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The Eighth Coffee Issue—June 2023

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Art done using MidJourney, except the Asimov's SF Adventure cover on page 23.

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‘round these parts, Elizabeth Holmes is big news.

There’s a coffee shop just across the way from my office, 4th Street Bowl. It’s a great old school diner-type bowling alley coffee shop. There’s a few booths, and one of them, pretty much every Friday, is the gathering place for lawyers and other court workers in San Jose, just down the road from the County Courthouse.

And that’s where the Elizabeth Holmes trial took place, and that’s where the discussion has lived for ages.

I only know one of the DAs in San Jose these days, and the one day they showed up, they happily chatted, and mostly laid out not only the case against Holmes, but how they’d counter the claims of the defense. It was a good lunch that day!

I met Holmes very briefly, at the Computer History Museum. She gave a talk, and when she arrived, I chatted with her very briefly. I noticed her voice wasn’t nearly as deep as I had

heard in the other interviews, but I can also state that Steve Jobs, who Holmes was clearly emulating over much of her career, didn't sound like he did at the World-Wide Developers Conference.

Now, the story of Holmes is a very Silicon Valley true crime story. Elizabeth Holmes was a Stanford student, and she wanted to develop a method for testing for just about everything all at once using a single drop of blood. A noble goal, for sure, and after dropping out, she started Theranos to do just that.

It came out during her trial that while she was at Stanford she had been raped at a frat party. This is an important aspect to the case, as she seemed to tie it to wanting to leave Stanford as a part of the psychological damage it caused her, and that she founded Theranos as a way of giving her life a new direction away from Stanford. I read a lot of people questioning this, though during the trial they produced a partial police report. This does play into my main Theranos theory.

You see, it makes sense that she wanted to establish a new life for herself, and a complete re-creating of who she had been.



The testing idea was a good one, but it wasn't based on getting half-way there and then making a moonshot, but on an idea that she hoped could be possible. She surrounded herself with good folks, not hard when you have strong connections, and especially when you've got someone on your side like Sunny Balwani.

I've got nothing good to say about Sunny. The funny thing, I had no idea Sunny was Sunny until fairly recently. See, I follow a wonderful artist name Keiko Fujimoto and have for many years, since I saw her work in SOMA back in the early days of my gallery-hopping. She was married to Sunny prior to getting together with Holmes. Keiko is marvelous, and Sunny sucks. Plain as that.

So, the engineering of the Theranos box was incredibly complicated, but Holmes needed the project to work. She had the incredible Disney Princess Eyes, and she took on that deep voice. She emulated Jobs, and really well at times. She had the right people to introduce her to the even righter people. She had folks like George Schultz, the former Secretary of State, and a guy I met back in the 90s.

Go figure.

Anyhow, with the idea that she needed to make Theranos work, she and Sunny started looking for ways to 1) keep everything they were actually doing under wraps, and 2) to figure out how to keep pulling in money so that they could bail out with a golden parachute right before the bottom fell out. Sunny had done that with a company years before, bailing when the first dot-com-bust happened about 2003, and it seems like they were building valuation and waiting to be able to sell.

Maybe it was Sunny's idea and Holmes just wanted to

make the product work, somehow. There's a Silicon Valley idea that if you throw enough money at a problem, usually in the form of people-points, that you can solve any problem.

Sunny got 12 years. Elizabeth Holmes got 11.

The Court ordered Holmes to start serving her sentence this week, and the Santa Clara County Court group at 4th Street were hyped. They were discussing how it was nowhere near shocking that they got her, but that they made it stick even when she had a second baby almost certainly to use as an excuse to not have to go to prison. Didn't work, and she reported there last week.







Sadly, #ChrisCon50 is probably not gonna happen.

Something will still happen, but it won't be a con. I had grand hopes, but finances aren't there to make it happen.

It also means we will almost certainly not be at Glasgow.

Now, that makes me very sad. The team has obviously been working so hard and has put together such a powerful concept, but unless my book sells through a couple of printings, we just can't. We're gonna have to run a GoFundMe or something for a back-up battery/Solar system for the house which will allow me to use my CPAP and not have to replace everything in the

fridge three or four times a year. Power is iffy during the storms, and it can be just as bad during the heat. If we can manage that, we can have a way to keep our internet up as well, which would allow us to do at least some work from home and make some money when we're stuck here. Sadly, the battery/solar system we want is about 8 grand total.

Such is life.

Now, for #ChrisCon50, I'm going to do a virtual thing, and maybe if we can find someone willing to let us use their place, we'll have a party. Who knows, it's a year away.

Still, I'm kinda bummed





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Watched a documentary about PEZ.

Now, long-time readers of my various zines will know I love PEZ. I went to the first PEZ convention on the West Coast, in Santa Clara back in 1992 or so. At that convention, I bought a PEZ clock. It was awesome.

The documentary, *The PEZ Outlaw*, tells the story of a crazy PEZ seller, Stephen Glew, who went to Europe and bought a huge amount of PEZ dispensers that weren't allowed in the US. Now, here's the gig; there's an exclusivity agreement for the US where a single company is allowed to import PEZ concepts from Austria. Glew was given a bunch of PEZ and brought them home, but PEZ USA hadn't registered as the exclusive importer of the device, and so they caught him, but they just let him go because they didn't have the papertrail that would allow them to deny the import. In particular, he brought a couple of example pieces of a dispenser called Bubble Boy. It's a basic cartoony figure, with big puffed-out cheeks. It's kinda cute, and kinda ugly.

Now, PEZ collectors are nutty, and there are fanzines, and prozines, and in the mid-1990s the first websites for PEZ were popping up. When word of the Bubble Boy being available in the US, people were offering him big money. Like more than a grand, for a single PEZ dispenser that was less than two years old.

Now, this happened at the same time as PEZ collecting was becoming bigger and bigger. There were several PEZ conventions around the world, and there was a PEZ Museum in San Carlos, CA, though sadly, it's now closed.

PEZ USA released Bubble Boy to completely wipe out Glew's cashcow. He took that as an affront, and he ramped up his importing of European PEZ and selling them through ads he took out in collector magazines. HE was making damn good money.

We, of course, support Steve Glew, because he's a figure that seems to be fighting the system. It was Glew vs. Big PEZ. Sadly, in the end, PEZ wins.

The story is beautiful and kinda sad, and kinda funny. They weren't precious about it, they give the entire story weight, but at the same time, it's still fun. Even the darker portions where the bad guys are not only winning, but pointedly winning, where the villain gets exactly what they want.

I Love PEZ, and right now, I'm trolling eBay looking for cool designs to buy 'for the kids' to enjoy.

Well, I know why I'm really looking.





I've been looking into UFOs again.

SO, there's been a lot of activity on UFO matters lately. It's been said that with cellphones, there should be millions of sightings recorded, but there haven't been. This is, actually, exactly what's happening, so much so that the Government has started a process that's being called 'soft-disclosure'. While digging for recent information, I looked into more historical information, and I came across a sighting rather close to my home. While there are no major sightings in Boulder Creek (we're a ghosts town) there was one in the nearby town of Felton.

My family has long ties to Felton. My Wife and her fami-

ly lived there, and my brother-in-law and his wife and kid live in Felton and work at Roaring Camp, the local train enthusiast centre. Back in 2008, on September 29th, to be precise, someone reported the following—

“I've never seen anything like it before. I saw shiny objects in an arrow formation. A couple of them broke formation slightly. There were approximately 8 shiny objects. It was flying over for about a minute or so before it disappeared. My friend who was standing next to me saw the exact same thing. It was a perfectly clear afternoon. I saw two planes fly over as soon as the formation disappeared.”



Now, that's about as classic a UFO sighting as you can get. Remember, if you will, that Kenneth Arnold (Hallowed be thy Name!) saw an arrow-like formation in the famed 1947 sighting that gave us the term 'flying saucer' for UFOs. The number of objects, estimated at 8, is also in-line not only with Arnold, but with sightings from across the 1940s and 50s. Arrow formations are reported in many sightings, which makes sense if you look at UFOs as reflecting biological tendencies. If you look at how ducks fly in flock, they're arrow-shaped. It's a natural because there's a lead, and others fall in line, and in order to allow for changes in speed, having followers off to one side works, and having two is certainly better than a single line.

Felton is a beautiful mountain town. It was mostly spared from the major fires, though not entirely. Fan Glenn Glazer lives up there, they have a great library, a couple of good restaurants, and oh yeah, they're right on the road up to Bonny Doon and Lockheed.

Now, Lockheed's area is about 6 miles away, up in the top of the mountains. It's at the end of a long, twisting, mountainous



road. It's lovely, but don't get too close because the guards do not like visitors.

Many people have seen things up there. At one time, my brother-in-law lived around those parts, and he'd see things at night, mostly lights that took erratic paths, but one thing he saw was long-bodied craft, he estimated 10 to 20 feet long, that was able to hover and move laterally. At the time, he was thinking alien craft, but later he figured it was almost certainly some sort of drone. Which makes sense, being Lockheed and all.

I'm digging for more on this sighting, and for any sightings in this area. We've got Bigfoot (and a museum about 'em!) and we've got ghosts (Brookdale Lodge, for example) and we've got UFOs! We're basically Twin Peaks... though I understand that the town of Shashta is actually even more Peaks-like than we are!





The Specials

I love Ska. Have for several decades.

The 1960s produced some great music, but Jamaica was the home for Ska, which would give rise to Rock Steady which would give rise to Reggae. While America was going in for Psychedelic and less staccato R+B hits, Ska tore it up in Kingston, and made it's way to the US (via hits like *My Boy Lollipop* and *Oobladi-Ooblada* and to a lesser extent, folks like Jimmy Cliff coming to the New York World's Fair) It was infectious, and when I discovered ska (I'm still not 100% sure when, but it was likely right around the time I started watching MTV and loving Madness) it was clearly going to be my favorite musical style.

Enter, The Specials.

By 1991, I owned their complete discography. The song *Gangsters* was my fave for ages, and when I finally saw them in 1996, I remember bouncing around like a mad man to *Niteklub* even as tired as I was having bounced about for opening act the Suicide Machines, (A show which I remember as being at The Avalon, but I!) and I remember walking back to the dorm sweaty and chilling from the wind against the sweat, and I think it was early summer in Boston.

The Specials were several things, but the most important thing is they were an integrated band. Punk Rock, the movement in the UK that had been the leading force prior to the Ska craze, was decidedly white kid-centric. It was also poor kid centric, to a fairly strong degree. Punk and Ska, in a way, had a similar original in the UK: poor kids hearing Jamaican music played by the sound system DJs that were all over. It was Jamaican immigrants bringing the music over, and playing both it and Reggae. Punk was greatly influenced by Reggae from the streets, and kids who were enamored with Elvis, Buddy Holly, and other 1950s rock 'n rollers who perfected the idea of the rock song. The Jamaican music that drove Ska was the stuff by the likes of The Skatallites, early Jimmy Cliff, Prince Buster, Demond Dekker, and Roland Alphonso. While Punk turned out lily white-ish (and yes, I am aware there were some excellent Black English punk bands!) it was Ska where we saw bands that blended races. The Specials, more than most, epitomized this ideal.

There are three Specials periods, each defined by the primary hit of that era.

The first period, running from roughly 1977 through

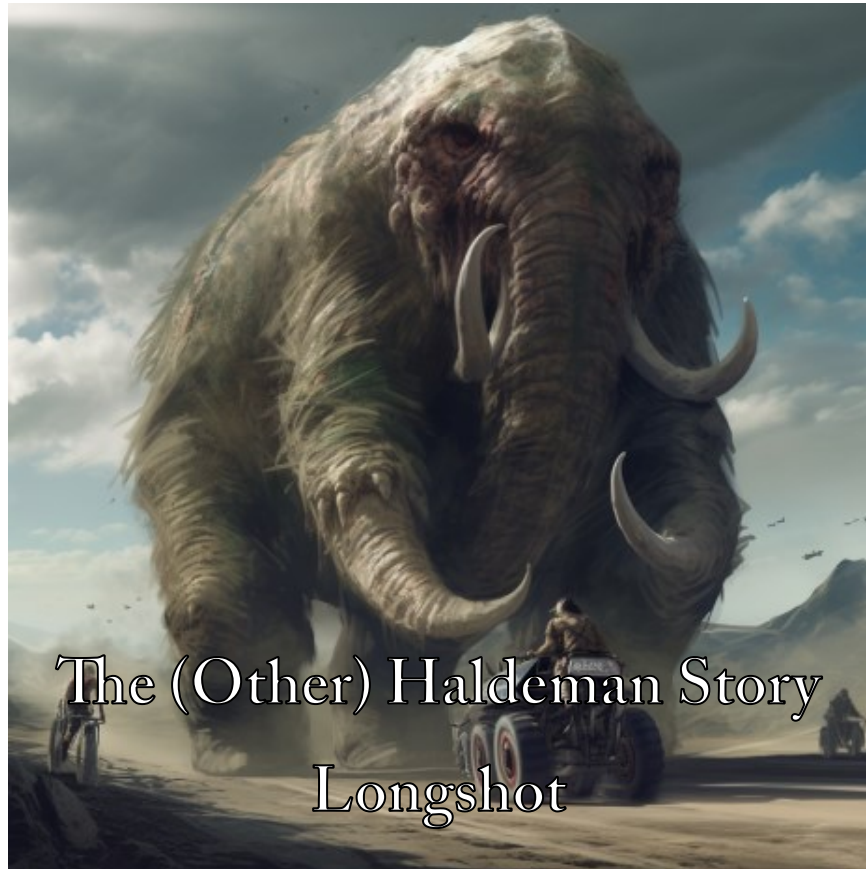
about mid-1980, is defined by their reliance on straight-up danceable ska. This is where we get the most perfect ska songs they ever did—*A Message to You Rudy*, *Monkey Man*, *Too Much Too Young*, *Concrete Jungle*, *Nite Klub*, and *Guns of Navarone*. These are the songs that really defined the sound of the band, and popping up in 1979 on radio, really stood out against the 70s Arena and Art Rock that was on there, and perhaps even more starkly against the Punk rock that got radio play in the UK (but far less so in the US). The peak is 1980, when documentarian Joe Massot recorded the documentary *Dance Craze*. Their performances on the doc are exactly what defines that period. They were working with a great amount of energy, and that could be felt throughout the crowds.

The second period happened starting with their album *More Specials* which saw a creeping influence of MUZAK and other almost easy-listening stuff. It's still fun, because we get things like *Stereotype* from this period, but the production becomes a bigger aspect of things. It was also in this phase that the original band started to break apart, and that's sorta why folks consider this to be the end of The Specials.

Until 1984. when they released *Free Nelson Mandela*, which showed their influences. Ska, reggae, South African music, and Afro-Caribbean rhythms. After that, the group more-or-less broke up for a while, and when they came back, they were that first group again, but they were far more focused on the live performance aspect.

Still, they're a great band, and those late 70s recordings are gold!





Jay Haldeman does a lot of comedy!

This one is so smart, it's wrap-around is a classic, a bar story. Crash is a spacer who's come drinking, and then once he here's about a longshot betting possibility, he goes into the last time he bet on a longshot.

And it's funny.

The sport he bet on? Behemoth racing. Behemoths are huge, mastodon-like beasts that aren't exactly thoroughbreds and race...after a fashion.

And that's where the comedy comes in!

The behemoths are usually uncoordinated, and often kinda lazy. They are lined-up, and the race is begun, well, often the behemoths just stumble and fall down, and sometimes they just don't move.

The funny thing is the one Crash bet on, Heller, is an old, mangy, broke-down behemoth. He doesn't look like he's gonna be able to even move, no less race. HE's a 200-to-1 shot, and of course, he wins.

And then the funny part of the story begins.

I LOVE THIS STORY!!!

It's from *Asimov's SF Adventure Magazine* from 1979. It was very different from the others in the Asimov's universe. I liked it, and I wish it had stuck around longer.

The thing about the story is it falls in a very specific realm—the lovable loser horse/dog/other that ends up turning out to get super-loving and super-wonderful, and who teaches the gambler the meaning of love. This is a faster version of that story, one that W.C. Fields would have recognized, and it is only made more interesting by the crazy kind of racing that the behemoths do. It's a silly scene, and it only makes the way Heller and Crash interact after the win more heartwarming. I love it!

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the Jack Gaughn artpiece on that first page. The image is phenomenal, and it goes a long way to establish the basic idea of the last portion of the behemoth story. It's always what I think of first when I think of this story.



