

JAMES JOYCE DROPS FOUR QUARTERS

AT THE RETRO ARCADE

By Eric Henry Sanders

Quantum Arcade: a dim converted schoolhouse beside a cornfield. I watch Charlie play and sip my pint. Never understood Galaga. What is that flying about? Insect? But probably. It tries to pull him up in its tractor beam, so blind. Fires at him. Misses. It will fly away after a diving run. There he goes, funny little beggar.

“I will bring you something,” I tell her. I hope to find a pair of bouncing cherries, though I know I don’t have much time. I turn a blind end and am surrounded by ghosts. They haunt me from all directions. Filled with anger and anguish I grab a power pellet and pursue the one I later recognize as Blinky. He escapes; Inky and Clyde and the others scatter as quickly they’d appeared. Alone, I ache to see Ms. Pac-Man, to chase her and be chased, to see her bow and red lips, to hear her theme music.

Stately, plump Q*Bert descends the stairhead. The mockery of it! Your absurd name! Where do they go at night, I wonder? Coily, Slick and Sam, Ugg and Wrongway. Approaching the high-score I see myself a creature driven and derided by vanity.

Every life is many levels, level after level. The Wizard has died and we are surrounded by grunts and thieves. We walk through ourselves, meeting demons, lobbers, sorcerers, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love. But always meeting ourselves. I don’t want to die. Damn Death. Pray for life. Pray for us. Elf needs food badly. And pray for us. And pray for us.