

**What Happens When Your Hero Turns Out to Be a Jerk?**

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**Ellen Cutter**

Thank you to the Quest Club paper committee for assigning me this topic. In the age of #MeToo, hot mic moments, hacked emails and texts, we are squarely in an era of gawking at the bad behavior of others, particularly people who present themselves as successful and good.

Let's face it: we encounter jerks pretty often. These are people who are devoted to themselves, above all others. It's someone who cuts in line or makes a remark to embarrass someone. They interrupt, steamrolling conversations with self-centered banter. Jerks let others take the fall, skirting responsibility. And, in the Midwest, it may include taking the last cookie or piece of pie. Nothing gets under my skin like finding myself behind a driver with crude bumper stickers. If you wouldn't say it to your grandma in a conversation, please don't put it on your car for my children to read. That's a jerk move.

There are two kinds of jerks. The first is easy to spot - the overt jerk. It is someone who is unlikeable and annoyingly foolish (Merriam-Webster). Harold Ramis' 1993 movie, *Groundhog Day*, provides a great case study.

Phil Conors, a cynical tv weatherman, relives February 2 in a repeated time loop. He is sent to Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania to cover the town's annual Groundhog Day event along with cameraman Larry and his producer, Rita. They arrive in town on February 1. When his radio alarm clock goes off the next day, at 6:00am, he awakes to Sonny and Cher's "I Got You Babe."

While on assignment, he's condescending to the locals, referring to them as hicks, and sarcastic to his colleagues, cracking jokes at their expense. He runs into a high school classmate, "Needle Nose" Ned Ryerson, and blows him off later referring to him as a "giant leech." Ironically, the weatherman fails to track the changing weather that day, an on-brand annoyingly foolish jerk move. A blizzard hits Punxsutawney forcing the team to stay in town for the night. The next day begins as the day before, with "I Got You Babe, the same encounter with Ned Ryerson, the same festival, the same blizzard. And so the story unfolds, each day repeating itself. *Groundhog Day*.

As only he among the cast of characters, relives the same day over and over again, Phil goes full throttle into jerk mode. He gives in to his worst temptations: eating junk, drinking too much,

sarcasm, stealing, and philandering. He gathers Easter eggs about Rita, his beautiful, good natured producer, collecting them in an attempt to seduce her. He fails.

Phil barrels toward nihilism, eventually growing so bored and depressed with the deadend of each day, he tries to end it by stepping in front of a car, jumping off a building, bathing with a plugged in toaster, and driving off a cliff. To no avail, Phil awakes to yet another February 2nd. He delivers his weather forecast from the festival. “I'll give you a winter prediction: It's gonna be cold, it's gonna be grey, and it's gonna last you for the rest of your life” (Ramis).

Things begin to change for Phil when he has breakfast with Rita and opens up to her. He tells her he's living February 2 in a loop. He tells Rita details about nearly everyone in the restaurant, and predicts a waiter dropping a tray of dishes. When Rita asks what Phil knows about her, he responds, “You like boats but not the ocean. You go to a lake in the summer with your family up in the mountains....you're a sucker for French poetry and rhinestones. You're very generous. You're kind to strangers and children. And when you're in the snow, you look like an angel” (Ramis). Rita believes him, they stay up playing games and reading, waiting until midnight. When nothing happens, they fall asleep, and when Phil awakes it's another Groundhog Day.

The next morning, Phil begins to change. He gives money to a panhandler. Phil brings coffee and breakfast to Larry and Rita. He's congenial and helpful while they film their segment. Phil gradually stops self-indulging. He uses his daily observations to help others. Phil catches a boy who falls out of a tree and saves a man from choking, making it a point to be there every day. He changes a stranger's flat tire and buys dinner for someone in need. He learns to speak French, to play the piano, and to make ice sculptures. With each passing February 2, viewers see the evolution of the jerk into the hero. Phil embraces a life of service, achievement, and kindness.

On what would be his last February 2, Phil lives the best day of his life, full of joy and kindness, with Rita quietly observing. She bids on him in a charity bachelor auction. Phil tells Rita that he's happy and, no matter what happens, he'll always love her. They retire to Phil's room together, and the next day, he awakes with Rita next to him, and it is, finally, February 3.

*Groundhog Day* has drawn comparisons to the Greek myth of Sisyphus's Punishment. As punishment for his wrongdoings, Sisyphus, who thought himself to be more clever than Zeus, is forced by Hades to roll a boulder up a hill over and over again. Each time as he reaches the top, it curves, he loses control, and it rolls back down. Sisyphus is consigned to a life of meaningless struggle, rolling the boulder up the hill each day only to have it roll back down just as Phil Connors relives February 2 each day. *Groundhog Day* subsequently entered the American lexicon as shorthand for reliving a frustrating or negative experience.

How did Phil change his perspective on rolling his boulder up the hill? He came to accept his reality, and with this realization he changed. Albert Camus' essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, concluded that accepting the absurdity is the first step toward rebelling against it. Some may turn toward self-harm or lashing out to rebel. Camus argues that joyful acceptance of the struggle is true rebellion and what gives us fulfillment and identity. He writes, "The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (Camus).

*Groundhog Day* shined a light on a person's ability to change from bitter to joyful by embracing their circumstances. With this, we see Phil transform from the movie's jerk to its hero.

A hero is admired for outstanding achievements, courage, or noble qualities (Merriam-Webster). They fight for a cause. We turnout in droves when a new Marvel or Star Wars movie comes out, because we not only love to see the hero win, but the villain lose. Heroes have lives of devotion - first responders are devoted to protection, teachers are devoted to educating students, activists are devoted to justice, and doctors and nurses are devoted to care. Devotion is also a benchmark of athletes, actors, writers, and musicians who have earned remarkable achievements. It is why, to many kids, someone like LeBron James or Taylor Swift, may be heroes. If you are kind, work hard enough, and are totally devoted to your vocation, you can reach the top.

When heroes are showered with attention and accolades, it can lead to idealization. And idealization can cause heavy disappointment if we learn mismatching information about someone's perceived character. This brings us to the second type of jerk, one that strives to evade detection. It is someone who is unfair, dishonest, or a cheat. These jerks are deceptive, concealing their bad behavior.

Abraham Lincoln famously said, “Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man’s character, give him power.” When the bad behavior of powerful people is exposed, all hell breaks loose. The tabloid industry is case in point. It thrives on Scooby Doo moments, unmasking the hero to reveal the jerk that was there all along.

Claire Dederer examines the ethical dilemmas of engaging with art produced by creators with questionable morals in her book *Monsters: A Fan’s Dilemma*. She writes, “They were accused of doing or saying something awful, and they made something great. The awful thing disrupts the great work; we can’t watch or listen or read the great work without remembering the awful thing. Flooded with knowledge of the maker’s monstrousness, we turn away, overcome with disgust. Or...we don’t. We continue watching, separating or trying to separate the artist from the art. Either way: disruption” (Dederer 14).

When we discover our hero turns out to be a jerk, a disruption occurs. Because likability is rather subjective, we will set aside the Phil Connors brand of jerk and look at two examples of modern-day heroes, devoted to their occupations, who unfairly cheated, lied to cover it up, and the disruptions that subsequently consumed their communities.

Cycling was not a sport many Americans paid attention to until the 1980s. Coach Eddie Borysewicz put U.S. cycling on the world stage when the American team won nine out of a possible fifteen medals at the 1984 Olympics. Just six months later, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that a U.S. Olympic Committee investigation showed all five medal winners received blood doping transfusions before their events, violating Committee rules (Reich). The article went on to explain, “Blood doping... involves removing blood from an athlete’s body, keeping it in frozen storage while the athlete’s body makes up for the shortage, then injecting it back into the athlete’s body just before competition. The extra blood, carrying extra oxygen, enhances the athlete’s performance and stamina” (Reich). Coach Eddie was briefly suspended and demoted, and he continued coaching at an elite level. Doping was growing as an accepted, but not talked about, practice in the sport and the team's reputation was not tarnished by the exposure.

The following year, Greg LeMond became the first American to win the Tour de France. Soon after, Silicon Valley investment banker, Thom Weisel, set out to build a U.S. team to win the Tour de France. Even Weisel saw the hubris in this, noting it'd be "like a French baseball team trying to win the World Series" (Albergotti page 36).

In a small town in Texas, Lance Armstrong was a teenager being raised by a single mom. He was an extraordinary athlete who excelled in triathlons, and he had earned a reputation of being self absorbed and cocky. In 1990, Coach Eddie B. recruited Armstrong to Thom Weisel's team, Subaru-Montgomery. The following year, Armstrong became the first American to win the a major Italian stage race. He sowed bitterness with his teammates due to his selfish maneuvering early in the race. But, he performed, and Coach Eddie B changed his strategy. The Subaru-Montgomery riders were to help guide Lance to victory thereafter" (Albergotti page 53). Soonafter, he began training with the U.S. national team to prepare for the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. Armstrong ultimately finished 14th among roughly 200 riders, an admirable performance for someone so new to the scene. Still, he was disappointed in the results.

In 1993, Greg LeMond, by then a three time winner and top contender for the Tour de France, withdrew from the race days before it was set to begin, citing major fatigue. "But privately, LeMond told friends and family that he believed new, powerful blood-boosting drugs had so dramatically improved the abilities of riders who used them that it had become impossible for riders who weren't doping to compete" (Albergotti page 61-62). Recombinant erythropoietin, or EPO, was developed to treat severe anemia It is a synthetic version of a natural hormone in the body that causes bone marrow to produce red blood cells. Riders going into the Tour without EPO were at a considerable disadvantage, and LeMond knew this.

Lance Armstrong rode for the Motorola team in the Tour. On the eighth day, Armstrong became the youngest American to win a Tour stage, dropping out shortly thereafter. After Motorola's disappointing performance, Armstrong complained to his teammates about other teams using EPO. "[Teammate] George Hincapie understood Armstrong's message clearly. His buddy

Armstrong wanted him and the Motorola riders to start using EPO, too. If they didn't they wouldn't be strong enough to support him in the big races" (Albergotti page 69). At this time, the team did not have an organized doping strategy, but this soon changed. Doping became integral to Weisel's team strategy to securing a Tour championship and lucrative sponsorships.

1996 was a defining year for Armstrong. He dropped out of the Tour due to illness and underperformed at the Atlanta summer Olympic games. That fall Armstrong was diagnosed with testicular cancer, which had metastasized to his lungs and brain. According to several present at the time of his treatment, "Among a series of questions, one of the doctors asked if Armstrong had ever taken performance-enhancing drugs. Armstrong responded matter-of-factly, listing EPO, testosterone, growth hormone, cortisone, and steroids" (Albergotti page 86). His friends were shocked, these were banned substances, but they said nothing publicly.

At age 23, Armstrong beat cancer, established the Livestrong Foundation, and became the highest paid rider on his team. Between 1999 and 2005, Lance Armstrong won the Tour de France a record-setting seven consecutive times. He repeatedly denied using performance enhancing drugs. In the midst of his winning streak, Armstrong was featured in a Nike Commercial. Viewers see Lance training outside and in a lab, grinding out ride after ride. "Everybody wants to know what I'm on," Armstrong says. "What am I on? I'm on my bike, bustin' my ass six hours a day. What are you on" (CBS News)?

The following year, it was reported that six urine samples from Armstrong's 1999 Tour tested positive for EPO. This was discovered as part of ongoing research on EPO detection, as tests for EPO were not yet available in 1999. The investigation was subsequently dropped due to alleged improper handling of the samples. However, SCA Promotions, a prize insurance company, withheld its \$5 million payment to Armstrong for winning the 2005 Tour over these allegations. The resulting depositions included damning testimony from cycling insiders confirming Armstrong's doping and the organized doping strategy of his team. The case was subsequently settled out of court, but its proceedings damaged his credibility.

Armstrong's former teammate, Floyd Landis, won the next Tour in 2006. The title was revoked shortly thereafter when urine tests showed unusually high levels of testosterone. Broke and disgraced, Landis struggled for years with the fraud the U.S. Postal Team perpetuated, especially by Lance Armstrong - who, by this time, was wealthy, revered, and famous. Landis came forward to U.S. cycling officials, and an investigation was opened. The U.S. Anti-Doping Agency subsequently charged Armstrong with using, possessing, and trafficking banned substances. In 2012, he was banned from professional cycling for life and stripped of all titles from August 1998 onward, including all Tour championships. Armstrong denied doping even after this and continued to viciously attack naysayers in the media.

The following year, when it became clear he could no longer control the narrative, he finally came clean in an interview with Oprah Winfrey. Armstrong cited his "ruthless desire to win" as the reason for cheating. He also said he felt no remorse or guilt at the time, because doping was the sport's de facto culture developed over several decades (ABC News).

In the book *Wheelmen: Lance Armstrong, the Tour de France, and the greatest sports conspiracy ever*, the authors note, "Lance Armstrong's fourteen-year-long deception was an elaborate, many-tentacled enterprise requiring complicated logistics, scores of people to execute them, and an iron-willed determination to keep it going. Lance relied on his teammates, doctors, lawyers, financial backers, sponsors, assistants, and those associated with him to help him cheat - or at the very least to ignore the evidence that he was doing so - and on the complacent, hero-worshipping media to celebrate his victories without looking into how he achieved them" (Albergotti 315).

The details are shocking. Sometimes the team bus was used as a secret blood transfusion unit, with blood delivered by the team chef. Sometimes transfusions were done at a hotel. Windows would be papered over with blood swaps occurring in total silence, should the rooms be under surveillance. Empty blood bags would be cut into small pieces and flushed down the toilet. And,



when EPO was consumed, the drug could only be detected for a few hours. Riders worked around this so-called “glowtime” by surveilling dope-testers or hiding out.

In her book, *Monster: A Fan's Dilemma*, Claire Dederer writes that when morally compromised people produce astonishing things, their work becomes stained when we discover their bad deeds. “The stain - spreading, creeping, wine-dark, inevitable. The person does the crime and it’s the work that gets stained. That is what we, the audience, are left to contend with.” (page 50).

The authors of *Wheelmen* write, “Millions persisted in believing in [Armstrong] until it became impossible to do so. Why? That may be the harder question to answer than why his teammates and coaches, his sponsors and financial backers, collaborated in the lie. But society’s gullibility in the face of ever-mounting evidence probably has something to do with its need for a certain kind of hero. Looked at this way, Lance is the inevitable product of our celebrity-worshipping culture and the whole money-mad world of sports gone amok” (Albergotti 319). In other words, the stain was there for a long time, we just chose to ignore it. Why?

When someone we admire falls from grace, it can land like a personal betrayal. Heroes can hold a symbolic place in our lives—they represent values, aspirations, or ideals we hold dear. When they disappoint us, it forces us to reconcile their humanity with the pedestal we placed them on. But when the stain spreads and can no longer be ignored, there is reckoning. Lance was not devoted to values we cherish. Like all jerks, his devotion was only to himself.

Elizabeth Holmes, founder and CEO of Theranos, has an origin story that thrived perfectly in Silicon Valley. She grew up in an affluent family and was raised in Washington D.C. and Texas. Holmes excelled in coding and Mandarin, started her first company in high school. In 2002, she enrolled at Stanford University and studied chemical engineering. At the end of her freshman year, she interned at the Genome Institute of Singapore. “Elizabeth spent the summer testing patient specimens obtained with old low-tech methods like syringes and nasal swabs. The experience left her convinced there must be a better way” (Carreyrou 14).

When she returned she conceptualized an arm patch that could simultaneously diagnose and treat medical conditions. She shared her concept with her adviser, Channing Robertson, a chemical engineering professor, and Shaunak Roy, the doctoral student running the lab where she worked. Robertson notes, “I never encountered a student like this before of the then thousands of students I had talked to. I encouraged her to go out and pursue her dream” (Carreyrou 14).

In 2003, the fall of her sophomore year, she dropped out of Stanford and founded Theranos, which combines the words “therapy” and “diagnosis.” Theranos’ mission was “to facilitate the early detection and prevention of disease and empower people everywhere to live their best possible lives” (Bulgarella). Robertson joined the company’s board as an advisor and Roy became the company’s first employee.

She developed an investor prospectus for her TheraPatch and set out to raise money. The patch would use microneedles to collect blood and use sensors for analysis and drug delivery. It would also wirelessly send readings to a doctor’s office (Carreyrou 15). While health focused venture capital firms passed, she raised \$6 million by tapping into her friends and family network.

Holmes adopted the template persona of successful Silicon Valley founders, sporting black turtlenecks year-round like her hero, Steve Jobs. She sipped green power juices, became a vegan, and swore off vacations. Holmes was a unicorn in two ways. First, very few tech startups are led by women, let alone young, beautiful women. Second, many startups aimed to “change the world” but really just focused on “disrupting” areas of the economy like dog walking. Theranos’ mission was sincere and promised to meaningfully improve health care. She received hero status in the tech industry, pursuing a noble cause, sacrificing tremendously and taking on great risk.

It soon became clear to employee #1, Shaunak Roy, that the patch concept was so out of reach it bordered on science fiction. The patch concept was scrapped. “The compromise was a cartridge-and-reader system that blended the field of microfluids and biochemistry. The patient

would prick her finger to draw a small sample of blood and place it in a cartridge that looked like a thick credit card. The cartridge would slot into a bigger machine called a reader” (Carreyrou 17). Theranos called its reader system the Edison. The blood would flow through internal channels in the cartridge, coated with antibody proteins, to separate the blood cells from plasma. “A chemical reaction would produce a signal that would be ‘read’ by the [Edison] and translated a result” (Carreyrou 17). This technology could eliminate in-office blood draws, which require numerous vials of blood and lag time in receiving test results, in favor of at-home testing or at express pharmacy clinics.

Phyllis Garder, a professor of medicine at Stanford told Holmes early on that her idea would not work. As reported in *Vanity Fair*, Gardner explained “When a finger is pricked, the probe breaks up cells, allowing debris, among other things, to escape into the interstitial fluid. While it is feasible to test for pathogens this way, a pinprick is too unreliable for obtaining more nuanced readings. Furthermore, there isn’t that much reliable data that you can reap from such a small amount of blood” (Bilton). This was accepted in the medical field. But Holmes was undeterred.

Theranos continued to expand their labs and R&D capabilities. Each cartridge cost about \$200 and the labs were using hundreds of cartridges per week. With the company’s first \$6 million nearly gone, it raised an additional \$9 million in its second funding round. They grew their staff, who found strong incentive in receiving Theranos stock, which could mean millions after an IPO. They also wanted to work for Elizabeth Holmes, a rising star who many in the field idolized. But, these expectations fell short for those who joined the team.

Sunny Balwani joined Theranos as President and Chief Operating Officer in 2009. He was also in a romantic relationship with Holmes, 20 years his junior, although this dynamic was not disclosed. “Sunny was a force of nature, and not in a good way” (Carreyrou 68). He had an

“aggressive, in-your-face management style” and “projected an air of menace. He was haughty and demanding toward employees, barking orders and dressing down people” (Carreyrou 68-69).

Holmes and Balwani adopted Steve Jobs’ Apple management style. “Like Apple, Theranos was secretive, even internally. [The] departments were generally siloed, Holmes largely forbade her employees from communicating with one another about what they were working on—a culture that resulted in a rare form of executive omniscience. At Theranos, Holmes was founder, C.E.O., and chairwoman. There wasn’t a decision—from the number of American flags framed in the company’s hallway to the compensation of each new hire—that didn’t cross her desk” (Bilton). She was successful in building a powerful board of directors that empowered her complete command and control management of Theranos. Elizabeth was the only woman director, others were all men and only two had any background in biotechnology or medicine.

The company operated in stealth mode, garnering a reputation for high secrecy internally and externally, which created a shield against scrutiny. Theranos never issued a press release. It did not have a website until 11 years after its establishment. Employees felt the strain of this culture, as questions arose about the viability of the products they were developing. “There were frequent mechanical failures. The cartridges either wouldn’t slot into the readers properly or something inside the readers would malfunction. Even when the devices didn’t break down, it could be a challenge to coax any kind of output from them” (Carreyrou 72). Staff could not communicate across departments about these tech failures and how to correct them. Because information was controlled by Holmes and Balwani, the full picture of the issues remained unknown to most.

Nestled inside Theranos’ building was a network of rooms that were not included in the tours provided to government regulators, or potential employees, investors, or clients. Few employees were granted access to this area. This is where commercial blood testing equipment from Abbott

Laboratories, Siemens, and DiaSorin was stored. As Theranos claimed its Edison technology could run 15 common blood tests reliably, estimating this number would eventually reach 240, it was actually using other companies' equipment to produce results. During demonstrations of the Edison machine to investors and potential customers, results would be wirelessly sent from Siemens machines to the Edison, giving Edison the illusion of credible technology.

Theranos raised more than \$700 million from investors (including more than \$100 million each from the Walton Family, Rupert Murdoch, and Betsy DeVoss) and was eventually valued at \$9 billion. Its staff reached 800 employees, many of whom held stock in the company. Customers included Cleveland Clinic, Walgreens, and Blue Cross. Theranos blood tests were available to and being used by thousands of people in multiple states.

And Elizabeth Holmes was adored for her work. She was an industry darling. In 2014, at age 30, *Forbes* named Elizabeth Holmes the world's youngest self-made billionaire, worth \$4.5 billion. In 2015, *Time* magazine named her as one of the world's 100 Most Influential People. She appeared on the cover of *Inc.* magazine, with the title "The Next Steve Jobs." On *Charlie Rose*, she confirmed that the lab results from Theranos were the same that can be obtained from traditional blood draws. And, despite being a college dropout with no scientific or medical training, Holmes was inducted into the Harvard Medical School Board of Fellows.

It is notable that all information about Theranos' breakthroughs came from Elizabeth Holmes herself. No scientist could vouch for Theranos' technology. When Holmes herself was asked by *The New Yorker* to explain how the technology worked, she responded, "a chemistry is performed so that a chemical reaction occurs and generates a signal from the chemical interaction with the sample, which is translated into a result, which is then reviewed by certified laboratory personnel." (Auletta). So, how did she raise so much money to back a company with little scientific information about how the Edison technology worked?

As *Vanity Fair* explains, “It generally works like this: the venture capitalists (who are mostly white men) don’t really know what they’re doing with any certainty—it’s impossible, after all, to truly predict the next big thing—so they bet a little bit on every company that they can with the hope that one of them hits it big. The entrepreneurs (also mostly white men) often work on a lot of meaningless stuff, like using code to deliver frozen yogurt more expeditiously. The entrepreneurs generally glorify their efforts by saying that their innovation could change the world... and this also helps seduce the tech press... The financial rewards speak for themselves. Silicon Valley, which is 50 square miles, has created more wealth than any place in human history. In the end, it isn’t in anyone’s interest to call bullshit” (Bilton).

But eventually, people did. Whistleblowers inside the company came forward. Tyler Shultz worked at Theranos for eight months. What he saw deeply disturbed him: data manipulation, falsification of blood samples, false positives for syphilis tests, and a culture of deception. When he voiced his concerns to Holmes, he was sidelined and eventually resigned. Lab associate Erika Cheung worked with Tyler and also had concerns. When the lab was cleared to start running hepatitis C tests for clinical use, which she knew the Edison could not reliably provide, she quit. “She was appalled by the lack of scientific rigor that had gone into validating the assays of the Edison. She [felt] Theranos should never have gone live testing patient samples. The company routinely ignored quality-control failures and test errors and showed a complete disregard for the well-being of patients. In the end, she resigned because she was sickened by what she had become a party to” (Carreyrou 237).

With these and other accounts in hand, *The Wall Street Journal* ran a cover story by John Carreyrou revealing Theranos was using other companies’ machines to produce blood test results, not their own. Days later, Holmes told her staff that the *Journal* had gotten the story wrong, and Balwani led the team in a chant of “F— you, Carreyrou!”

Holmes doubled down in the media, sticking by her claims. And, as you probably know, things quickly unraveled. Three months later, in January of 2016, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services uncovered irregularities with Theranos' equipment. After an investigation, it banned Holmes from owning, operating, or managing blood-testing services for two years. The FDA ordered Theranos cease use of their finger prick blood capture system. Walgreens terminated its contract. The State of Arizona filed suit against the company, as it sold 1.5 million blood tests to its residents while concealing or misrepresenting real test results. Class action lawsuits were filed. And, the FBI opened an investigation. By 2017, the company filed for bankruptcy and closed in 2018. The SEC prosecuted Holmes and Balwani for defrauding investors, destroying evidence, and advertising a false product. Balwani was sentenced to 12 years and 11 months. Holmes was convicted in 2022 and sentenced to 11 years in federal prison - she is scheduled to be released in 2032.

Many employees had concerns, but were unable to substantiate them. They lost their jobs and promise of an IPO and stock cashout. Theranos' Chief Scientist died by suicide in 2013, trapped by the realization the technology didn't work and Holmes' deception of employees, board members, and investors, who ultimately lost millions. In her book, *Monster: A Fan's Dilemma*, the author observes that the more closely we are tied to the work of morally compromised people, "the more collapsed the distance between us and them, the more likely are are to lose some piece of ourselves when the stain starts to spread" (Dederer 55). When heroes fail us, it causes widespread devastation.

Theranos' perpetrated fraud put real people's health at risk. "For some, that blood test eventually delivered difficult, if not, devastating health news. For other patients, its results translated into agonizing medical decisions. But perhaps most disturbing of all for those impacted was finding out, weeks, months, and even years later, that the test they had relied on was not only

inaccurate—its founders knew it was bogus and had promoted it anyway.” (U.S. Food and Drug Administration).

Redemption is being presented with the same circumstance and making a different choice. In these examples, the heroes are not redeemed. Their frauds, and the great lengths to which they have gone to conceal them, have been exposed.. In these circumstances, is redemption possible?

In *Monster: A Fan's Dilemma*, Dederer observes that a certain kind of person is immune to the stain immoral behavior would otherwise put on their work, citing artists like Woody Allen and Ernest Hemmingway. “A certain kind of person demanded to be loved, no matter how bad his behavior - and we all agreed he was worthy of love. This was the person called the genius. This person might be stained - in fact almost always is stained - but stain seems not to dent his importance. Genius is the name we give our love when we don't want to argue about it; when we want to push our obsession onto the next guy. When we don't want to hold our heroes accountable” (Dederer 80-81). For Armstrong and Holmes, the cracks in the foundation were apparent. But they were geniuses! When we observe heroes from afar it is best described as a parasocial relationship. This creates confusion for us, the observers, as there is the sense a relationship exists outside of the sport, the company, or the art (Dederer 55). So, the cracks were largely ignored until total collapse.

If a hero is discovered to be a jerk, can the disruption we experience be repaired?

It depends on the audience's willingness to hold our heroes responsible, and their willingness to accept that responsibility. It requires turning away from self-devotion and toward humility for the hero, and for us, it requires reflection on what stains we are willing to live with.



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