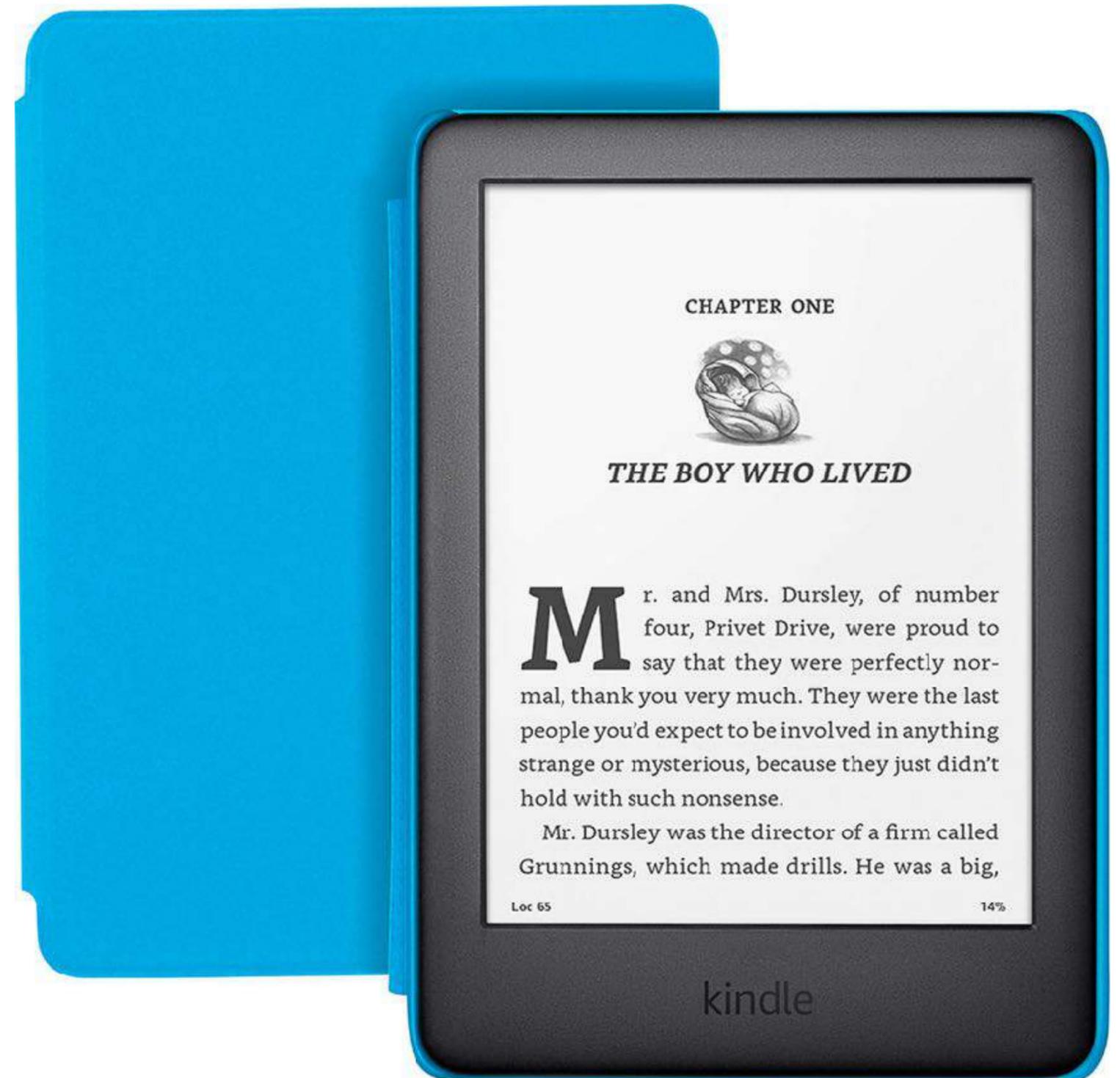
## Closed tech fails users

- Who does the technology empower?

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TECH / AMAZON / CIRCUIT BREAKER

**Why Amazon is tracking every time you tap your Kindle** / Amazon explains why it needs to track every page turn you make

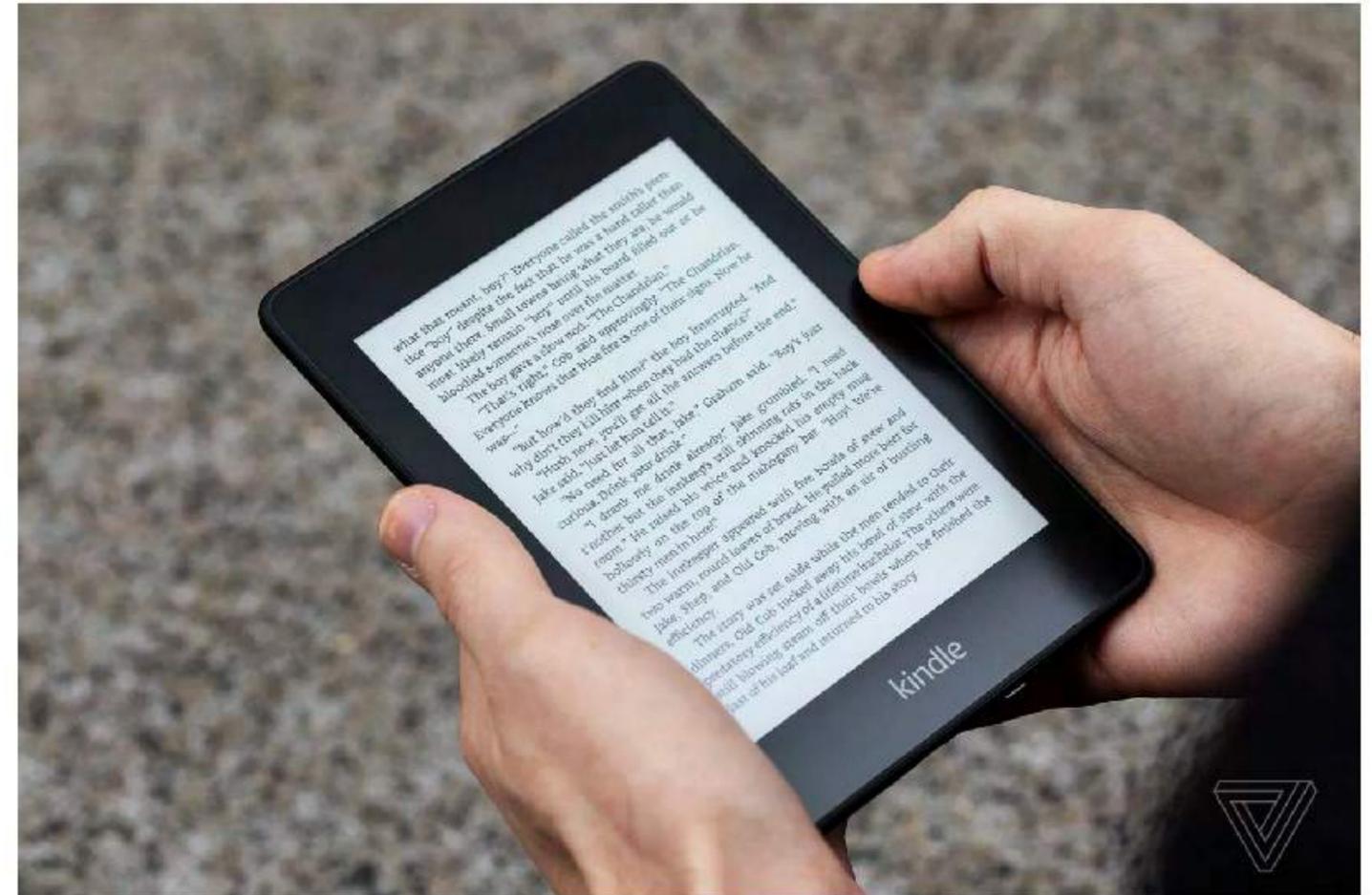


Photo by Amelia Holowaty Krales / The Verge

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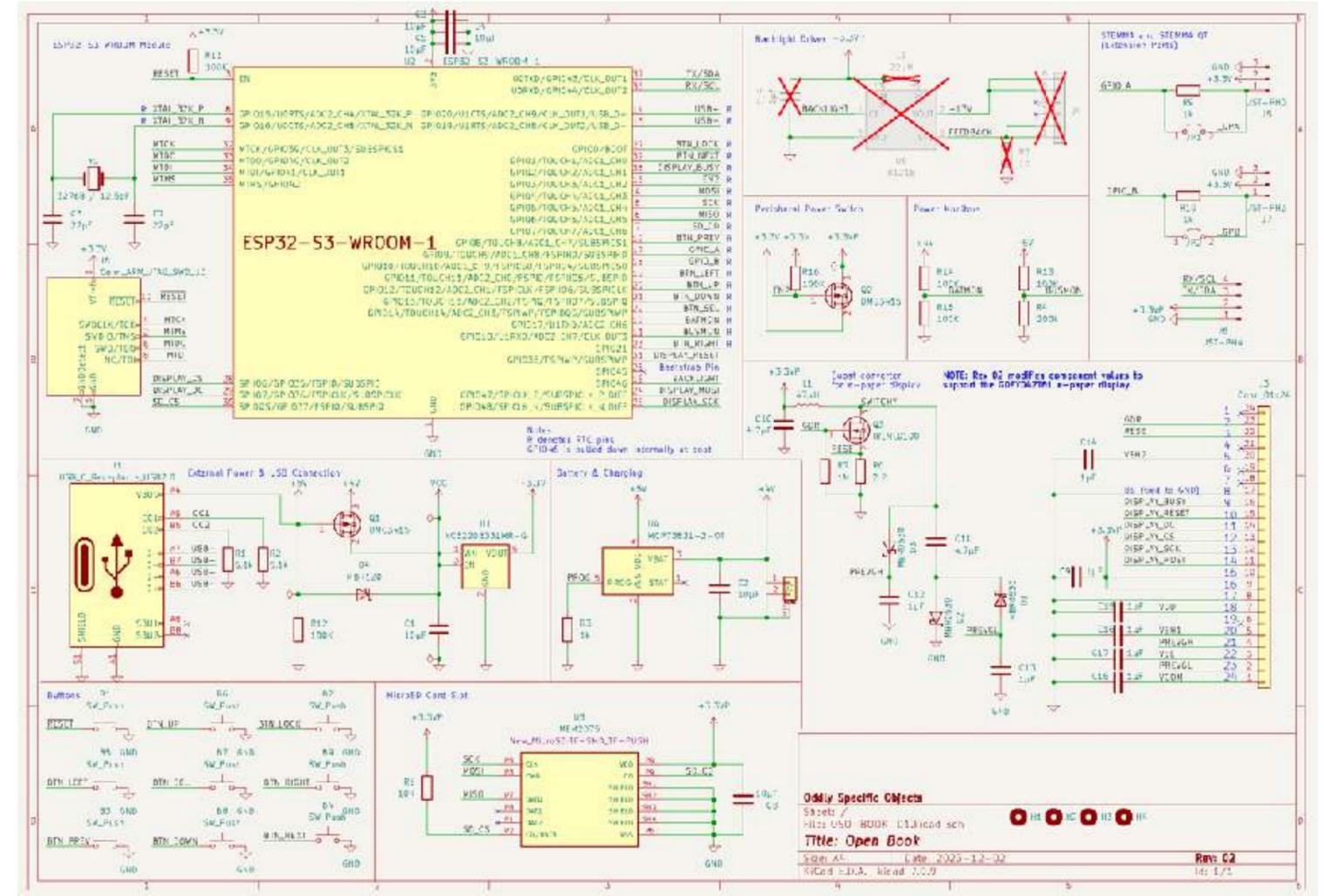
- Who does the technology empower?
- Who does the technology diminish and disempower?
- **Why does the technology get to do this?**
- What can we do about it?



# One Solution

## Make it comprehensible

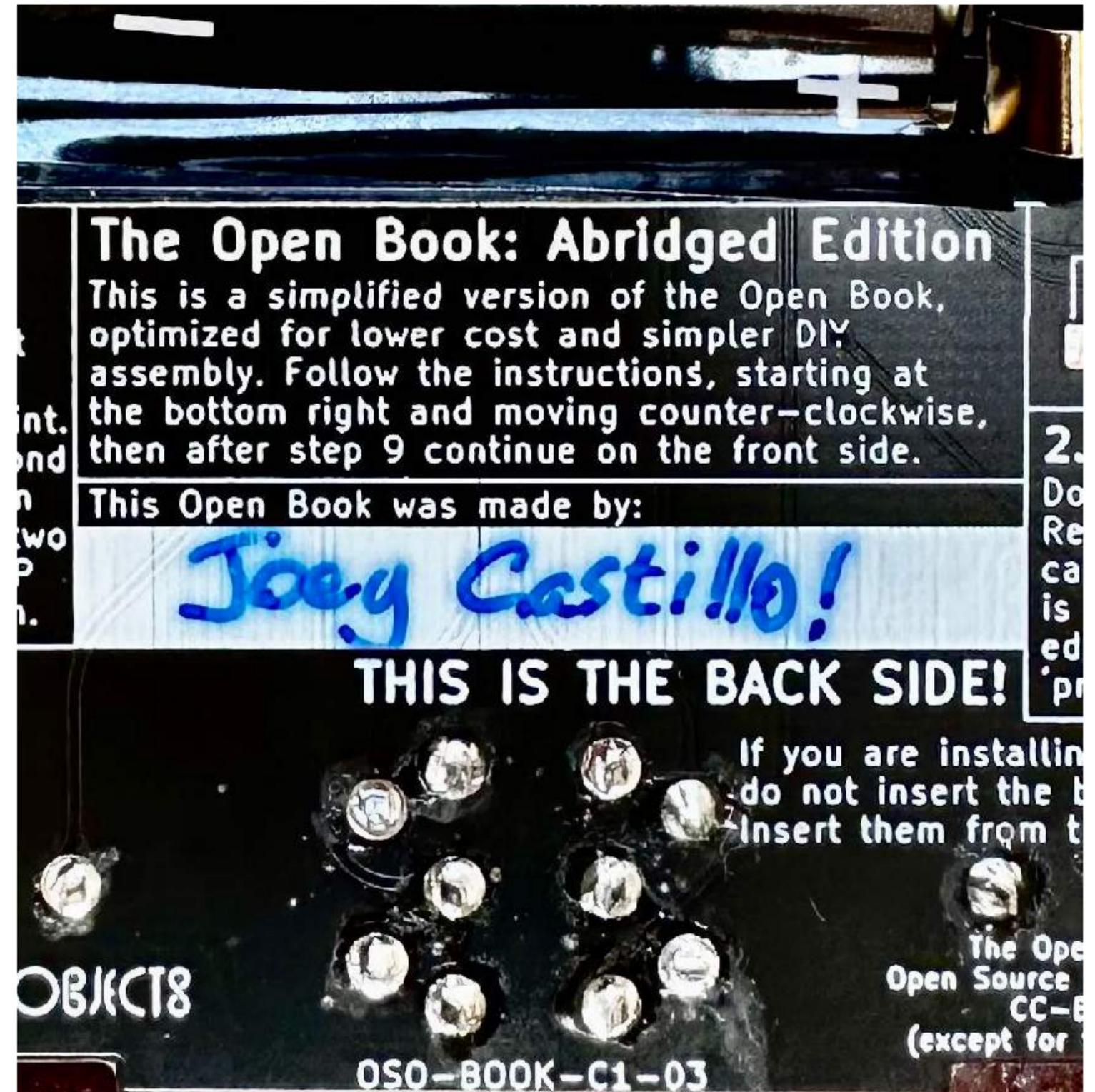
- Design well documented open hardware...
- ...that people can build on their own and understand, at least in broad strokes...
- ...to teach them that they don't have to accept technology that wasn't made with their best interests at heart.



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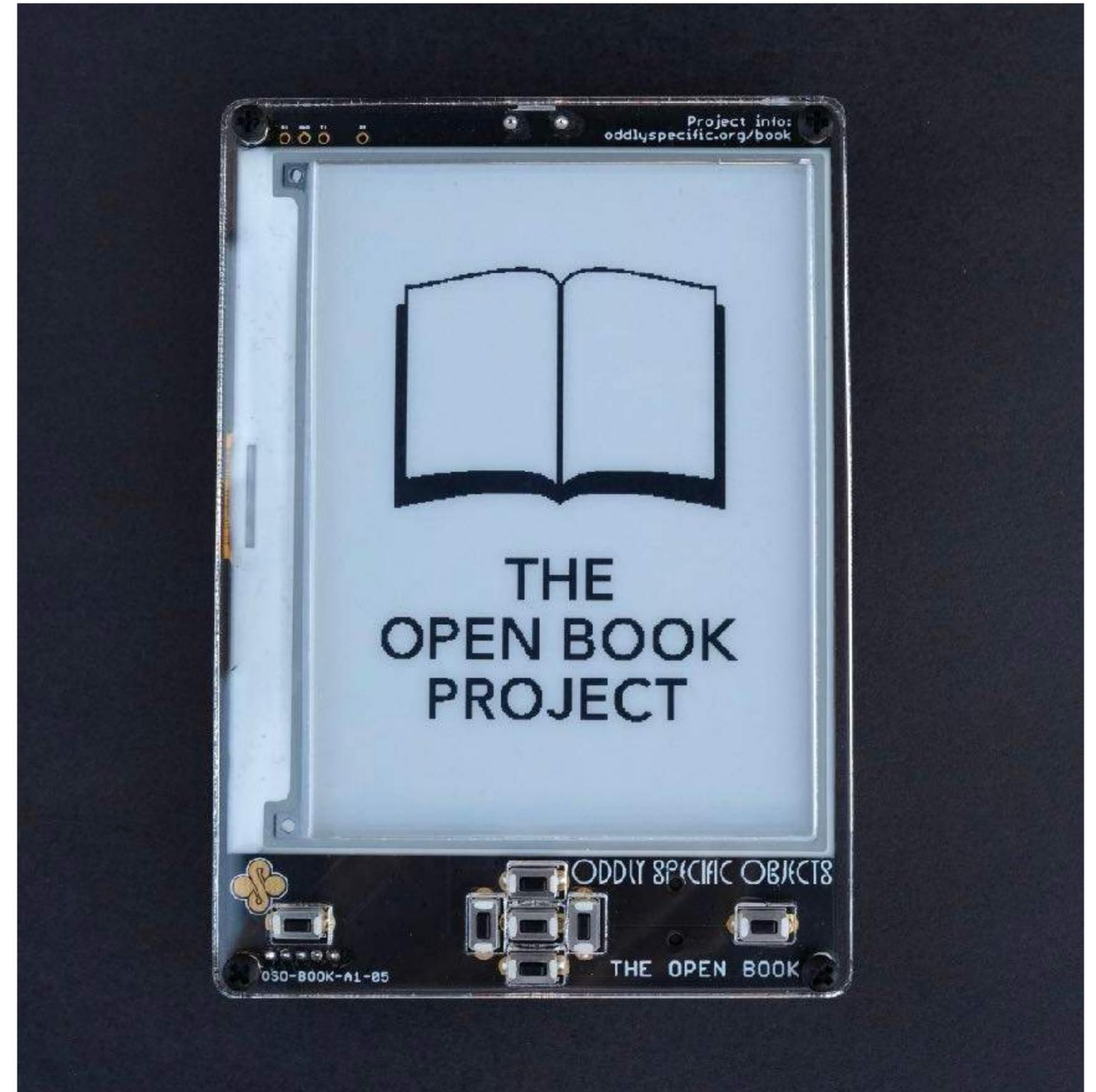
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**“The point of open source is not to ritualistically compile our stuff from source. It’s the awareness that technology is not magic: that there is a trail of breadcrumbs any of us could follow to liberate our digital lives.”**

- **Bunnie Huang, “On Liberating My Smartwatch From Cloud Services”  
<https://www.bunniestudios.com/blog/?p=5863>**

**So, what are those  
breadcrumbs?**

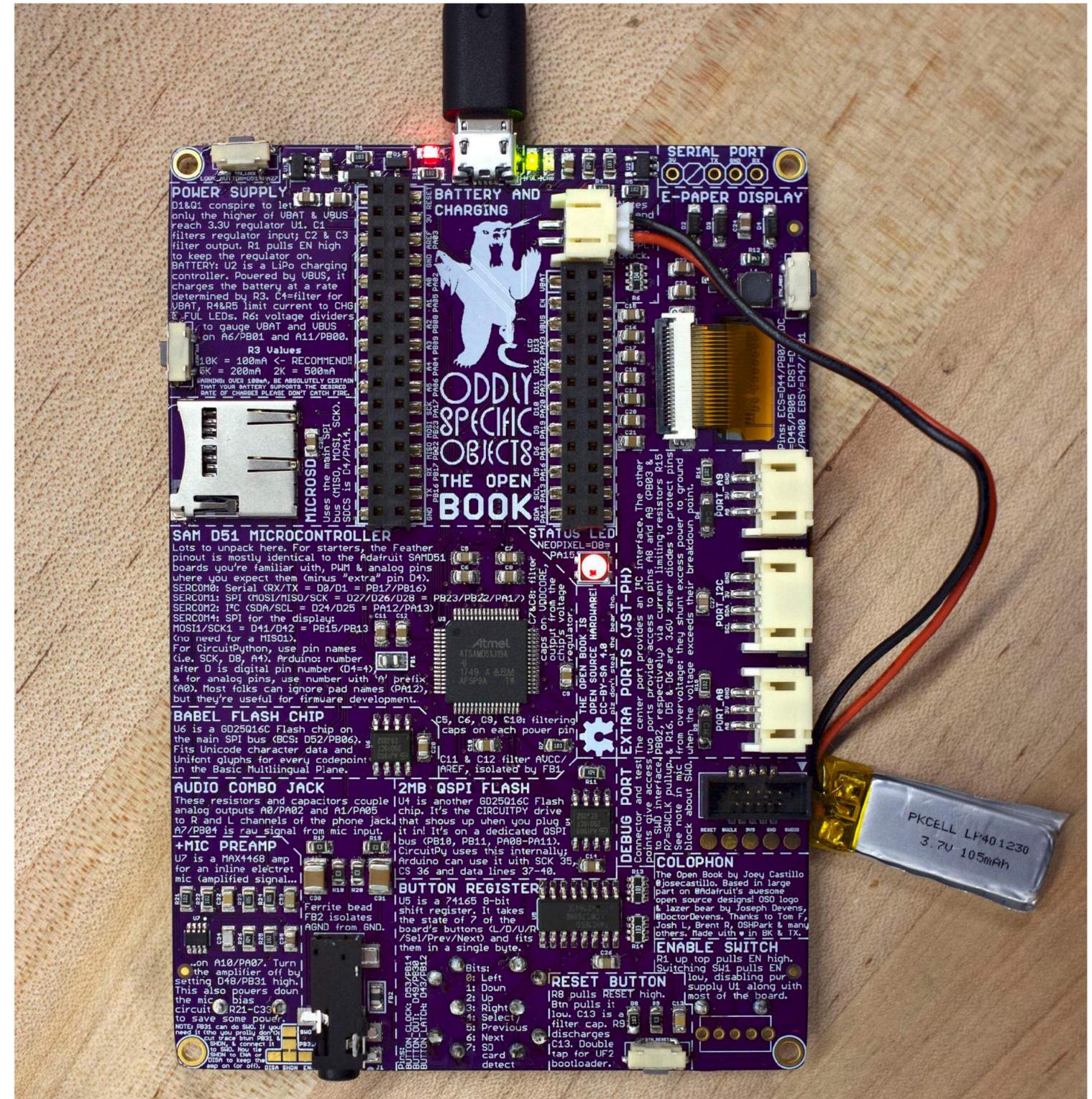
# Three Sets of Breadcrumbs

## Different trails for different contexts

- Explaining how it works.
- Explaining how to build it.
- Explaining how to use it and hack it.

# This trail leads to... Understanding how it works?

- Use the silkscreen to narrate what each component is for
- Pros:
  - It could demystify the tech?
- Cons:
  - Hard to really explain it in the space available
  - Is this the most useful info?



**Maybe.**





# Open Book Abridged

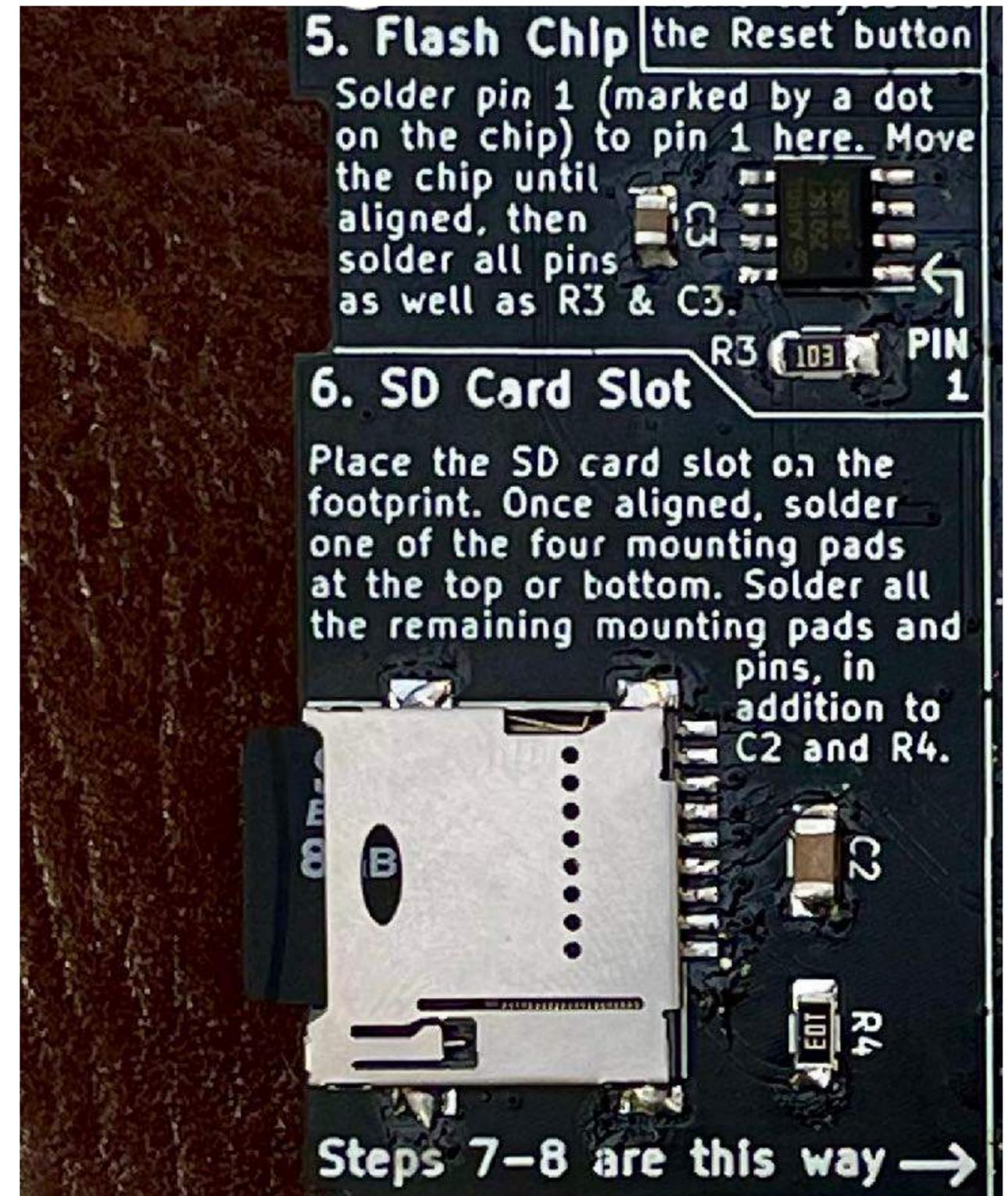
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# Open Book Abridged

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- Larger passives and exposed pins for easier soldering



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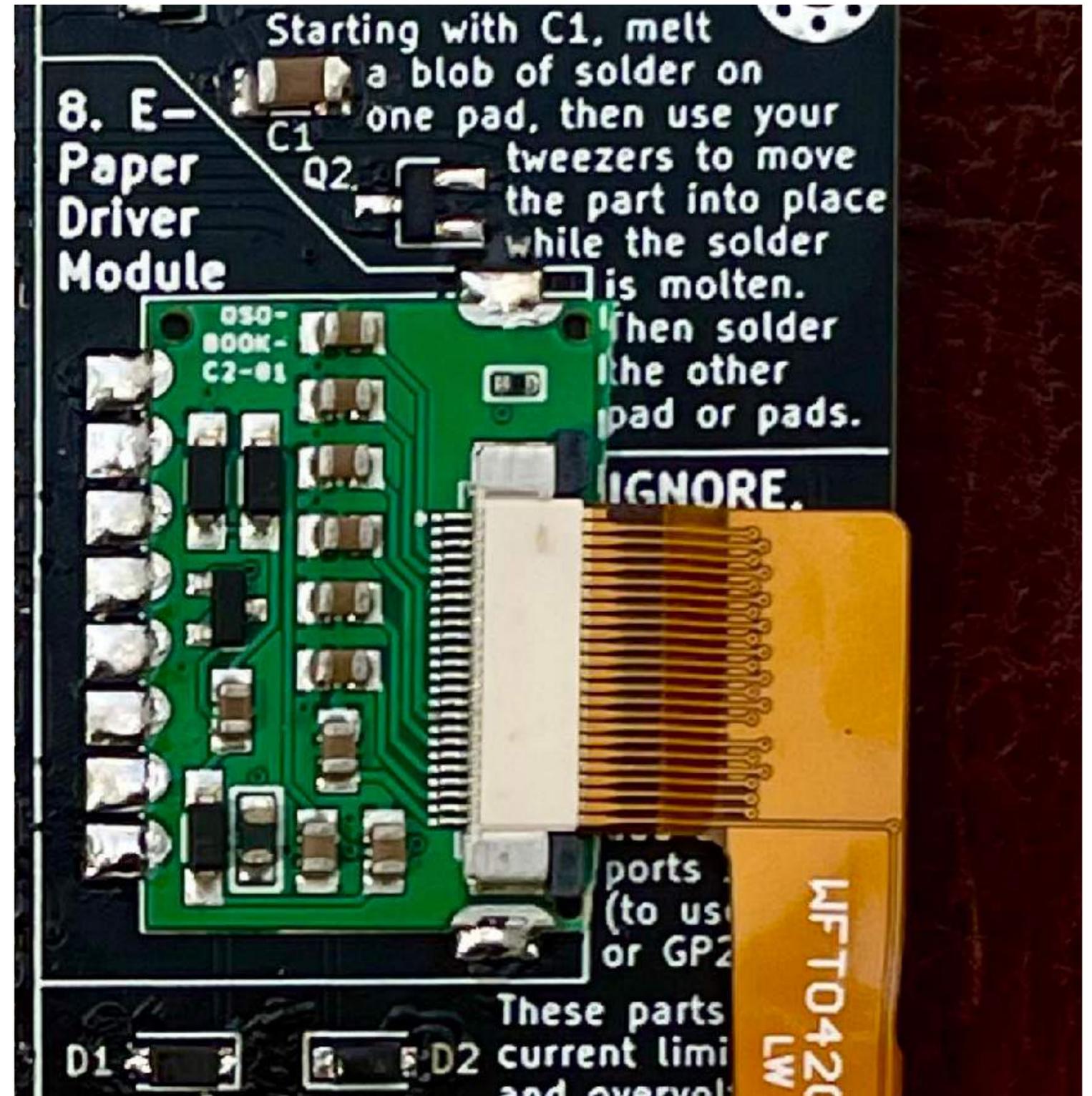
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- Using a friendly module like the Pi Pico make it easier for folks



# Open Book Abridged

## Optimizing for DIY builds

- Larger passives and exposed pins for easier soldering
- Using a friendly module like the Pi Pico make it easier for folks
- Have a fine pitched part? Put it on your own castellated module and PCBA that!

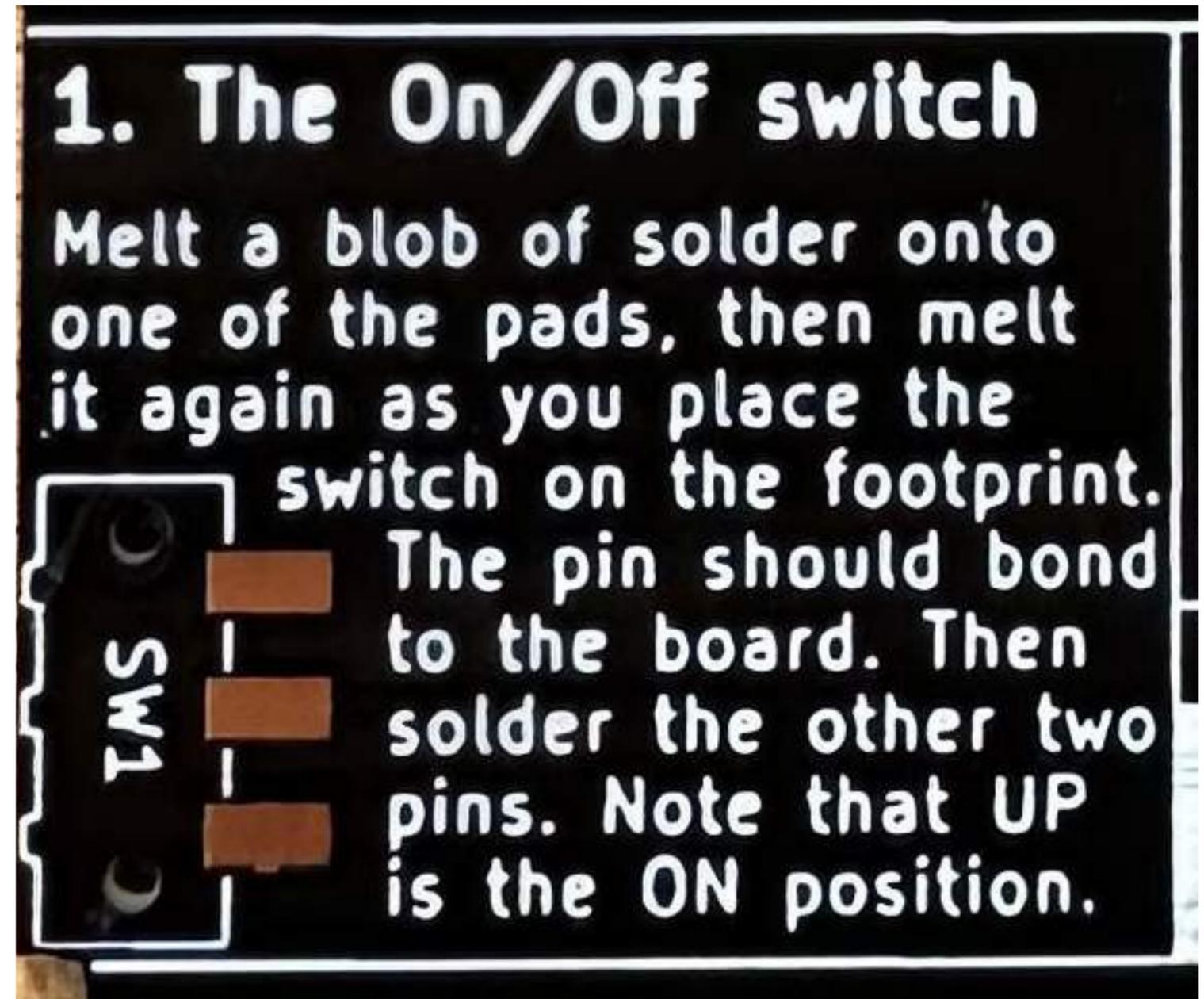




# This trail leads to...

## Building the device yourself?

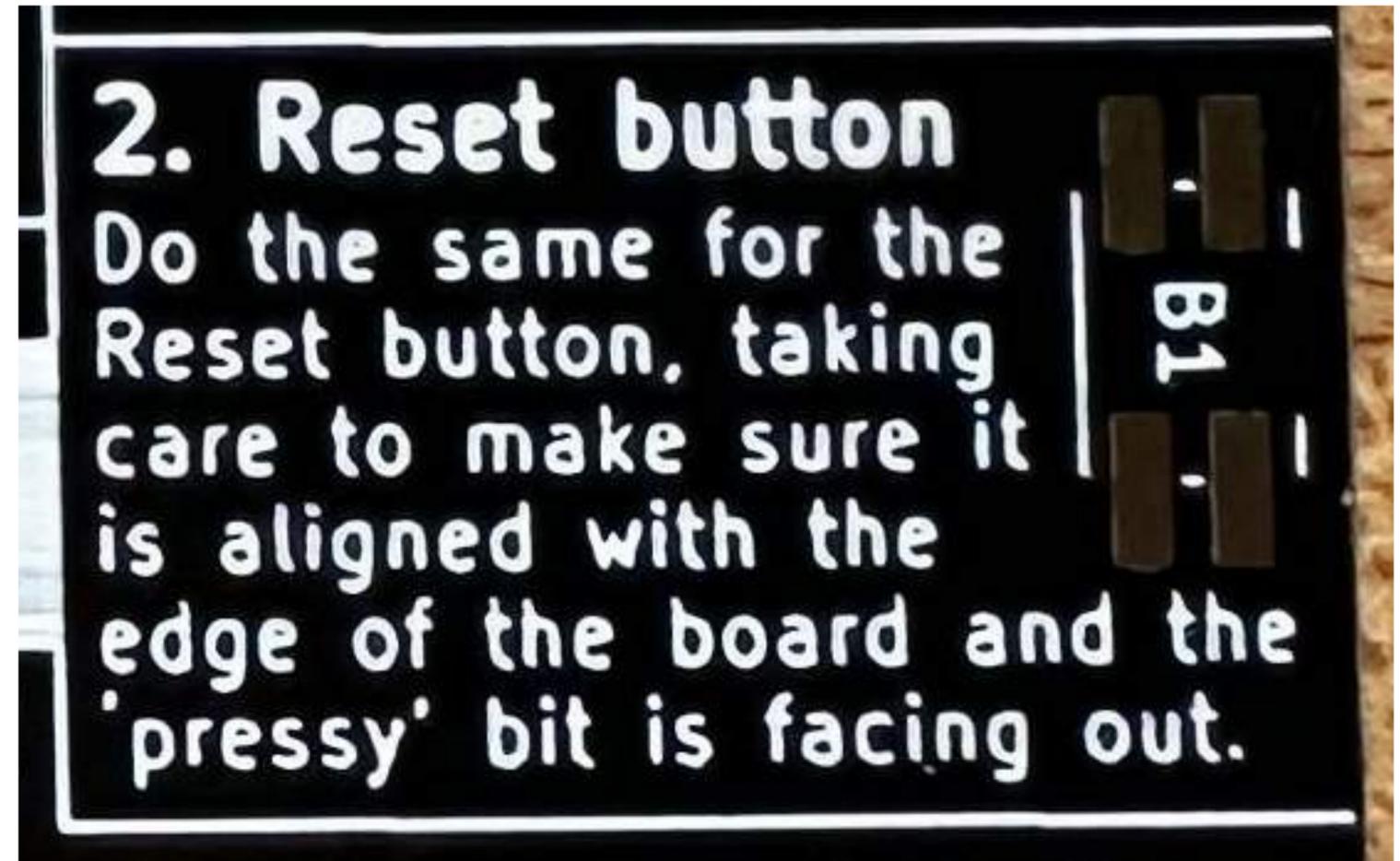
- Use the silkscreen for directions to the person building it



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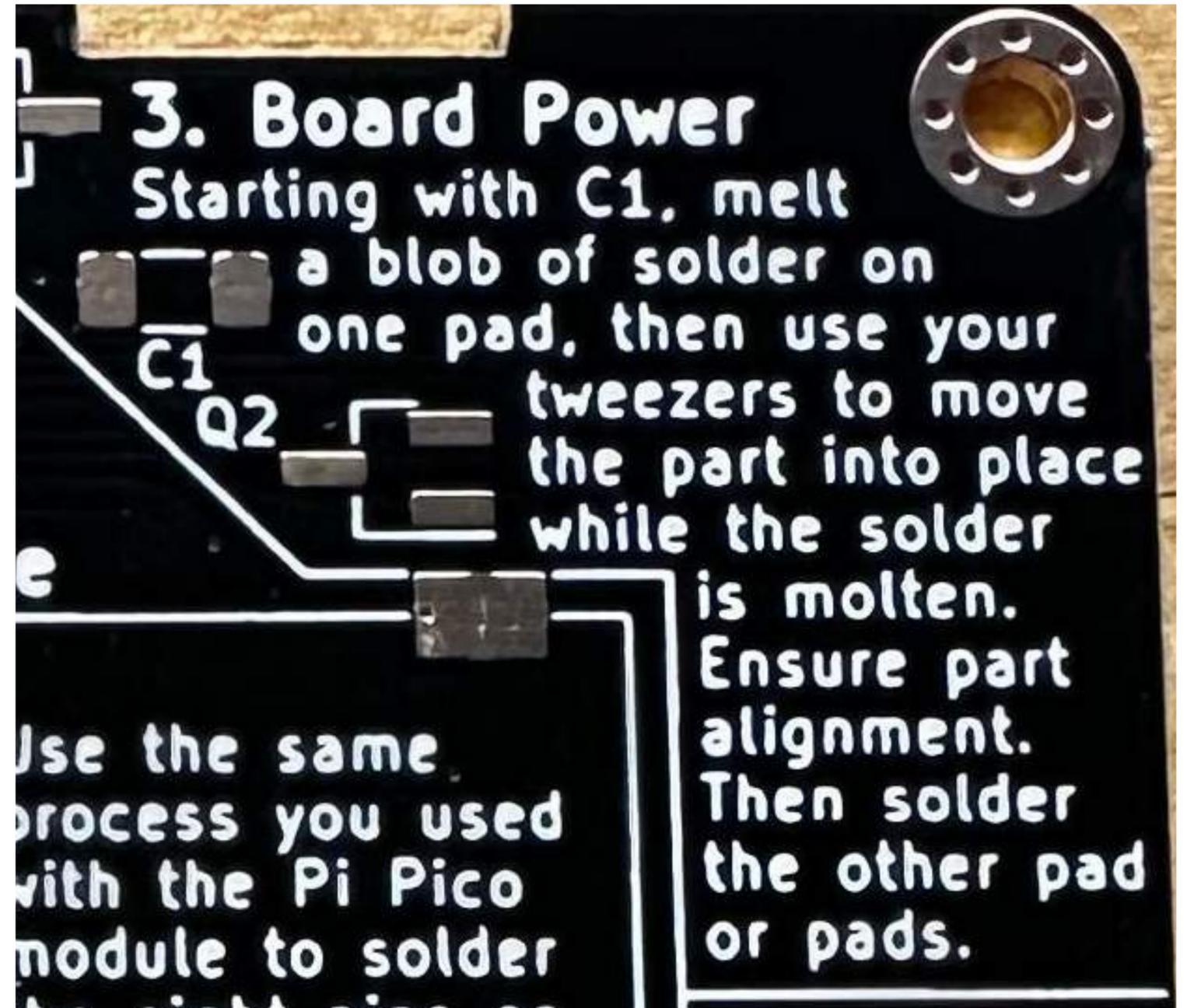
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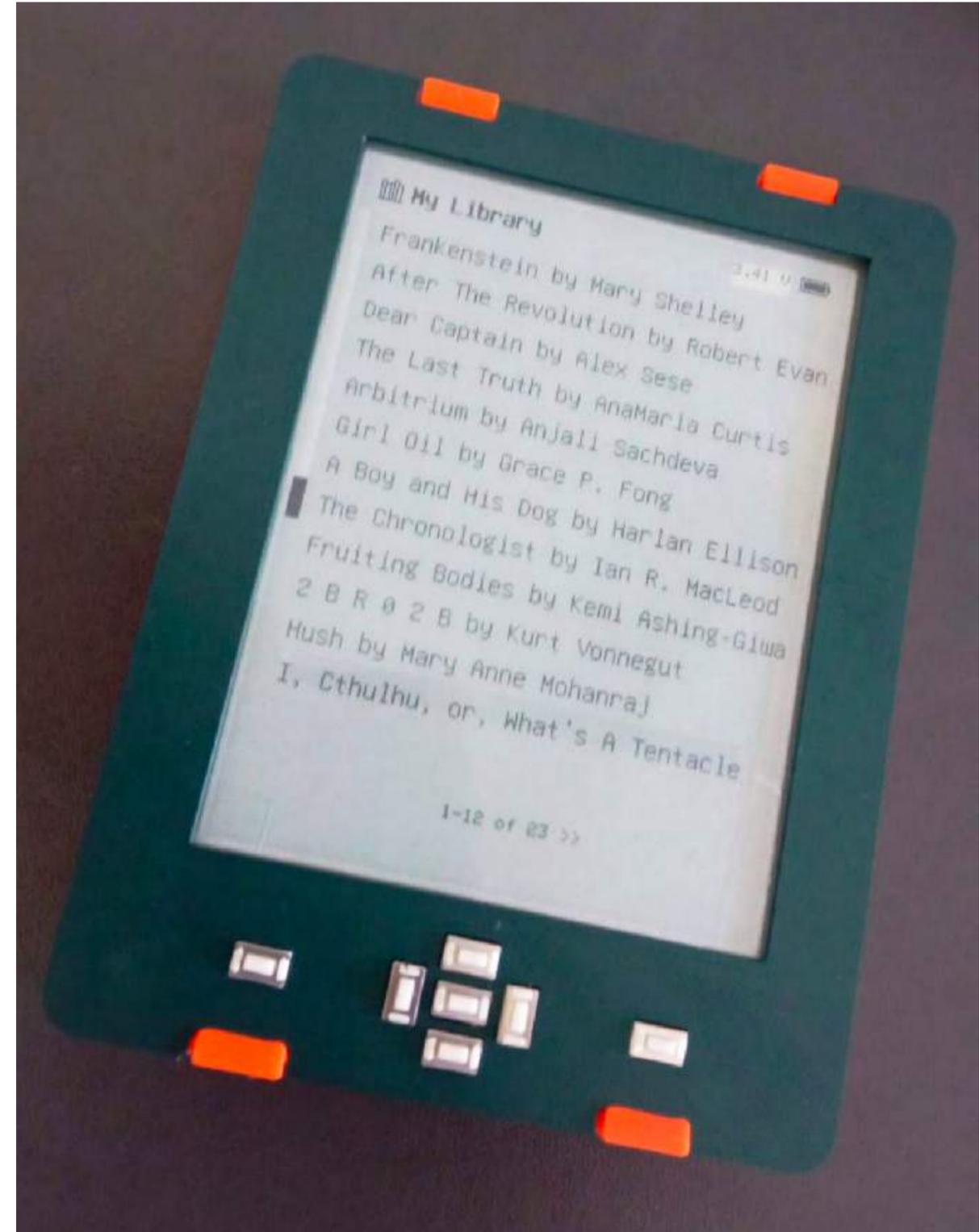
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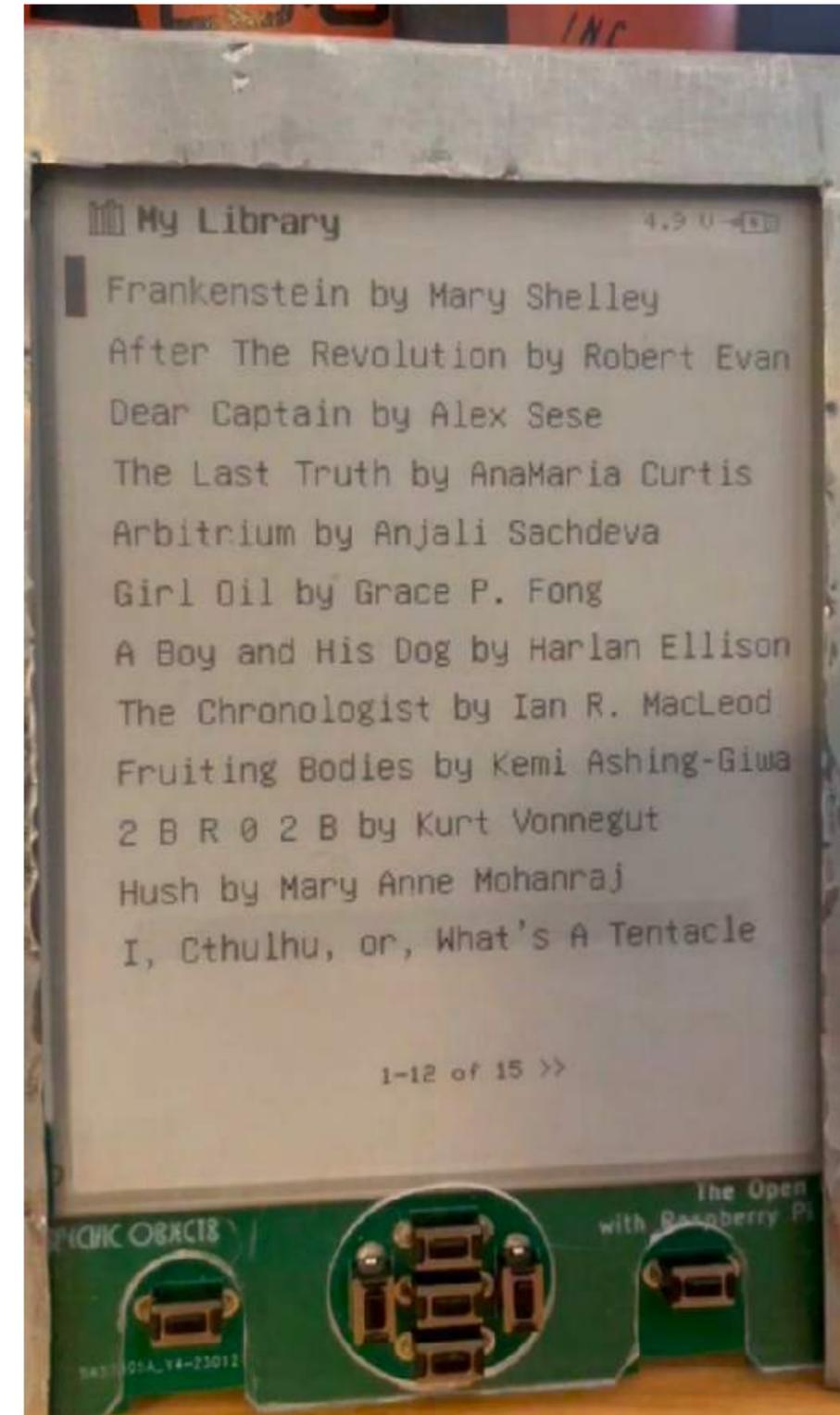
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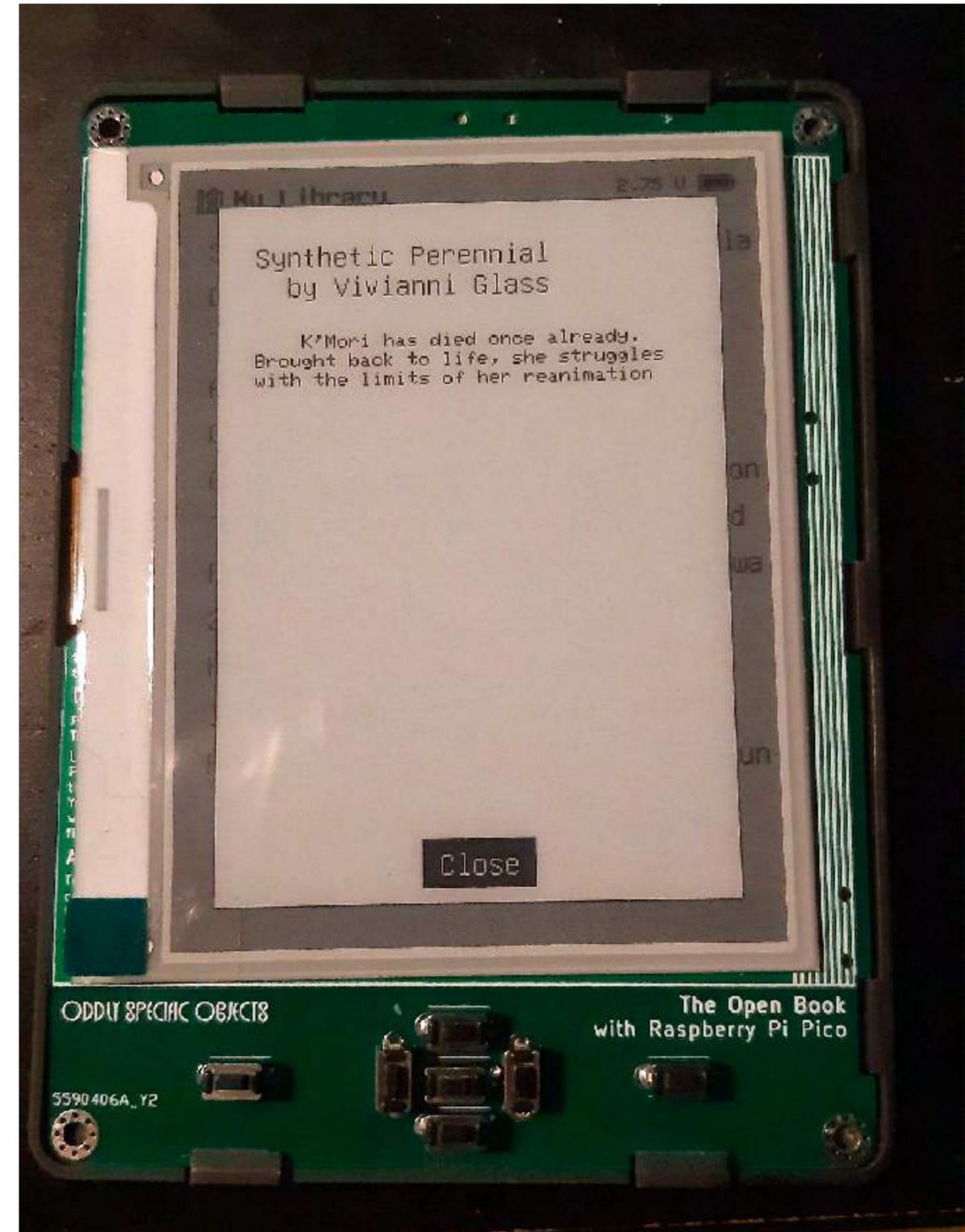
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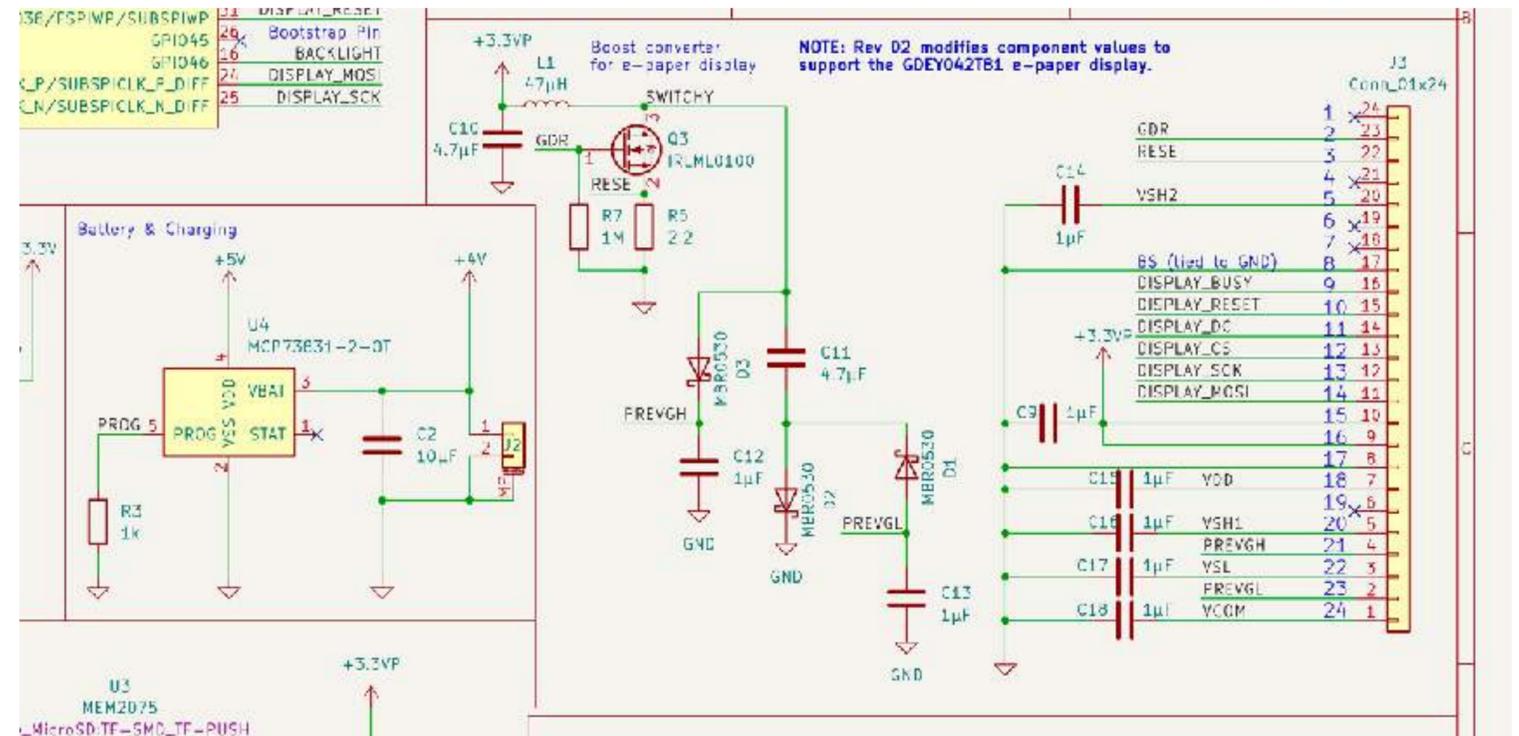
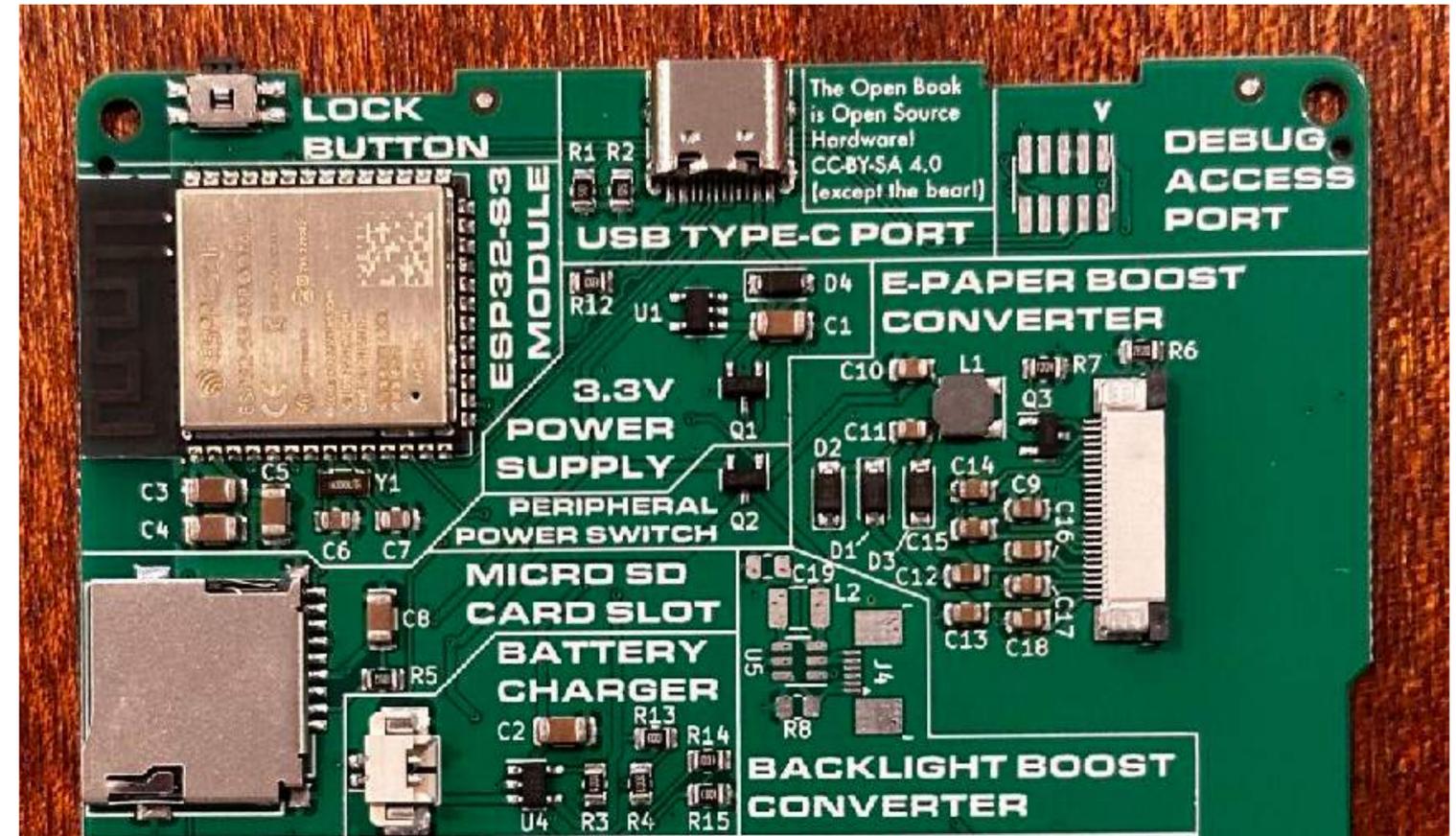


**What about self-documenting  
boards that come preassembled?**

# Moving to PCBA

## AKA: not building it yourself

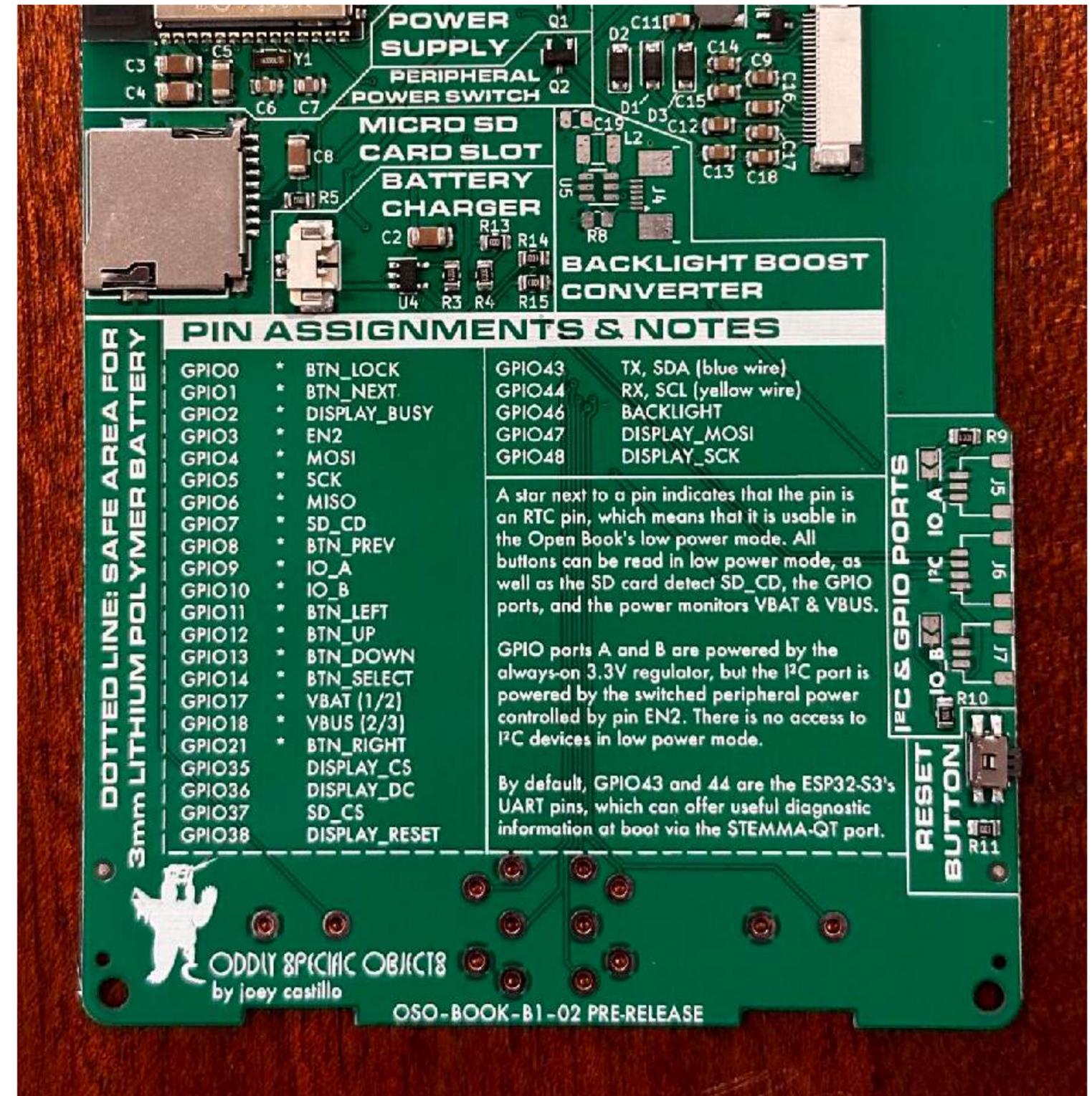
- Arrange components in functional blocks...
- ...that match what's in the schematic
- This still gives an overview of "how it works"
- Still: what to do with the rest of the silkscreen?



# This trail leads to...

## Making use of the device!

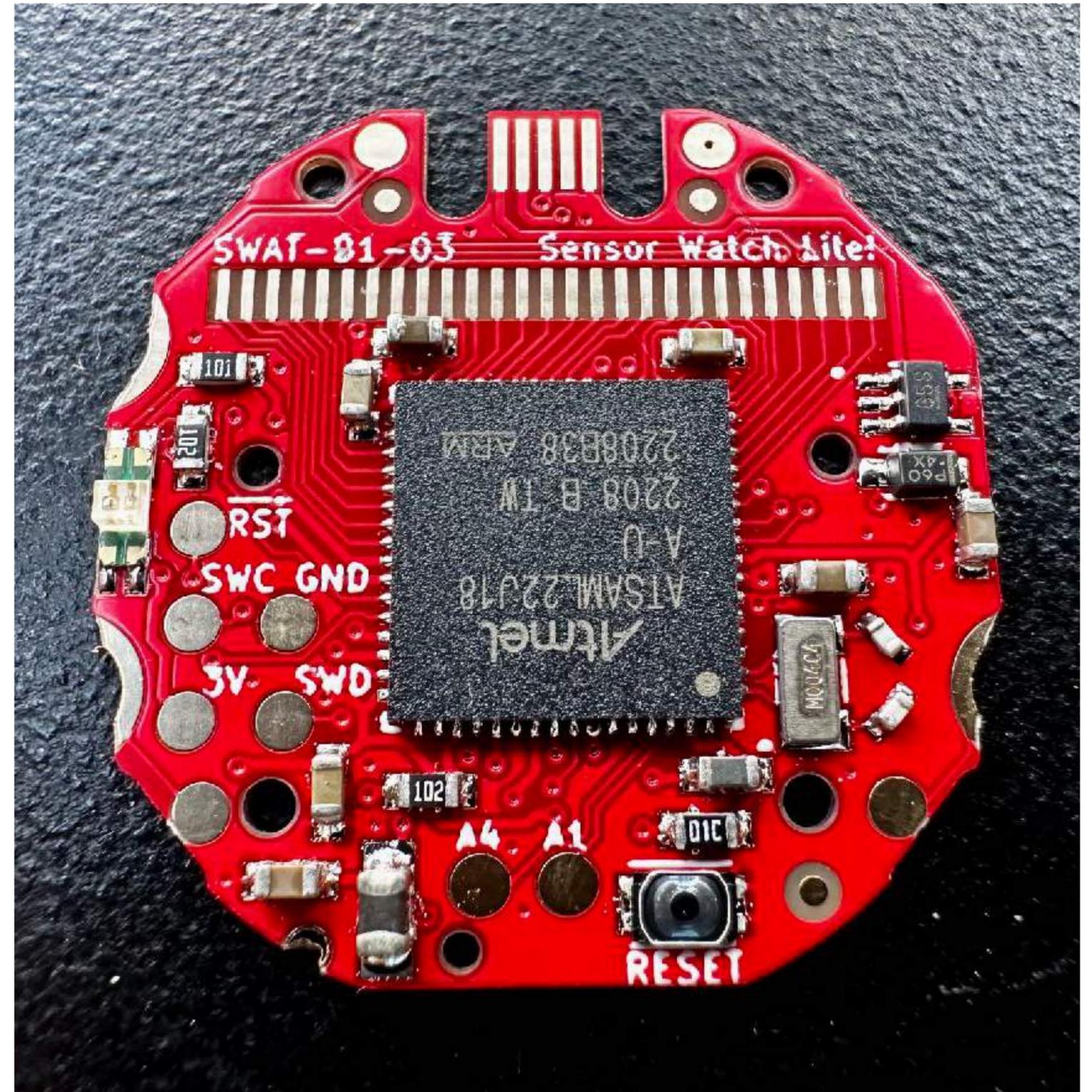
- Pin assignments and notes on how to develop for the device!
- True facts: I use this a ton when writing my firmware!
- It's an affordance both for me and for users of the device.

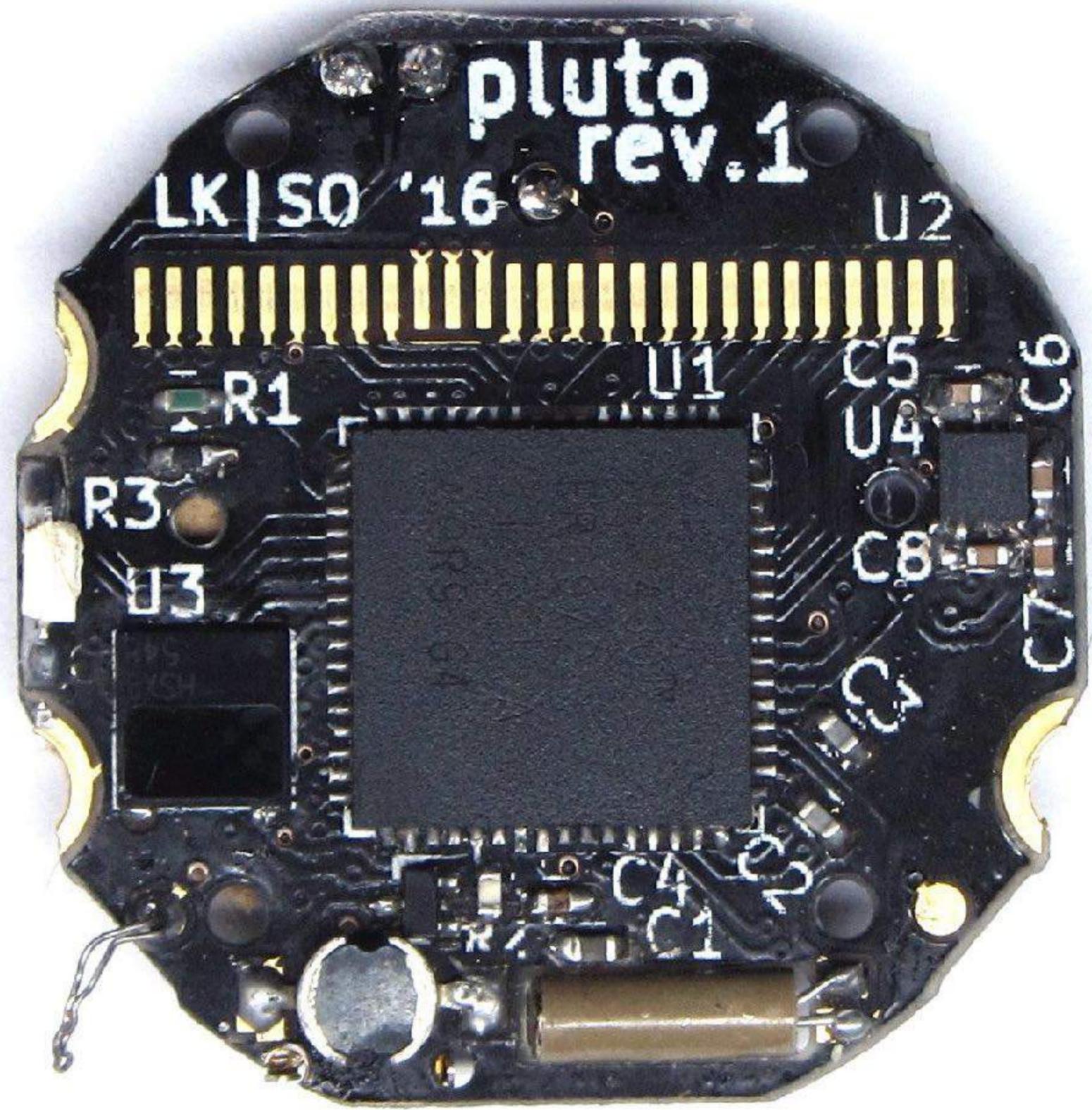


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- Works on boards of (many?) shapes and sizes.





pluto  
rev.1

LK|S0 '16

U2

R1

U1

C5

C6

U4

R3

C8

U3

C7

C3

C4

U5

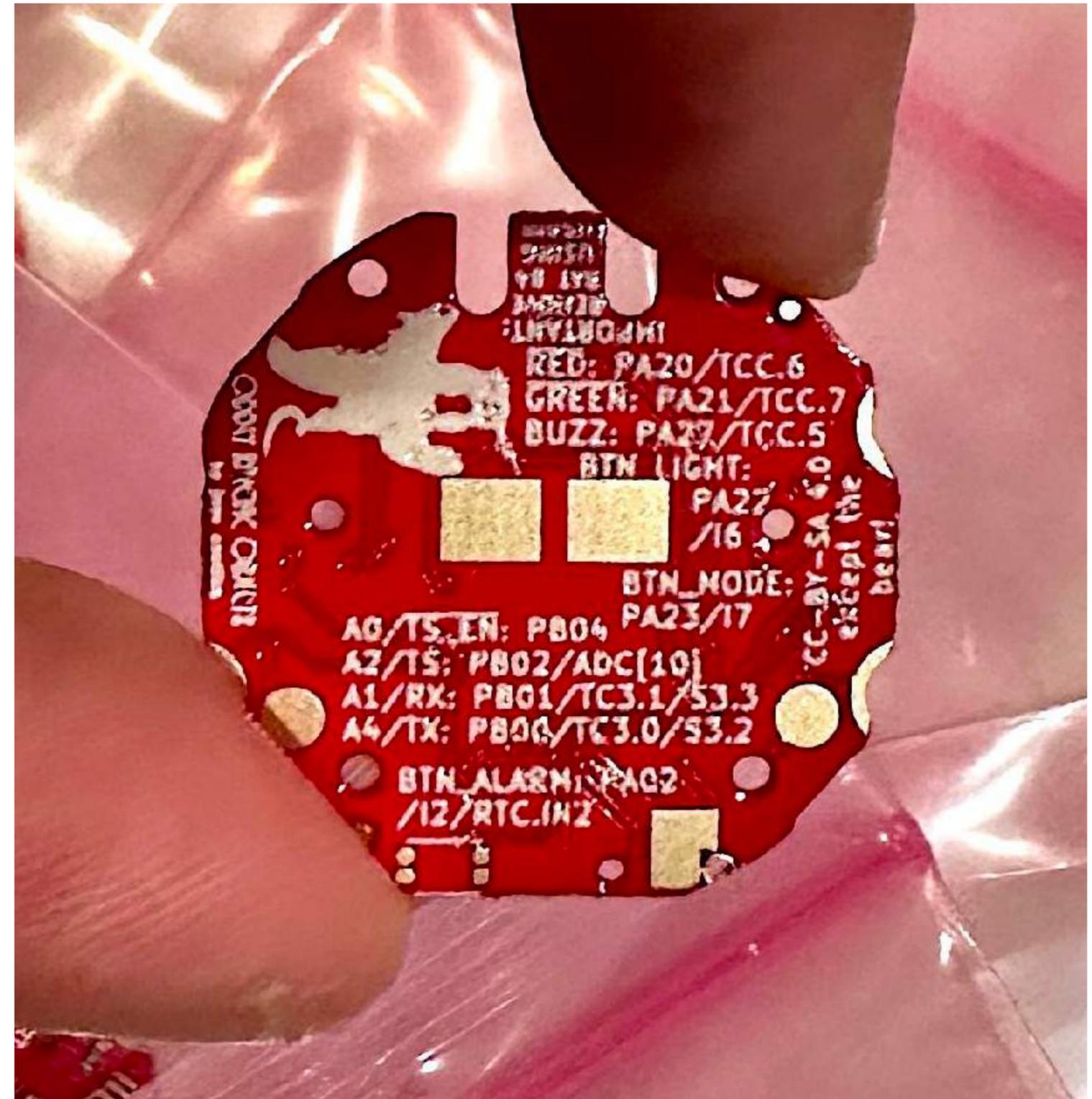
C1

R2

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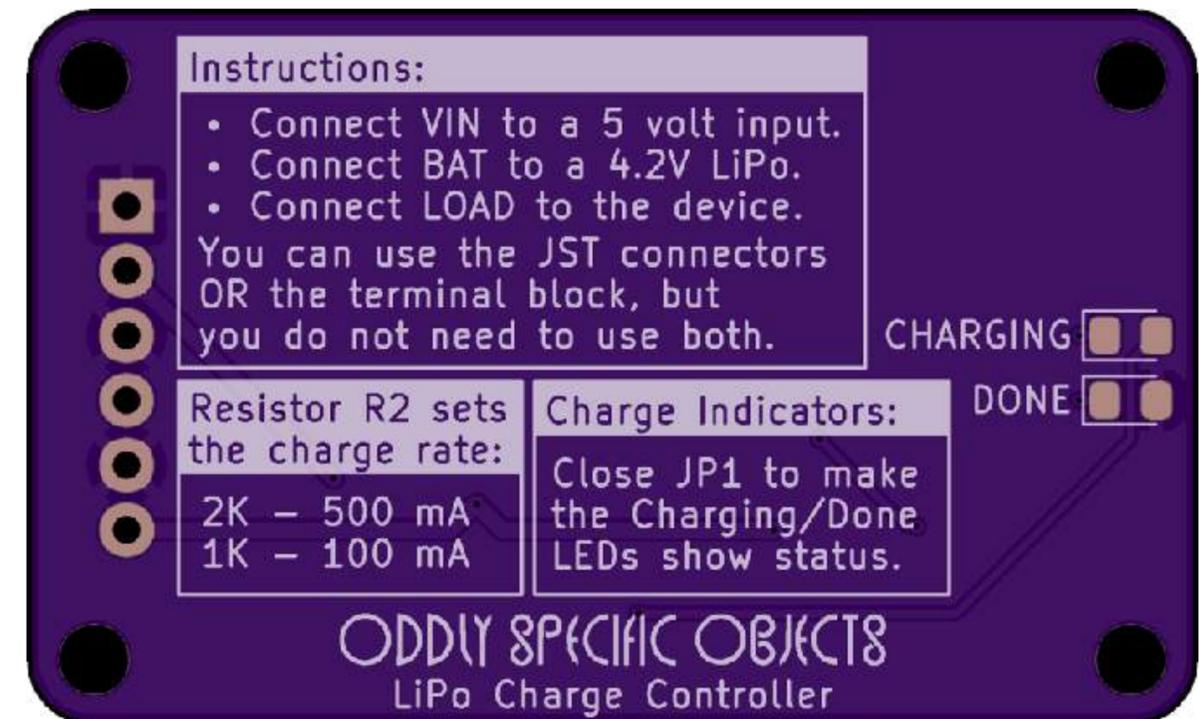
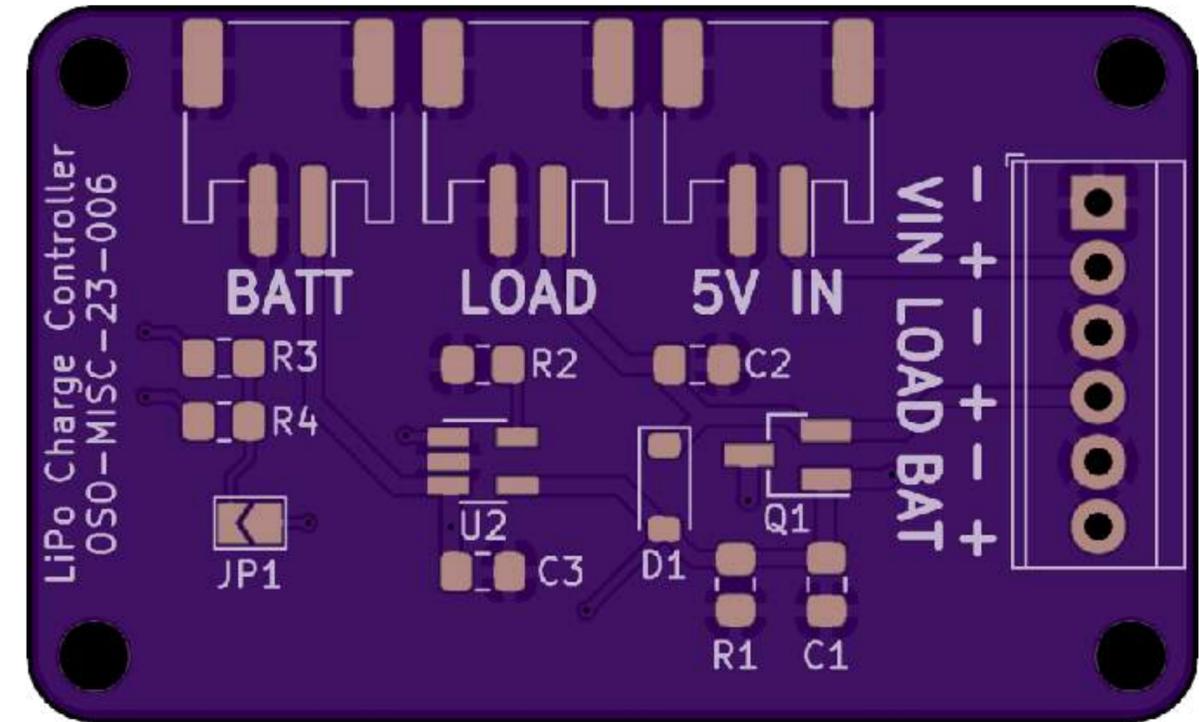
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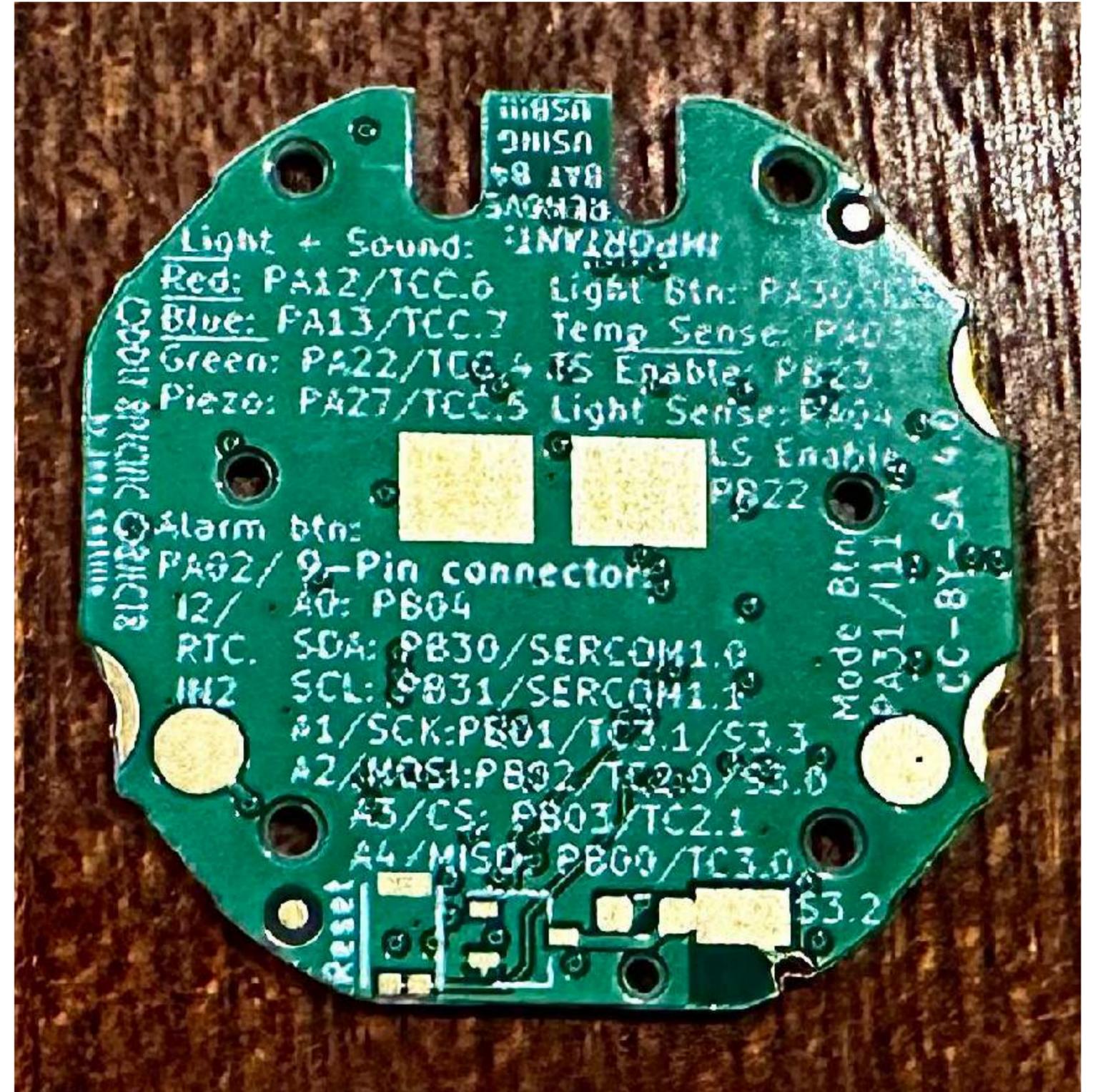
# Self-documenting circuit boards...

- Add immediate context to the hardware you have in hand



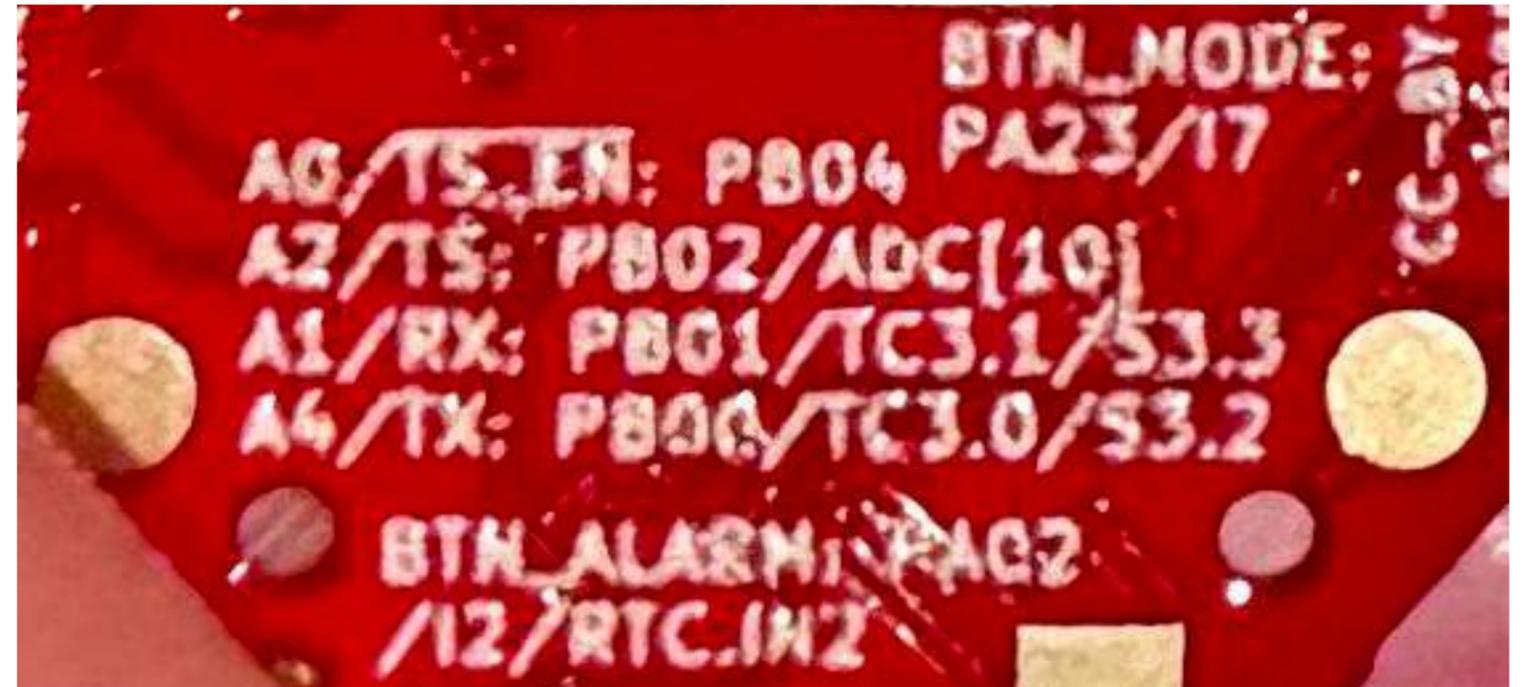
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- Are user-hackable by default



# Self-documenting circuit boards...

- Add immediate context to the hardware you have in hand
- Create a self-contained artifact
- Are user-hackable by default
- Pairs nicely with code that makes use of the same names



```
// Buttons
HAL_GPIO_PIN(BTN_LIGHT, A, 22)
HAL_GPIO_PIN(BTN_MODE, A, 23)
HAL_GPIO_PIN(BTN_ALARM, A, 2)
```



ODDLY SPECIFIC OBJECTS

THE OPEN BOOK

# Questions to Ask

## How can we do even better?

- How do I imagine other people making use of the device?
- What affordances am I offering in the service of those use cases?
- What information would I want to give to a novice user of the device? An advanced user?
- Can I tell the story of the device in a way that makes sense?



# Comprehensible Open Hardware

Joey Castillo

Oddly Specific Objects: [oddlyspecificobjects.com](http://oddlyspecificobjects.com)

The Open Book: [theopenbook.is](http://theopenbook.is)

Sensor Watch: [sensorwatch.net](http://sensorwatch.net)

Fediverse: [mastodon.social/@joeycastillo](https://mastodon.social/@joeycastillo)