

A Coney Island of the Mind

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(With immense debt to Lawrence Ferlinghetti.)

Reality Parlor.

He pays his money and goes back to the cubicle with the treadmill and pulls on the waldos, puts on the heavy eyeless, earless helmet. He grabs for the handlebars suspended before him, blind in the helmet that smells intimately of someone else's hair.

Now he can see. Not the handlebars hung from the ceiling on a tape-wrapped cable, not the treadmill. He is the cat with future feet. He sees a schematic of a room; all the lines of the room are in pink neon on velvet black, and in his ears instead of the seasound of the helmet he hears the sound of open space. A room sounds different than a helmet even when there's nothing to hear.

A keyboard appears, or rather a line drawing of a keyboard with all the letters on the keys glowing neon blue. Over it in neon blue letters is the message, "Please type in your user ID."

"Cobalt," he types, letting go of the handlebars. The waldos give him the sensation of hitting keys, give him feedback. His password is "Nagasaki."

A neon pink door draws itself on the velvet wall in front of him. The keyboard disappears and the handlebars appear in pink neon schematic until he grabs them. Then they disappear from sight but he can still feel them, safe in his gloved hands. He starts forward [the treadmill lurches a bit under his blind feet but it always does that at first so he is accustomed to it, doesn't really think about it, just kind of expects it and forgets about it] through the door which opens up ahead of him, pulling apart like elevator doors into the party.

The party isn't a schematic, the party looks real. The party is a big space full of people dressed all ways--boys with big hair and girls with latex skulls and NPC in evening gowns and tuxes--as he comes out of the elevator he looks to the right, to the mirrors and sees himself, sees Cobalt, sees a Tom Sawyer in the twenty-first century, a flagboy in a blue silk jacket and thigh high boots with a knotwork of burgundy cords at the hips. All angles in the face, smooth face like a razor, a face he had custom configured in hours of bought-time at the reality parlor, not playing the reality streets, not even looking, just working on his own look. Cobalt eyes like lasers, and blue-steel braids for hair.

Edgelook, whatta-look, hot damn.

Not what he looks like at all in the mundane world of Cincinnati, Ohio, but he isn't in Cincinnati, ho, flagboy, he's not in Kansas anymore, he is at the PARTY. Here he is, a serious dog, a democratic dog, but he doesn't think he'll spend a lot of time at the party today. Looking around he doesn't see anyone he knows. Not that that means they aren't there, because anyone can look like anything, but if they don't have a handle he recognizes and they don't go calling out for Cobalt, then they don't want to be people he knows, right? And anyway, this afternoon the partyroom is full of off-the-racks

