

OrionWorks Sonova Quark

Brought to you by Steven Vincent Johnson and Darlene P. Coltrain, mailing address: 6666 Odana Road, #213, Madison, WI 53719. Email Steve: orionworks@charter.net. 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.

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Second Walkabout Confessions of a Science Fiction Artist Part 5 (Conclusion)



One of Many Paths

Quarry Park, Madison
A block from our house

In *TCPA #358*, April 2016, I concluded "*My Life as a Rocky Rococo Busboy (Part 4)*" with the following paragraph:

"In the wee morning hours at the end of another nondescript night shift of delivering pizzas, it all came to a head. Without any obvious provocation that I can recall I was suddenly overwhelmed with feelings of raw frustration and rebellion. What the hell was I doing with my life! I was going nowhere fast. Right then, with no forethought of giving notice to my manager, I quit. I wrenched the hotbox out of the back of my Honda Civic and shoved it in the back of Rocky's kitchen. The simple ritual of removing the hotbox felt empowering. I desperately needed to scale the prison walls and escape. Once again, with minimal forethought in place, I felt an impulsive desire to leave Madison. I'd been thinking about California."

BACK ON THE ROAD

I couldn't really couldn't put my finger on a specific reason why I needed to escape Madison for a second time in 12 months. I dealt with my sense of frustration and depression by making what might be described as a prison break. Under the circumstances getting out of Dodge felt dramatic and self-affirming. I convinced myself that doing so would address my personal issues.

In the throws of another cold 1977 February winter I packed up my meager belongings in the back of my silver gray Honda Civic and left. After negotiating the outskirts of Chicago's suburbs I took I-55 south passing through St. Louis. I connected to I-40 and I-30 and headed towards Dallas. From there I took I-20/I-10 and headed for El Paso, Texas. I engaged in scant self-reflection during this time of escape.

Having never traveled most of these freeways before nothing looked familiar except for a twinge of nostalgia passing through the southern boarder town of El Paso. Ten years earlier my parents and I reentered the United States through this boarder town. (See Footnote 1 for additional details.) This time, I didn't linger.

Driving west on I-10, somewhere near Tucson, Arizona I realized it was time to get another oil change. I drove into a gas station situated off the interstate and took a seat in the customer lounge. Shortly, a mechanic approached me. He told me my shocks were shot and recommended I purchase a set of new ones. He took me back to my car still elevated on the platform and pointed to oily discharge oozing out of one of the shock absorbers. He told me it a gasket seal had failed and that the shock absorber was toast. He told me not replacing them would be bad for the car's suspension. He recommended I replace them all. I performed quick assessment of my financial reserves. The oil leak looked strikingly fresh. I figured the failure must have recently happened, perhaps within the last day because I sure had not felt any difference in my driving comfort. I concluded that I really couldn't afford to have all my shocks replaced. Feeling somewhat guilty I paid the

bill for my oil change to a disappointed serviceman and went on my way. I never noticed any driving discomfort and soon forgot about my callus disregard of taking care of my car's suspension needs. (See Footnote 2 for more details.)

SELF-ASSESSMENT IN DEL MAR:

Four days after leaving the frigid clutches of Madison I passed through the southern border of California via I-8. I drove through San Diego turning north on I-5. The Pacific coast was only miles away. As evening approached I drove into the parking lot of a coastal Holiday Inn located in the scenic beach city of Del Mar just north of San Diego. The hotel manager told me the only vacancy he had left was a room located above their restaurant's kitchen. He warned me the room occasionally got noisy at night as pans and dishes were washed and recycled. I didn't think listening to the sounds of a nearby restaurant kitchen would be much of a hardship. I was simply glad to have found a decent affordable room in the scenic Del Mar area. With room key in-hand, I walked outside into the dusk. I decided to spend a couple of days here.

Early the next morning after getting a decent night's sleep I drove to Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve. As I drove up the winding scenic roadway a shroud of morning mist enveloped my car. Morning fog is typical for the coastal area. Stopping near the summit a sign informed me that this spot offered a spectacular view of the pacific ocean, sans the fog. I climbed on top of a nearby boulder and waited for the curtain to rise. Slowly, silently, the Pacific revealed itself. A vast deep blue expanse stretched into a hazy vanishing point marking the transition between ocean and sky. Seeking the exact transition always felt like a transcendent experience.

Sitting on the boulder my sense of tranquility began to ebb as undefined emotions I had been avoiding during my journey to the west coast began resurfacing. Now what? What was I trying to do with my life? I realized escaping Madison had been an impulsive act. Deep down I knew was running away, but from what? The fear of being trapped? Of loneliness? Of isolation? Depression? I was tired of running. A profound sense of disappointment overwhelmed me as I came to the conclusion that my efforts to find a

Footnote 1:

Back in 1966 the family entered the United States through El Paso driving up from El Salvador, passing through Guatemala and Mexico . Nothing about El Paso seemed familiar to me even though only ten years had passed. What I remember when I was 14 was spending an evening in a motel room being exposed for the first time in my life to a brand new science fiction TV series involving a crew of humans and a strange pointy-eared half-human/half-alien science officer. The first episode I was exposed to was "The Naked Time". It sure beat the socks off watching TV episodes of "Perdido's En El Espacio" (*Lost in Space*) and having to listen to Billy Mummy being lip-synced in Spanish, and watching Robbie the Robot thrash about while bleeping "Advertencia! Advertencia!"



George Takei in *Naked Time*

Footnote 2:

Years later I remember watching a sting operation broadcast by 60 Minutes. Gas stations along the U.S. southern border were caught on video clandestinely squirting motor oil on shock absorbers of cars that had come in for an oil change. The attendant would tell the owner that their absorbers were shot and needed immediate replacement. Year later when I watched that installment I realized my luck. In my case, I was either too clueless or too stingy to have been taken in. I guess greed can occasionally work in one's favor.

sense of inner peace over the past year seemed unobtainable. I was 25 years old and I felt I had failed. I had failed my life.

I mulled the status of what felt like an increasingly bleak future. A conclusion I had never considered before confronted me. The only practical avenue left was to find a way to take myself out of this life-time. There it was, confronting me, staring me down. The conclusion didn't frighten me as it would have months earlier. Confronting this new option was cathartic. A profound sense of release washed over me as hot tears welled up watering my vision.

So, how do I go about doing myself in? I didn't really want to think about the messy mechanics. I rationalized there was still some quality time left before being forced to deal with my ultimate fate. I had some cash in my wallet. San Diego was only minutes away. Why not delay the inevitable for a spell while I take a well-earned vacation... my last vacation. I always wanted to see Sea World.

A TOURIST

I bought a day pass and walked through the entrance gate of Sea World. In no time I found a school of dolphins frolicking about in their immense water habitat. They were a great hit to the tourists. Some were embarrassing the spectators as they undulated about underwater, occasionally paring up and mating. One of the dolphins peered out of the water towards a collection of schoolchildren as if assessing how embarrassed they had managed to make them. Their aquatic choreography was entertaining and mesmerizing. I envied the unabashed freedom expressed in their kinetic activity. I lost track of time watching them.

An unexpected emotion hit me. It felt explosive. My mind envisioned a bright yellow spark of light. The associated feeling was unfamiliar, as if I had tapped into an intelligence I had no familiarity with. The sensation was rich and bright, sinuously slippery and fluid-like. I never questioned the source. It came from the frolicking dolphins. I have never felt that emotional signature again.

Later, I walked over to a smaller, private more intimately accessible observation pool where a mother dolphin and her calf had been placed. Tour-



Torrey Pines State Reserve, photo by A. Jane

ists occasionally threw in purchased dead fish for the dolphins. Once a fish was thrown into the pool mother would consume it on her circular rounds. She seemed bored and in no hurry to gobble up the offerings. She ignored my presence. Meanwhile, the young calf popped its head out of the water to get a closer look at me. We stared back at each other. I had just purchased my own fish offering. I reached over with my prize fish in a gesture of offering. The calf remained motionless, seemingly content to observe me. I extended my arm further, eventually touching the beak of the calf with the limp fish. The young dolphin continued to remain motionless. I wondered if the calf had not yet been weened. I was also beginning to feel self-conscious, wondering if I was not really getting what this observation was all about. That's when I began to feel a little sheepish. All I could offer this silent observant being was a dead fish. It didn't strike me as an equitable exchange. It was a lesson in humility.

* * *

I spent the next day at San Diego Zoo, and the following day San Diego's Wild Animal Park. Both attractions were entertaining and informative. I think I must have been secretly relieved that my pending fate had been placed on temporary hold.

In the evenings, back at my Holiday Inn, I heard the hypnotic repetitive sounds of pots and dishes clanging about from the kitchen below. Their presence seemed to comfort me, lulling me to sleep. I was reminded of prior days working at Rocky's. It made me feel less isolated, less disconnected from the world I

was planning to soon depart from.

As my San Diego vacation plans came to an end I sensed another wave of despondency lurking nearby. This time I didn't care. I was tired of fighting them off. Returning to my motel room I sat down and found myself staring blankly at wall. Nothing happened. I let go some more... I waited some more.

Something inside let go. A gentle sensation of falling. Suddenly, I was presented with a vision. It lasted for only a second. I saw a wooded path covered in pine needles leading to a collection of cottages. I was surrounded by a forest of mature pines shading the community. It felt quiet and peaceful. I sensed artisans and craftsmen living and working in this village setting. They had banded together, cooperatively, to help each other live peacefully, harmoniously, away from the stresses of urban life. They had created a habitat that sustained their life-work. They sold to tourists who occasionally stopped by. It was enough to sustain their simple life-style. I knew *this was where I belonged*. As the echo of the vision faded something had shifted inside me, just as something had shifted back at the Midvale Boulevard and University Avenue crossroads the previous year.

REASSESSMENT

For more than six months I had survived living an isolated meager life in a one-room efficiency working full-time at minimum wage as a busboy at Rocky Rococo's. It was a stable existence, albeit boring and limiting. I had little discretionary income left over to spend on luxuries. I pursued simple goals. Pay the utility bills. Feed myself reasonably healthy food. Remain clothed and sheltered from the elements. It was a primal life-style I felt I needed to survive. But now as I sat in that Holiday Inn motel room in Del Mar, as the vision of an artist colony faded, I realized all those boundaries I had constructed for my survival and protection, those boundaries no longer sustained me. The vision revealed another path.

I assessed my skill set. I had a knack for computer programming. I had discovered the joy of computer programming after taking an introductory class in Fortran as a sophomore at UW back around 1973. I was also more than half-way through completing an Associate Degree in Data Processing at Madison Area Technical College, before abruptly dropping out. I knew computer programmers were in high demand and subsequently paid a lot more than minimum wage. Perhaps securing employment as a computer programmer would afford me a lot more quality time to seek out the existence of that idyllic vision I had just experienced. I was also close to completing a Bachelor of Science degree in Art at UW. For god's sake, Steve! What the hell is stopping you! Go back to school and complete your training. Get your damned degrees.

RETURN TO MADISON

The rest of my west coast vacation passed quickly. I have few memories of the return journey back home. There are vague memories of driving north up the west coast to Seattle, turning East and heading back to Madison hugging the southern border of Canada.

Back in Madison I made preparations to enroll in summer school for the University of Wisconsin, Department of Art. I rented another efficiency off of West Main street. The room was ironically only a block away from the apartment complex I had lived in while working at Rocky's just a month prior. I picked up a part-time job at the Memorial Union cafeteria. I started taking the rest of my requirements to complete my BS in Art.

The UW summer session went quickly. When fall semester arrived I re-enrolled at Madison Area Technical College to complete my Associate Degree in Data Processing (Business application computer programming). I became a full-time student, going part-time to both University of Wisconsin and Madison Area Technical College simultaneously.

I seemed to relish the demands made upon me. While I still wrestled with occasional bouts of depression I managed to get good grades at both institutions. Mostly As and Bs. Maybe one C in calligraphy. (With apologies to Jae!) I fell into a diverse and highly liberal social group working at the Memorial Union cafeteria. Working there was good for my emotional health. Being challenged, keeping busy crowded out occasional bouts of moodiness. Another healthy thing I did after returning to Madison was reestablish contacts with several West High school friends, like Jeff Milsap, Dan Butler, and Kim Nash.

One day, Kim Nash encouraged me to drop by Nick's Restaurant off of State Street on a Wednesday evening. Kim told me there existed a collection highly eccentric science fiction fans who hung out there. Many of them had recently put together a science fiction convention the previous winter. I had to check the establishment out. I soon made a lot more friends.

* * *

FINAL THOUGHTS

Regarding my second walkabout: I think it was mostly about my personal search for a life-path. Finding a life-path is a journey in itself. It seems to be a passage that never ends, not until you die. As it typically is for most, my journey has included countless twists and turns, many that were not anticipated. No doubt there are more twists to come. I have few regrets.

There are countless textbooks that ponder endlessly the topic of depression. In the modern age we live in it would seem the affliction pretty much afflicts everyone at sometime in their life in various degrees. Regarding my own encounters with depression, I came to realize it's not something I had to get over to be cured of. I never conquered my "depression". With patience and support I have learned ways to live through occasional encounters. Partaking of professional therapy when I was in my early 30s eventually lead me to an unexpected realization that I had been sexually abused when I was around 18 months old. A Japanese house maid my parents had hired to take care of the children while we were living in the country back in the 1950s did the dirty deed. There seems to be a general consensus that sexual identity probably starts forming around the ages of 18 months to 2 years. It's not a opportune time for unwanted intrusions that one has no control over messing around with the formation of that highly personal identity. While I'll never know for sure I suspect several roots that fed into my particular form of depression, along with learned feelings of helplessness, may have sprung from having been thrown down that poison well. I have been fortunate in the sense that acquiring habits that challenged me to take back my life as creatively as I can turned out to be the best prescription. When I was able to realize that feeling depressed or helpless in itself would not kill me, I slowly acquired faith that all that was really required of me during hard times was to simply keep on walking. Two steps forward, one step backwards. It still adds up. When depressed I learned one of the best chicken soup recipes I could administer was to just keep it simple. Just take care my *self*. Honor and respect my *self*. Make it a point to be kind to *self*. And don't stay isolated. Spend quality time with others. That's how I managed loose track of the fact that maybe just yesterday, or last week, or perhaps several months ago I had been depressed.

The idyllic vision I encountered back in the Holiday Inn room where I saw myself living under a peaceful forest where artists and craftsmen creating their life's-work for visiting tourists never manifested - certainly not in the literal sense. OTOH, when I look out the front and back porches of the house Darlene and I cohabit I see endless rows of mature deciduous trees. They shade our neighborhood. There be pine trees here too! This is where Darlene and I create own life-work. We have been doing so for quite some time. These days I may not be painting in the same dedicated manner that I had once done back in the late 70s and 80s during the heyday of my brief claim-to-fame in the SF fandom universe. My creative energies have wandered down more pathways than I could have imagined I'd be interested in pursuing. Besides producing 2D art I've explored the art of composing music and researching the math and geometry behind orbital mechanics. Without question, any one of these subjects, by themselves, could turn into full-time jobs.

As I've gotten older I've allowed myself to be more comfortable working with the more intuitive non-linear side of my nature. Trying to integrate intuition with the more logical rational part of me has been a life-long process. I learned that my intuition definitely has its own set of opinions. It can be challenging allowing intuition to occasionally have the floor and not feel like I have to later apologize for what that portion of me feels a need to express. This is especially the case when intuitive impressions might seem to contradict what common sense dictates. I have come to realize that intuition is occasionally capable of pointing me to practical answers that the rational side of me might be ill-equipped to address. I suspect my on-going Kepler research project is an example of such a collaborative effort. The project it's not just about numbers. I continue to be astonished at how organized and intelligently designed the architecture of *Orbital Mechanics feels to me*. But then, so is the Theory of Evolution. My Intuition would seem to suggest to me that we're not the only form of Awareness that loves to play with dice.

With a little luck I may have another fifteen to thirty years of creativity left to continue walking my twisty little life-path. Perhaps Monty Python's Holy Grail said it best: "I'm not dead yet!"

Steven Vincent Johnson.

Or

MAIL BAG

#365 - November 2016

Or

REDACTED

Other Stuff

After taking a 9 month hiatus from my Kepler Research project I'm back in the swing of *Orbital Mechanics*. I realize some might be puzzled as to why I would want to spend a good chunk of my remaining retirement years staring at computer screens writing turgid C# code. In my own defense, I'm a computer geek. I enjoy generating detailed computer graphics. Creating static graphics and animations of orbiting bodies challenges me. There's a lot of data to be extracted and analyzed in the form of precise orbital positions and angles. This is data minding. Fortunately, I enjoy data mining.

In prior TURBO installments I've revealed some of the details pertaining to my research. Some of that research might possibly turn into useful insights worth publishing. At least that's one of my goals.

I'm currently investigating a mathematical concept known as *Kepler's Equation*, (*KE*). (For more info, google or Wiki: *Kepler's Equation*). *KE* plots the orbits of planets in elliptical orbits with considerable preciseness. It's known as a transcendental equation. What that means is that for the past 500 years *KE* could only be solved through numerical analysis. There is no known algebraic formula that defines the equation. Fortunately, and most curiously I might add, an inverse algebraic expression to *KE* does exist. Therefore, *KE* can be solved numerically. I believe Kepler, himself, discovered the inverse to the equation. He was also frustrated by the that he was forced to resort to using the inverse function to decipher *KE*. These days, the answer is easily resolved through the use of lightning fast computer algorithms that exploit the inverse algebraic expression to *KE*. Computers iterate endlessly until a sufficiently accurate answer is derived depending on how many decimal points of accuracy are required.

At present I'm still too naive to be intimidated by the fact that Kepler, Newton, and possibly Richard Feynman, failed to find what I'm looking for. That said, I have some ideas on where to look. I've stumbled across some interesting geometric constructions that are generated through the application of parametric equations. It's my current assumption that prior researchers may have not considered exploring these geometric constructions as potential hiding places. I give myself a 10 to 20 percent chance of succeeding. Not good odds.

For a graphic explanation of Kepler's Equation look at the upper two graphics side-by-side on the following page. *You are not required to understand what these graphics represent.* Hell! It's taken me more than a year to figure out how to properly exploit the inverse methodology in computer code. I can give you a million excuses as to why it took so long. One big excuse: *TRUMP!* Need I say more?

Researching Orbital Mechanics is a time consuming business. Presently, this project has higher priority than my TURBO commitments. In order to better balance my schedule it's likely that I'll be making TURBO contributions every other month, at least for the foreseeable future. Hopefully, this will give me sufficient breathing room to better balance my Kepler obsessions with TURBO commitments.

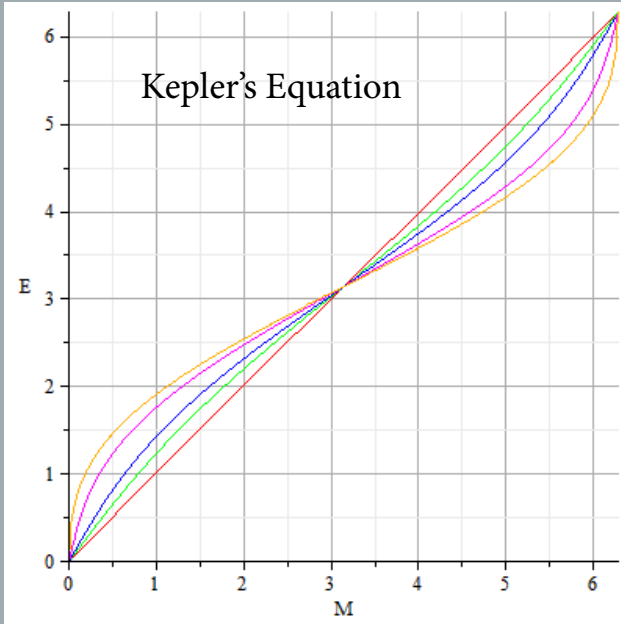
- Steve

OR

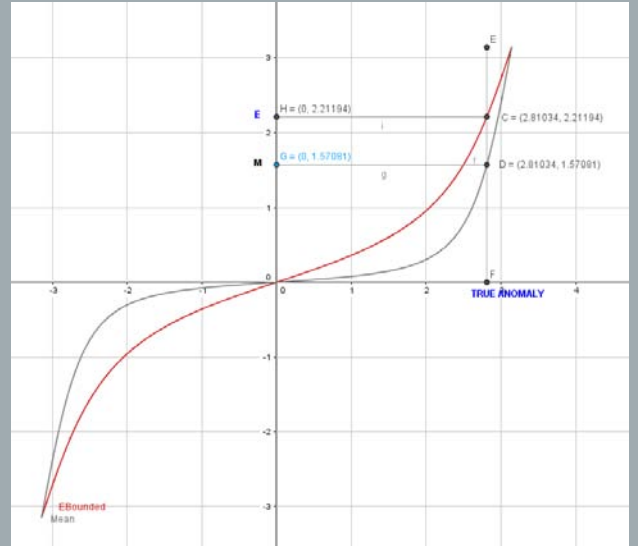
Until March.



"Mongo only pawn in game of life."



This is a graphic representation of *Kepler's Equation*. There is no known algebraic expression that can generate what this graph depicts. Source Wikipedia.



This is a generated graphic that represents, algebraically, a methodology of solving *Kepler's Equation* through the use of inverse equations. The answer is derived through a process of numerical iteration. I created the graphic using Geogebra software.



Seeking higher ground in the vet examination room.
Yes, Charm, I believe that's a thermometer.