

Sonova Quark

Brought to you by Steven Vincent Johnson and Darlene P. Coltrain, mailing address: 6666 Odana Road, 213, Madison, WI 53719. Email Steve: svj@orionworks.com. Email Darlene: dpcoltrain@gmail.com Web: <http://OrionWorks.com>. All material is Copyrighted © by Steven Vincent Johnson and Darlene P. Coltrain unless otherwise specified. Quark is brought to you by *OrionWorks* with occasional help from **Grasshopper Press** when I feel an inspirational mood overtake me. Final layout is assembled in InDesign CS5. Printing done on a HP Color Laserjet Pro MFP M277dw. Some might be asking how do you pronounce "Sonova Quark"? There isn't one.

This edition was created for **Turbo Charged Party Animal**, #361.
Completed (*somewhere around*) on July 21, 2016

A Couple of Gripes

GRIFE ONE

Since May my primary PC has been in the computer shop four times. Apparently, it's difficult to pin-point exactly what's causing the problem. My machine seems to work flawlessly for several blissful weeks, and then go flaky. Eventually it won't boot. I think it's a chronic hardware problem. Madison Computer-Works thinks it's some kind of a s/w glitch, possibly the windows operating system becoming corrupted. As such, the operating system has been wiped clean twice. I've had to completely reload all of my applications. That takes weeks. In fact I still haven't installed everything since the last brain wipe.

About the only good thing that has come out of this crap is that I have transferred all my important data files into an external USB 3.0 hard drive. When my PC fails again, and based on past performances it likely will, I'll be able to switch over to my backup laptop and resume crucial tasks with minimal inconvenience. While my laptop can't handle three HD monitors, it can handle two. I can get by on that.

Jim H., as per our conversation at Kim and Kathi's 4'o'July party, I am looking into Carbonite for off-site backup protection. The prices are reasonable, especially when one perceives it as insurance.



GRIFE TWO

Last Thursday, July 14, we got an unexpected letter from the Social Security administration. Apparently some bureaucrat decided I had extorted the administration out of several months of benefits. I suspect the misunderstanding is due to the fact that on my last paycheck stub I received a large payout, the result of thirty-plus years of deferred vacation con-

verted into sabbatical pay. In the state system, some of your vacation can be deferred and converted into sabbatical pay. The amount of sabbatical pay I had received on my last paycheck, when calculated out, was precisely the additional number of months that some bureaucrat had determined I had worked past my January 2015 termination date. What irks me is that someone had to have make that creative extrapolation. Someone must have believed that I had attempted to defraud the SS administration out of more \$14,000 of benefits which I now needed to pay back.

If felt like a good time to hit to roof. Fortunately, I had copies of my DOT pay check stubs, especially the last stub showing the sabbatical pay disbursement I had received back in January 2015. Social Security documentation is very clear on the point that special cash disbursements received from an employer, such as severance pay and sabbatical do *not* count as work performed in the current year. Receiving sabbatical pay is work performed in previous years. The pay check also showed SSNO taxes were taken out of that sabbatical amount when it was dispersed. It was a huge amount of taxes paid! Two hours after receiving the nasty letter I was at the social security building showing a copy of my pay check stub to a clerk. After looking over the contents of the letter and the copy of my January 2015 pay check stub, she told me, this kind of mix-up happens more often than one might think. She told me it causes frustration for me and more work on their part to fix the error. She took down all the facts, made copies of my last paycheck stubs and entered it into the system. I was informed that I should receive another official letter. We received that follow-up letter this morning reversing the previous claims. I'm keeping documents, just in case.



... AND ONE MORE GRIPE

Darlene and I are preparing to attend MidAmericon this August. The convention will be held in Kansas City, MO. I have been making preparations to display a lot of my historical works in the format of digital reproductions. Some works have been reproduced at their original size. There will be several works I haven't shown at shows for decades.

My efforts to book space in the art show didn't go smoothly. Back in March I entered in the amount of space I needed before the May deadline date had passed. But MidAmericon had not yet given me my membership number, and the art show form had requested it. All I could do was enter in all the necessary reservation details, sans my missing membership number. I wasn't going to pay for the panels until I got my membership number. I promptly saved the data out on their website.

I finally received my membership number in June - well past the deadline date. I logged into the website and promptly filled in my membership number and paid for my reserved panels. Several weeks later I receive an email from the artshow committee informing me of the fact that I had paid for my reserved tables after the deadline date has passed. I don't dispute that. The letter also stated that if I could not show (or prove) that I had entered my reservation requests before the deadline in May, I was pretty much SOL in getting into the art show. Space is tight. They would have to refund my reservation money unless I could prove my case. I immediately shot back an email telling them I had actually filled in all the necessary reservation details back in March. I added I had purposely delayed paying for my panels until I had actually received my membership number. Fortunately, they believed me. They have honored my request. Next stop: Windycon in November. I expect fewer snafus with the Windycon staff.

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FWIW, I suspect most 2D artists who show their creations at SF&F art shows don't make a profit. It's not about whether you claim you're an amateur or a pro. Granted, I suspect some may remain in the black. But most, I wager, really don't if you were to ask them candidly. I certainly haven't been in the black since the early 80s. That's about the time the economy tanked as Reagan took office. I don't think SF&F art shows have fully recovered from the 80s. The economy isn't all to blame. The matter has been exacerbated by the explosive evolution of digital technology. Convention art shows these days are glutted with digital art. I've gone digital as well. As such, I'm equally guilty for having contributed to what some traditionalists may perceive as the unfortunate demise of art shows at SF conventions. Why has this happened? I can only give my POV. It became

prohibitively expensive for me to focus exclusively on producing traditional "original" art the old fashion way - with oils or acrylics. Long ago I lost hope that customers would actually buy my originals at prices that would reflect work performed above minimum wage. I also had other interests. I'm not trying to lay blame here. It is my opinion that there simply isn't enough discretionary currency in the economy these days for prospective customers to purchase a lot of original SF&F art. I suspect many Art shows have taken a terrible beating. Granted, some patrons are beginning to purchase digital reproductions, perhaps because there not much else to buy. One should not be surprised that digital art is valued at a fraction of what "original" art had gone for. The result, in my case, has been that the only way I have been able to continue displaying my art at conventions (be it real or virtual) is to subsidize the "business" of art. Sometimes massively so. Long ago, I had to make peace with that realization. Thank god I had a full-time paying job, a job with health insurance too. And now, I'm retired. Same story.

I mention this in case some may have occasionally wondered why I haven't been creating as much art as I used to... in case some are wondering why I yammer on incessantly about my Kepler research project for which few can comprehend, let alone be curious about. Why? My on-going Kepler research project is a whole lot cheaper to subsidize.

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Promised writing assignments, like the conclusion to *Confessions of a Science Fiction Artist* and more Kepler musings will return after the dust settles. Sometime after MidAmericon.

OR

Sorry about no mailbag entries. I need to replenish my reserves, metaphorically speaking. Later!

Steve



Charm, instructing me: Don't worry. Be happy.