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by
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“YAAAAAAA!”

CRASH! Damn, that hurt! I nurse the top of my head and try to stand as the contents of a cabinet rain down around me, small figurines and plates shattering on the floor. I lurch to my feet and stumble over to the computer. Typing in a few quick commands, I shutdown the cleaning field. I hit the enter key to issue the last command and the painting I was cleaning, Van Gogh's Starry Night, shudders slightly and topples gently forward off the easel.

Fear stabs my heart and I dive forward, sustaining another blow to the head and a sprain to my wrist as I crash into the wall. It's all for naught though as I miss the painting by several inches and it crashes to the floor. Heart pounding, I crawl over to the painting and gently lift it off the floor. Luckily, the painting is still intact, no damage was done to the canvas. The frame has only a few new blemishes, and since the frame was “distressed” to look old I figure a few more dings won't be noticed. Sighing with relief, I lay the painting face down on the floor and lean back against the wall, recovering for a few minutes from my ordeal.

You'd think that after having done this a few dozen times, I would have mastered the re-entry. In my defense I was being chased when I jumped back through the portal, so a certain amount of disarray was to be expected. I've had a few close calls since I discovered what I could do, but none like that. It all started when I invented a new method for cleaning paintings using buckyballs and encapsulated quantum singularities. I found that if captured the painting digitally on my computer, sprayed the microscopic balls on a painting, and exposed them to a computer controlled distorted EM field then the buckyballs would remove the grunge from the paintings, no mess, no precautions, no damage. I first noticed something was weird when I was cleaning a painting for the Boston MFA and tripped holding a cup of coffee I had just poured for myself. I fell head first and crashed to the floor, coffee flying. I panicked as the cup flew toward the Monet I was cleaning. Much to my shock it fell

right through. Intrigued, I put on a pair of Nitrile gloves and gingerly reached out for the painting.

Imagine my shock when I *didn't* touch the painting! My hand went right through the canvas!

Ever since then I've been experimenting and taking trips into the larger paintings. This last one, though, was almost enough to make me re-consider my adventures, or at least make me swear off Van Gogh. Sure, those adventures had become wonderful fodder for my new writing career in which I published under a pseudonym. It was the only way I could continue cleaning the paintings and get fresh material, but hey, I was willing to trade off fame for fortune.

I glance down at the painting, glad the I managed to shut off the computer in time. If that *thing* had followed me back..... The problem with paint jumping, was that the worlds they led to were complete un-knowns, brought into being by the artists imagination. The un-known truth was these artists were actually quasi-psychics, able to read the time and dimensional streams. At least that's what I've come to understand from my limited research. That stuff about making political, social or economic statements? Total crap. And don't even get me started on Escher or Dali! It's amazing those guys never went insane! Well, maybe Dali, just a little.

At least now I have an inkling why Van Gogh was such a tortured artist. The worlds he tapped into... well let's say they make Picasso's look like Sesame Street. The one I just came from, Starry Night, was actually a hellish world, where the humans were kept in villages to be used as food and power sources for the most intelligently evil creatures ever to grace the dimensional continuum. That big black thing in the foreground? That's actually one of the beasts, a giant mass of tentacles and venom that strangles its paralyzed victims for pleasure. And *that* was what I was fleeing from. I was just glad I was able to escape with all my appendages in tact. Turing off the portal would have been difficult without two hands.

I look down quickly when a noise comes from the painting resting beside me.. I stare at the back of the painting, encased in its frame of gold, willing it to lie still. It doesn't. I think we're all in trouble.