

Remote Art

Almost straight-overhead, three bald eagles swooped on thermals. I tried my best to capture their grandeur on the Remote Art workstation, but I worried about my eyes, and my hands. One of the raptors suddenly dove! My heart skipped a beat – it was unusual to see these great birds do anything other than circle at awesome heights. In a moment, the eagle pounced on a small duck, floating on Lake Gunterville – and without missing a beat, he rose towards the South, where I knew the nests were – the duck was a snack for her eaglets. When the eagle dove, I quickly pressed the *Save* button, and then I swiped the *New Canvas* button, so I was ready for the action, and I got most of the initial strokes in pretty quickly. I'd fill in the scenery later on, but I looked at the diving eagle, and the single duck, picked out of a dozen, skewered and lifted off. I captured its startled squawk, and its open-beak. *There, that was a keeper!* I looked at the sun, which was almost touching the horizon, and I started packing up my gear – I'd be back tomorrow to finish off my eagle series. The Remote Art competition ends Saturday, so I've got a lot to do.

"Come on, Susie," I said to my Labrador. She was an old dog, but she loved to "help me" paint. Mostly, her help consisted of sleeping at the foot of my Remote Art workstation, and scoring a pet from me every once in a while. I folded up my 4-D canvas capture device and headed for my Honda. Susie slowly rose and trodded along.

When I was done cooking dinner for my husband, Stu, we sat and talked for a while. I told him about the eagle's dive into the ducks, and he thought that was a great adventure.

"It'll show 'em how we really are, here on Earth," he said. "I've seen some of the junk that the other artists have submitted, and it's just not representative. We want to show 'em something grand, really grand."

He was right, of course. The artists on Thulanon had sent us a challenge, and we were going to rise to the occasion. Stu had explained it to me once, but I'm not a scientist, I'm an artist. Somehow, nothing can travel faster than light, except thoughts. Stu explained that about 30 years ago, a few people started picking up images in their dreams. Mostly their friends and associates thought they were stoned, crazy, or purely insane, but when they drew the images, little by little everyone figured out that they were picking up thoughts of beings far, far away. Suddenly we all knew that the images were interstellar art – we were not alone. More and more people captured the art, and the U.N. opened a *Museum of Remote Art*, to display the images of Thulanon. But it was all very technical and difficult, because the thoughts had to be decoded properly, and rendered properly. That's when I met Stu – he was working at the University of Alabama, Huntsville on his doctoral thesis on digital signal processing, and I was working on my master of fine art degree in fiber art. I was displaying some of the Remote Art on the university's giant screen when he happened to walk into the room and the first thing he said was "That sucks – it needs some image processing to clean it up."

I flipped him a stare with "Well, you're pretty haughty!"

"Well, sorry, but we could clean up that image – what is that, anyway? Is that some of that space art?"

"It is *Remote Art*. The U.N. is opening an exhibition. I'm thinking about a job offer with them – they need a curator."

"Well, ah, I didn't get your name?"

"I'm Doreen LaConda."

"I'm Stu Bellman; nice to meet you. Anyway, don't you think that art from the stars should be cleaned up a bit before you display it? These aren't paintings from the Caves of Lascaux. We should take the time to display them in their best possible light."

"Oh, now it's 'We'?"

"Sorry, Doreen, I'm just sayin', that's all."

"My friends call me 'Sketch'," I told him.

"My friends call me 'Doc', 'cause I'm working on my third Ph.D. degree. This one's in digital signal processing, and believe me, Sketch – I could do you some good."

Well, that was the start of a fine romance, and two more Ph.Ds for Stu. He tried to explain how the 4-dimensional signals could be manipulated and cleaned up, but, like I said, I'm not a scientist. In any case, the U.N. hired us, and the rest is history. After 10 years, I passed the baton to my young assistant, and I went back into the first-person art world.

When I was young, it was easy to paint – bring canvas, easel, paint, brushes and water. But when scientists and engineers saw the star art, new inventions sprang up, and one of them was the Remote Art workstation. Now we just use it, but it was a long-time coming: it paints your thoughts, in 4 dimensions, into a computer crystal. Stu explained that the layers of a diamond could hold so many petabytes of something, something, but I'm not an engineer – it just paints what I think.

Tomorrow I'll finish my 2 paintings. Saturday, the world will judge all the submissions and vote. The 3 winners will have their Remote Art sent to Thulanon by thought. There are thousands of trained thought-speakers now, and we carry on regular conferences with Thulanons – about art, and only art. They told us that they didn't want to get involved in our politics, or other trivial matters, and that art was the only important thing. At least I understand that!

Now it's Friday night. Stu is with me, and his eyes light up at my submissions. "Baby, you're the greatest," he says, and then I push *Send*.

NOTE: This story is in the format of "flash fiction," which allows a maximum of 1,000 words.