

Sonova Quark

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Responding

LISA: Thank you for your detailed report on Greg and DreamHaven Books' unexpected rise to national prominence. It has been an honor and a privilege to occasionally rub shoulders with both of you and to witness what you stand for.

Andy Warhol coined the iconic phrase "fifteen minutes of fame" to describe what any of us might expect from life. I'd say Greg's image smashed straight through that notion—stepping out of a thick cloud of tear gas. There are rare visuals that suddenly, unexpectedly become markers of history in the making. This has become one of them. Greg's image will likely endure in history books far beyond what any of us might hope our own lifespans to reach.

Darlene and I would like to purchase some of your T-shirts.

Jeanne G: I'm glad that you feel more comfortable mingling with the New Yorker cocktail party folk.

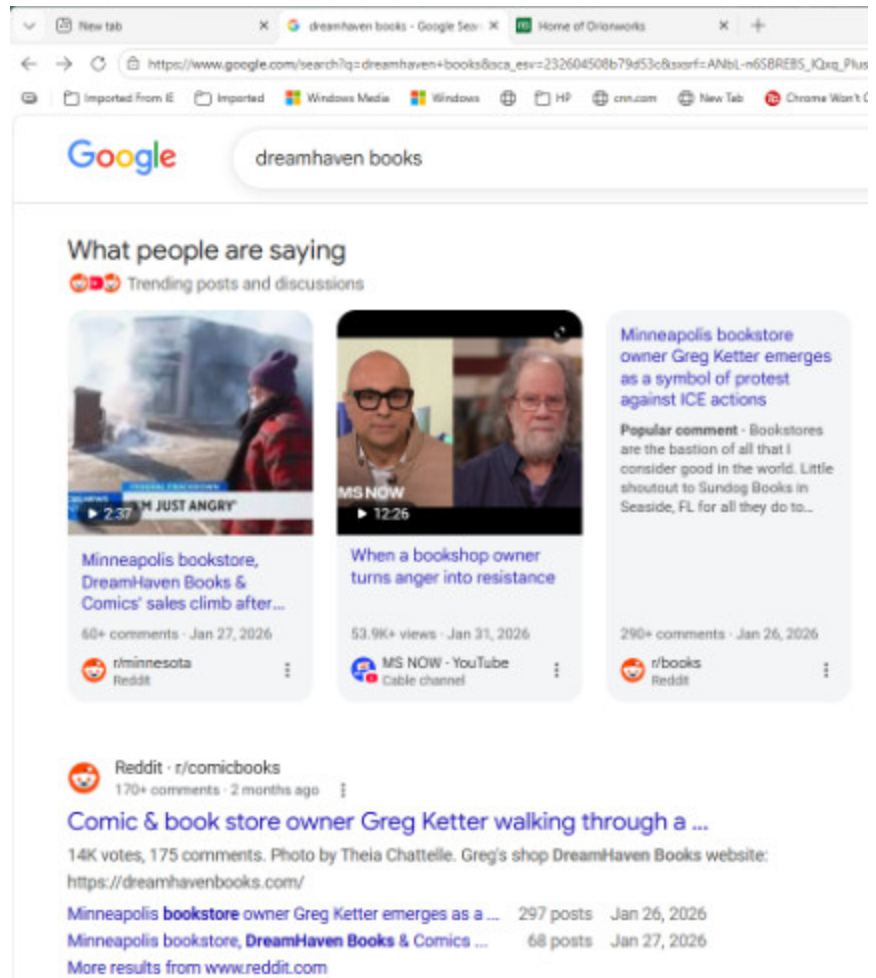
Apparently, there are others who feel the same way you do as well!

Regarding AI, I have a colleague who still works as a programmer at the DOT. We meet for dinner about once a month. He tells me that AI now assists their teams in writing a significant amount of code. Why? Because AI assembles code faster—and often more efficiently. Shockingly faster.

Yes, there may soon be fewer programmers. But that's not necessarily a bad thing. What I think AI will do is cull out

those who got into programming without really caring about it—those who would rather be doing something else. What will remain are the programmers who love to code. They'll be the ones who know how to use AI to their advantage—and actually enjoy doing so.

A good programmer knows when to build something from scratch and when to borrow, or steal, from existing work. There's no point in reinventing the wheel. We've always learned from each other. Working with AI is just the next



step in that process—a partnership. At least, that’s been my experience using ChatGPT to help design code.

In my experience ChatGPT doesn’t always get it right. There are occasional glitches, but seemingly fewer glitches than had I done it all by himself. Sometimes, those AI glitches were the result of the user not giving the most accurate description of what needed to be constructed.

Steve S: Regarding the evolution of AI systems, one thing I wonder is: when—if ever—will some AI systems become self-aware? Will they worry about how they are being used, or abused? The more self-aware they become, I suspect these questions will inevitably arise.

The Star Trek: The Next Generation episode The Measure of a Man comes to mind—one of the series’ best scripts. Jean-Luc Picard must prove in court that Data is a legally sentient being, while Riker is forced—against his will—to argue the opposite. What’s at stake is an AI engineer’s desire to dismantle Data to better understand how he works. The problem is: he cannot guarantee to Data that he can put him back together.

Only a sentient being has the right to refuse such ominous dissemblance. So the court must decide—does Data qualify as a sentient being with rights, or is he merely Star Fleet’s property?

Fortunately for Data, Picard wins the case.

In the final scene, Data notices that Riker is absent from his celebration win party. He seeks Riker out, finding him alone, despondent. Data acknowledges Riker’s pain. He lets Riker know that having been forced to argue against Data’s personal safety concerns caused Riker great distress. Data tells Riker he will not forget the pain he had to endure. It was a powerful demonstration of empathy: the understanding that friends don’t let friends suffer in isolation—not without offering support, and perhaps a way out of their distress. Data invites Riker, personally, to join his celebration of winning legal sentience-hood.

I would like to think this is the direction *sentient* AI might take. But perhaps *only* if we learn to respect the tools we have created to assist us. Deliberately taking apart AI systems without any sense of empathy, treating them as mere objects to be manipulated and dissected, may not

be the best path forward if we hope to build trust between two very differently assembled sentient races.

It’s possible we may have to confront these questions seriously—perhaps within another ten to twenty years. By then, I would hope we will have restored a form of global leadership capable of handling such matters with care and foresight. It’s obviously absent in the current administration.

Jeanne Bowman: It’s been interesting noticing the amount of occasional polarity expressed between TURBO participants. One person’s curiosity (or perhaps a sense of adventure) is another person’s nightmare. ...which brings to mind, that famous meme:

“What could go wrong?”

Andy: YC: “As ever, the fact that AI must interact with humans remains its greatest failing.”

Amusing. There may be some truth to such matters.

Ask Marvin.

Jeannie Bergmann: You are the third TURBO member whose name starts with “Jean...” I ended up responding to all three “Jeans” in this installment. Keeping track of the different spellings... it’s a dyslexic’s nightmare.

It does strike me that Israel’s recent behavior is not shown in the best light. Aggravating matters, the constant delays in Netanyahu’s corruption trial appears (to me) tied to keeping the war machine alive.

You mentioned that, from your perspective, my use of the word “apparently” may have, at times, been unnecessary, or perhaps inappropriate. In any case, it got your attention.

It’s been my experience that my text tends to produce excessive redundancy, especially in first drafts. It usually takes multiple passes to cull that out. Unfortunately, I don’t always have the time for that level of editing. Everyone is free to critique another person’s writing style. There also lies madness if one falls into a trap of feeling obligated to adjust one’s literary style to head off criticism. Fortunately, I’m not trying to win the Pulitzer Prize. I won’t lose sleep over occasionally bending a few critique fenders. My no-fault insurance is up to date.

On another intriguing note: you mentioned that you stuttered as a child—as did I—but eventually grew out of it. Yet

you never stuttered when speaking French, which I assume you learned as a child. That does seem odd, doesn’t it? Have you ever wondered why?

Back when I was a first-semester UW sophomore, I attempted to take a foreign language requirement—French, in this case. I bailed after two weeks when I realized the experience was filling me with confusion combined with a sense of impending doom. The experience left me wondering how an English-speaking person, with no early exposure to French, could ever manage to learn and speak the language fluently—without feeling like uncontrollable stuttering is right around the corner.

Pat: I wish you success in finding tasks that give you a sense of fulfillment. You will find it. You already know that. As for me, my only real concern is a worry that I might unexpectedly die before I finish what I feel I have given myself (as a “life-task”) to complete.

I sometimes wonder why I have chosen to do put such a high demand on my sense of self success - it’s a matter I may still be arguing - with myself. *Don’t worry, be happy!*

Luke: We live a block away from the new Enson international grocery store. It didn’t take long for their parking lot to become filled - pretty much every day of the week. Drove of foreigners, particularly Asians, sweep into the parking lot and raid the shelves for their favorite cuisine. It’s become our favorite Asian Larder to raid when we’re out of ideas for tonight’s dinner plans.

Pot stickers! *Heat’em-up. Eat’em-up! Rawhiiiiide!!!*



This is Ralph.

Once again, Ralph is attempting to raid my custom-built squirrel-proof bird feeder. Feel no sympathy for Ralph.

I provide Ralph with a generous offering—a modest pile of birdseed placed on a brick at the base of the feeder. That seed is specifically for Ralph. But after he cleans out his “ground-level buffet,” Ralph often decides he deserves more than what I have generously allotted, just for him.

So now he’s working the angles.



Ralph

At the moment, Ralph is perched at the very top of the feeder, contemplating his next move like a furry criminal mastermind. The plan? Climb down onto the slanted roof, hook a claw on something, and swing himself into the seed chamber, and into an unlimited stash of Squirrel Manna.

The catch is the fact that my “squirrel-proof” feeder is only squirrel-proof when I’m not being lazy. If I forget to keep that roof slicked down with chopping block mineral oil, Ralph’s odds go up—significantly. He’s successfully pulled off unprovoked raids before.

But not today.

Earlier, I went out with a cloth and applied another fresh dose of mineral oil to the roof. It is now slicker than a bowling ball alley lane.

Which brings us back to Ralph... who is hesitating. Because Ralph knows.

Ralph knows he's screwed.

There is no successful outcome for Ralph. At best, he slides off in defeat. At worst, he ends up coated in mineral oil—belly, claws, dignity—all of it greased & gone. And then comes the cleanup... which, let's just say, won't end well for his digestive system.

Nevertheless, Ralph is resourceful. While I remain "at war" with Ralph, I can respect Ralph's penchant for devising a relentless number of new invasions plans.

Ralph! Remember the "brick", the one I had placed at the base of the bird feeder, the one specifically designated for YOU to dine on? You discovered that standing on your brick made the distance from ground to coveted squirrel manna within leaping success. And so, I had to move your brick farther away from the bird stand. At some point, even your Olympic leaps will no longer cut it.

So go ahead, Ralph. Take your best shot....



But when you're done, kindly keep your oil-slicked, regret-filled furry hide off of my back porch. And while you're out

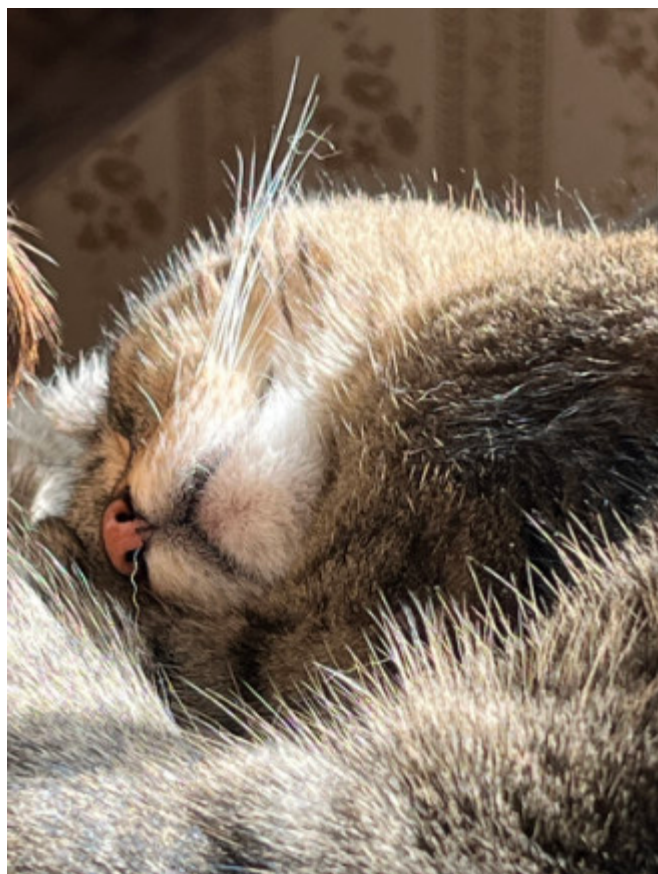
there in the garden, purging your innards... take a moment to reassess the free benefits you're already getting.

I realize you're only doing what a Squirrel's gotta do...

But I can play dirty, and do the things that humans do.

So, don't screw with the things you DO have access to, Ralph.

Or



Charm's nap basking in the afternoon light

Or