

Neon Lovers

by Adrik Kemp

Unlocking our psychic potential was only a matter of computing, in the end. It had very little to do with chakras and ESP (although that's still up for debate) and everything to do with programmed intelligence and big data.

My zoomer parents couldn't get enough of it. My millennial grandparents shared every second of their children's lives online, in private and public apps, through DMs, posts and in some cases, live feeds. And from that, the myriad apps learned everything about the zoomers. They were a kind of symbiote, a proto-generation for our own. By the time I was born, we could be app-bonded through a couple of slightly invasive procedures done at birth.

My parents were split between their physical bodies and the personas built from them in photos, videos and endless posts.

For me, it's always been one.

Permanent lenses cap my eyes. They're mirrored and reflect the neon blues and reds of the city. My tongue and vocal chords are embedded with perennial recorders that modulate and mirror any voice, but also feed my apps my every utterance.

My forearm implants came later. Instead of interfacing with a computer, I project screens from my fingers. I've got streams of my friends projected on the dark windows of shuttered shops around me. My sometime lover Caliph is on a pod, coming my way. Aside from the usual implants, ze is experimenting with body-mods. The only one visible in Caliph's feed is the detachable plate ze replaced zirs scalp with. It's a cascade of cables that drape over zir shoulders in iridescent blues like an electronic ocean. The recognition app in my lenses tells me ze's nervous about meeting me and that ze's watching feeds of zir other lover, Midnight.

Enraged and annoyed that my anger is being broadcast to my intimate connections per the terms and conditions my parents agreed to at my birth, I swipe all my feeds away for now and stare at the night sky, imagining the stars obliterated by light pollution. The upper levels are ablaze with neon that buzzes and flashes staccato onto pedestrians.

We're all different. Our fashion dictated by retro in different grades. Some favour the homespun normcore of the 2020s. Others like the cyberpunk of the 1980s. And others are in nothing but modern fleshtech. Some of our faces are masked to avoid detection, others have implants to keep their visage blank. But it's not just your face that gives you away. It's your friends and sub-vocalised thoughts, your movement patterns and search history. Even the masked are open books.

Caliph nudges my proximity app and I let it spin me in zir direction. Zir cable locs mirror the neon, now purple and black against the light from above. Ze kisses me a greeting, our implants feeding the passion to our databanks. I

ignore my recognition app as it warns Caliph is keeping something from me and slip my hand in zirs.

“You’re angry about Midnight,” Caliph’s voice is modulated phonics, the way I like it.

“No shit.”

“You know I think monogamy is a zoomer trap.” Caliph smiles and kisses me. “But within, I’m fiercely loyal to you. I will never not be.”

I don’t believe zir, mainly because my recognition app is telling me not to, so I pull away. “How can I believe you, when my app says you’re lying.”

“It doesn’t know me.”

I scoff.

“Reconnect with me and I’ll prove it,” whispers Caliph as ze pulls a long silver cable from zir head, at the same time lifts my hair to unlatch the matching cable protruding from behind my ear. Ze pulls both out and hands zirs to me.

I hesitate just a moment before consenting to reconnect. At once, our minds and bodies unite.

I see my face and Caliph’s at the same time. Our minds melt into one and I allow myself a smile, knowing that while the apps were right about Caliph’s lies, they were wrong about what the lie was about. I stroke zir cheek and feel my hand on zir skin. Caliph is a beautiful, polyamorous revolutionary, and whatever I find out while connected, ze will stay that way.