

## Beauty

The 51<sup>st</sup> Century was a time of peace and prosperity throughout the galaxy. It was an age of political stability. It was an age where the standards of living were high. Scientists could afford to devote their lives to the advancement of knowledge and technology. Artists and musicians had ample patrons to support them as they produced their inimitable masterpieces. Businesses was always booming; industrious entrepreneurs were becoming CEOs of interplanetary corporations overnight. Literature, medicine, philosophy, and mathematics flourished to unrivaled heights as humanity furthered its unending quest for enlightenment.

This was an age where a moral code was something important. A zeitgeist of benevolence and altruism pervaded throughout the Galactic Empire, its warm and gentle hand touching the heart of every man, woman, and child, from the Chairman of the Pavarian Parliament to the lowliest of farmers. Crime was at an all-time low, and military conflict nearly nonexistent. This was truly a Golden Age.

The crème de la crème of humankind's achievement was exhibited annually at the renowned Garuzon Convention. Every year, each solar system in the empire would appoint its two most distinguished citizens to represent them on the planet Garuzon. There, in a week-long celebration of the accomplishments of the civilization, they would unearth their greatest works.

Historians have since recognized the Convention of 5035 as the pinnacle of the millennium. In this annus mirabilis, the prestige and brilliance of the delegates were unrivaled. Professor Hans Thymalin presented a mind-boggling lecture revealing his discovery of the

discipline of trans-dimensional geometry, which opened up whole new fields of research in the analytical topology of temporal mechanics. The mellifluous melody in “Sonata of the Millowbird”, composed and performed by Marto Holmsley, had angels weeping with joy. The tragic play “Benedon of Omega-5” broke the heart of even the most stolid of critics, and would be taught in literature classes on every decent planet for hundreds of years to come. The finest culinary artisans served exquisite exotic dishes, supplemented with luxurious wines and canned cheeses.

But perhaps most memorable of all was the art display on the final day of the convention. Hundreds of artists presented their magnum opi, which they in many cases had been working on most of their lives. The display was broadcast superluminally to every holograph projector in the empire- over ten trillion people. To please the sponsors, the Garuzonians decided to have a panel of three judges award the honor of “Artist of the Year” to the creator of the most magnificent of masterpieces.

Even more surprising was the decree that the panel should not be comprised solely of experts in the field. Art, they said, is an expression of the soul, and should be able to connect with and be understood by plebeians and patricians alike. Thus, the panel was to consist of one artistic connoisseur- namely the impressionist painter Bernoli Mergadicci of Theta-6- and two completely random individuals from anywhere in the empire, who were to be chosen by lottery. The lucky winners turned out to be Lerida Foster, a waitress at a diner on Haladonia, and Malofar Benevint, a beekeeper from the outskirts of Epsilon-6. Needless to say, neither Foster nor Benevint knew the slightest thing about artistic techniques.

Of all the breathtaking pieces of artwork, two came quickly to the forefront. The first was a three-dimensional painting by Sellunius Macron entitled “Bridge on the River Gwendolyn”, which featured a beautiful scene of an old, run down bridge over a frozen river. Then, using an intricate network of holographic projections, the river seems to melt under a shining spring sun, and the image pans to the right to reveal the blooming of flowers in brilliant hues of goldenrod and cerulean which stretch across the horizon.

The second was a majestic sculptural rendition of the Trojan Horse of Greek mythology, by Lidneus Saraffat, entitled “Beautiful Treachery”. Made of a synthetic hydrocarbon resembling wood, the grandiose horse stood imposingly over a battalion of awestruck Trojan soldiers whose stature and visages were constructed with such tremendous precision that it was hard for the judges to believe they weren’t real.

The panel convened that evening to decide which artist would be crowned “Artist of the year.” Mergadicci vehemently argued that the title belonged to Macron, pointing out that his use of holographics to amalgamate and dissociate the shading, as well as his novel yet astonishingly effective integration of impressionist and neotemporalist elements serves masterfully to highlight the beauty of winter- a metaphor for the hostilities and ignorance of previous eras- gradually melting away into a harmonic assimilation of the vernal essences of a new generation. Foster, not understanding any of this, wholeheartedly agreed.

Benevint, however, was of the opinion that Saraffat’s horse was better. When asked why, he merely said, “It’s a horse. Horses are cool- I like horses. Why make things so complicated?”

Naturally, this display of obliviousness to the subtleties of art enraged Mergadicci. But unfortunately for him, the rules expressly stated that the panel must be unanimous in their decision. After two hours of futile attempts at intellectual discussion, (“But surely you understand that it is a symbol of the apotheosis of our unrestrainable ambitions!” “Yea, well I like horses.”) the panel was forced to admit its inability to reach an agreement.

The head of the Garuzonian council, Norbath Faraday, was quite disheartened by this, and resolved simply to decide the matter himself. After all, he reasoned, he was not as knowledgeable as the esteemed Mergadicci about the artists’ sophisticated methodologies, but he wasn’t as ignorant as Benevint. It was a fair compromise that he represent the general public.

Faraday asked for each side to present an argument supporting its choice. Mergadicci, desperately trying to convey the brilliance of Macron’s painting, embarked on a two-hour lecture explaining the significance of every color and every crevice of the work. Faraday understood about a quarter of it. Benevint said “It’s a horse. Horses are cool. I like horses.”

After thinking it over, Faraday found himself sympathizing with Benevint’s point of view. After all, how was he expected to appreciate something when he can’t even understand it? Macron’s painting was so byzantine and esoteric in its construction that it simply had very little aesthetic appeal to the general populous. Beauty, he reasoned, cannot be labeled. It can’t be measured, or defined, or categorized, or dissected and placed in a cardboard box. Intrinsic beauty can only be felt. And, like Benevint said, horses are cool.

And so it was decided that beauty is in the eye of the bee holder.

