

Arcade Encounter

by Aaron Sabatine

Looking over the crowd in the arcade is like looking over a crowd of zombies. Buzzed and blank, not concerned with the purpose of this hallowed ground. This isn't just a novelty for me, sliding tokens into slots and interacting with artificial intelligence. This is the only place beauty exists. A girl bumps into my arm, rattling the stash of golden-colored tokens I have in a case strapped to my belt.

"Oh, sorry," she says softly. Her pale breasts are spilling out of her tiny tank top, and she presses them into my side as we briefly stop in the traffic. She's short like me, and for a moment we're in the shade of a forest of giants. "I like your necklace," she says.

It's a struggle for me to say "Thanks." There's no way she knows where those runic symbols come from. "Do you want to come with me?" I ask, immediately regretting it. I want to go it alone.

"Where?" She looks pretty gaunt and her eyes are bloodshot, too much direct optical nerve stimulation. I wonder what she's addicted to.

"Cyborg Viking."

"That's where I was going, how did you know?" she says, not smiling. I grin, not quite sure if she's serious. It feels good leading the way through the jungle.

"I'm on stage 34," I say before plugging in to the old machine. I'm not getting any younger, my brain needs a lot more shots of electricity than when I was a teenager.

She puts her mouth next to my ear and says suggestively, "Well let's get all the way to 72. I'll take you to the Valkyrie Pleasure Planet..."

That's all I needed to hear.

