

THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

May 18, 2026

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

"Have you heard of Black Point?" Jeremy said.

"Not interested," I said.

"Fractal computing?" Jeremy said.

"Don't quiz, speak." I said. "If you must."

"Black Point is this outfit out on the Cortes Bank," Jeremy said. "They're building the world's first enterprise-scale fractal computing facility. Major threat to humanity. Pressing. Major."

"Why all the way out there?" I said.

We were in Santa Monica, which, it may surprise you to hear, is now a desert. Cortes Bank is about a hundred miles off what used to be the California coast. It was a seamount – a six-thousand-foot-tall mountain covered completely by the ocean. A geographical anomaly and a deep-sea fishing mecca, once upon a time. But now that part of the ocean is gone and it's a rocky beach.

We were sitting on the back porch, looking at the sea floor. Cortes Bank and I guess the fractal thingy were out there somewhere.

"Water," Jeremy said.

"What about it?" I said.

"You asked me why they were out at Cortes Bank," Jeremy said. "That's why."

"Frickin water," I said. "Water, water, water."

Sidebar: Have you noticed that everything we like takes too much water? Cows take too much water. Almonds take too much water. Wine takes too much water. I'm sure there are things I like, but nothing comes to mind. You know what I say? At least you can put those things in your mouth. Although, in the case of the cow, you'd probably want to rinse it off with – you guessed it – water! But let's stop blaming carbon-based life forms and examine the role of technology in the dissolution of the planet, shall we? What about robots? I guess they probably drink, like, WD40 or something. What about all these data whatevers? They pumped out half the Pacific Ocean to keep them cool and what have they given us, so far? Promises. Well, hell, I can give you two of those from where I'm sitting and all I need is a beer.

"Are you listening to me?" Jeremy said.

"No," I said.

"This is an imminent threat," he said.

"I don't feel imminently threatened," I said.

"Well," Jeremy said. "You are. That's just a fact. Look it up."

"Hand me another beer," I said.

"We have a chance to do something about this," Jeremy said. "We have a chance to stop them before it's too late."

"I don't like doing things," I said. "And isn't it always too late? What are we trying to stop? And, if we do stop it, won't something equally crappy occur in its place?"



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"Put these on," Jeremy said.

He handed me this jumpsuit made out of black and gray camo fabric. I took off my clothes and put it on.

"Mine's a little loose in the chest and tight in the stomach," I said.

"Are you kidding me?" Jeremy said. "You look like Telly Savalas."

"Cape Fear Telly Savalas or Kojak Telly Savalas?" I said.

"Total Kojak," Jeremy said.

"Thanks," I said. "Cool boots."

We walked down off the porch and climbed in the dune buggy and headed west. Goggles, gloves, helmets with radios in them. It turns out you can't drive in the ocean without covering up – the views are good, but the air is full of ammonia. Apparently, they've been experiencing the same thing out in Utah for decades. There used to be a lake. In Utah, I mean. I saw it in my teens. These days, you see pictures of lawyers or whatever walking to work dressed like Muad'Dib.

Sidebar: Don't trust photography. Seeing is no longer believing. Even what we now refer to as "real-time vision" has become suspect. My friend, Lloyd, had his eyes replaced. He said the infrared function is incredible but the daytime high def is disorienting. Apparently, a period of adjustment is to be expected, but it made me wonder: is what he's seeing with his hyper eyes the same as what I'm seeing with my normal, screwed up bio eyes? Then I thought, wait, our bio eyes are all different, too. Is there any common point of reference?

What remains, really, besides the self? And where does that reside, if not in the world around us, if not in the ones we love, if not in our dogs, if not in our bodies and minds and our power to perceive?

The sun was going down. Have you noticed the sun always goes down in stories that end in disaster? I've told my children that the ability to recognize when you're a character in such a story is an important survival skill. I say, "If you're just along for the ride and you don't like where the bus is going, stand up, pull the rope, and get off," and my daughters say, "What's a bus?"

The ocean floor at night is difficult to navigate when you're doing a hundred and twenty miles an hour. Humans have been abandoning things down here for as long as there have been humans and now, well, here it all is, waiting to be run into by a dune buggy. In that respect, the ocean is like any other desert – boundless vistas punctuated by the failures of man. I suppose outer space is getting there. But soon we were driving up the slope toward Bishop Rock. We neared the top and Jeremy cut the motor. We had to hike up the last little bit. The dune buggy has trouble with coral.

"Put this on," Jeremy said. "Hold this. Keep your helmet on."

"Check," I said. "Check. Check."

We were walking up the ridge of the dry seamount. In one direction was the ocean we'd crossed and the very distant lights of the west coast of the United States. The only lights between us and Los Angeles were the occasional dune buggy and the oil rigs.

In the other direction lay what was left of the Pacific Ocean. I don't know what's out there, anymore. I've

heard you can walk to Hawaii, if you time the tides. But the permits are impossible to get.

Sidebar: Permits. We used to go out to the OG desert and eat peyote and try to shoot out the stars with a 3030. Permits? Half the time we didn't have pants. I once left a joint and a poem about bats written in ketchup on top of a rock in Joshua Tree and came back eleven years later and smoked the joint. The bat poem was gone. Draw your own conclusions. But not if the conclusion you draw is that people love poetry. Oh, if that were true.

Sidebar: No, people don't love poetry. They love making other people get permits. They love Starbucks and Mister What's His Name and they love it when animals eat ice cream and get a brain freeze. William who? Shall I compare thee to my butt? The worst thing about people is how many of them there are. I'm tempted to say they're everywhere, but that's not true, because there weren't any of them out there in the dried-up ocean.

It was really peaceful. When we reached the top we were looking down the slope of a mountain at a building that looked like The Death Star with the tide lapping at its ankles. It didn't really look like The Death Star, it looked like a cross between a circuit board and an eight-hundred-foot-wide great stellated dodecahedron made out of Polymer 2 on which hundreds of thousands of lights blinked without pattern.

"Are we supposed to be here?" I said.

"That's it," Jeremy said. "It's called The Death Star."

"They got the rights to that?" I said.

"*They* don't call it that," Jeremy said. "*People* call it that."

"It's just, like, a nom de guerre?" I said.

"What's a nom de guerre?" Jeremy said.

"Stop quizzing me," I said.

We were walking down the mountain toward the, um – for lack of a better term – Death Star.

"Alright," Jeremy said. "Salt and Vinegar are going straight in the front doors. Tomcat, Cherry Bomb, Angel Horse, Six Fingers and Tatanka are coming in the roof. Blue Nose and Randy Mandy –"

"Are those people?" I said.

"Yeah," Jeremy said. "That's Tito and Vic, Slade and there's Lloyd. Those are just their war names."

I stopped walking.

"Wait a second," I said. "You didn't say we were going to a war."

"It's going to be a very small war," Jeremy said. "Very quick."

"How quick?" I said.

"Twenty minutes," Jeremy said. "Half hour, max."

"Wow," I said, "that is a quick war."

We started walking again.

"Remind me what the war is about again?" I said.

"It's to prevent total annihilation," Jeremy said.

"Of us, right?" I said.



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"And, like, the rest of the world," Jeremy said.

"Right on," I said. "Who's Randy Mandy?"

"That's Steve," Jeremy said.

"Why don't I have a war name?" I said. "I was thinking something like Big Hammer or Xerxes."

"How about Peanut?" Jeremy said.

"That's a little juvenile," I said.

We reached the door to the Death Star and Jeremy stuck an explosive device with a magnet on it and we blew the door off and went inside.

"See?" Jeremy said. "Easy."

We started walking up the hall and there was a grinding noise and we turned around to see the door close behind us. The sound of footsteps, a lot of footsteps, came from the other direction.

"Is it too late to rethink this?" I said.

Here are some thoughts on the wine in this shipment:

Mostly, as a winemaker, I feel like I get credit for stuff I have nothing to do with. Our Merlot is probably the best example of that. Our first vintage of Merlot was 2002, and we released it in 2005. I liked it alright, but it was kind of an afterthought. Then, people loved it. Why?

To figure that out, I started making Merlot from another few vineyard blocks, both at the Stone Ranch. I treated that fruit and the fruit from the original block at Red Winery the same way. Neither of the wines from the other two blocks was as good as the Merlot from Red Winery. So, I drew the same conclusion I always draw: it's the fruit. So I stopped making Merlot from anywhere besides Red Winery, and almost twenty-five years later, here we are.

In developing the Chardonnay, I only had one vineyard to work with, so I experimented with process rather than provenance. I don't feel that the first vintage, which was fermented in stainless steel and bottled straight from the tank, was my best work. In 2006, I fermented in tank, then aged in neutral barrels, stirring the lees. That was a revelation – the 2006 had way more depth and dimension than the 2005, with the wow factor of the fruit still fully intact. There have been very few changes in the process since then.

In both cases, the most important things I do are in the vineyard: prune hard, sucker ruthlessly, skimp on water, thin on time, taste and taste and taste, and when it's ripe, don't wait.

The **2022 Estate Merlot** is a bright, red fruit-driven wine with high-tone, spicy aromatics. It smells like cherry compote and cinnamon and allspice. There's always a little herbaceousness here, too. I call it thyme, but I read it as menthol, sometimes. Very slight. It seems like I'm less interested in new barrels all the time; the 2022 Merlot was aged exclusively in four and five-year-old French casks and there's very little oak influence on the wine. It's pure fruit. The palate is finely textured and delicate and the finish is clean and tangy. Drink it now, in 2035, or anywhere

in between.

The **2023 Home Chardonnay** smells like honeydew and lemon curd and wet slate. It was fermented in stainless and aged in very old French oak barrels that are entirely neutral. It doesn't undergo malolactic fermentation. The last time I tasted it, I said it tasted like Chablis, but this time I'm going to get even more pretentious and say it tastes like Meursault- tangy but not as linear as it was in its early days – the palate has actually gotten somewhat generous. Still plenty of acid and bright fruit. Yum.

The **2021 Alexander Valley Estate Cabernet** is a lot – a lot of fruit, a lot of tannin, a lot of acid. And, while I think it lacks the poise of the 2020, it has a certain EVERYTHING TURNED UP TO ELEVEN that is its own kind of balance. I get cocoa powder and black cherry and a hint of tamari on the nose; a tangy, broad palate full of dark fruit, and, I have to say, the 2021 has actually mellowed and gotten quite a bit softer on the finish than it was the last time I tasted it. It still wants time to breathe or time in the cellar, but it's opening up. Drink through 2045.

I like tasting the **2021 Pyramid Cabernet** behind the 2021 AV Estate – it reminds me what this vineyard is capable of – as loud a wine as the 2021 AV Alexander Valley is, the 2021 Pyramid cuts through the mix. It's even darker than the 2021 and the fruit on the nose is very dark and very pronounced – blackberry, Santa Rosa plum, espresso. On the palate, it's sweeter and broader than the 2021 Alexander Valley, and finishes with even more grip. In good years and bad, the Pyramid always produces the heaviest, grittiest wine in our lineup. The 2021 is no exception. Drink a bottle a day between now and 2045.

Bidip bidip bidip that's all, folks. I hope to see you this spring.

Thank you for your support.

– Jake