

# Arcade Attraction – Prelude

By  
Rose / MewMus

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With a soft groan and the stretching of limbs followed by a content sigh, Rose slowly awoke from her slumber. Eye's slowly adjusting to the bright lights above, grimacing at a small pain in her lower back. "Hec, what did a fall asleep on again..." she looked over to where she'd been laying. A novelty mouse pad, with a silicon bulge at its base, one of those often used for illustrating women's breasts, but instead this was a pile of eggs with a cartoon chicken above it. The hen heavily faded over time from extended use of the pad, having the words "just my cluck" barely still visible near its edge. A well-used microfiber cloth lay over the culprit of Rose's sore back. Grumpily she leaned forwards and kicked it to the side, "I pen lid? Really?" she pouted looking over her otherwise comfortable makeshift bed "it must've rolled over at some point".

Stretching her arms high into the sky Rose let out another loud yawn, though it would surely sound like just a squeak to anyone else around. Taking in her surroundings more now that her eyes had adjusted, what should be a simple staff counter to most seemed like a collection of small buildings to her. It had been months since Rose had gone through her transformation and gained a whole new perspective on her life, but she'd still not fully grown used to the sights when only doll sized.

She was quickly pulled out of her deep thought though by the soft thuds of someone approaching the counter. Leaning back under the lip above her to not be seen, still waking up and unwilling to help a customer, only to breathe a sigh of relief moments later as a large friendly figure rounded the corner.

“Oh you’re up pipsqueak!” mused the looming figure down towards the fairy. Fuzzy fingers holding a DVD case in hand as she leaned over the computer next to Rose. Scanning the entry into the ageing machine with a loud beep before looking up its rental history. Relaxing a bit Rose took a few steps towards the counter edge responding back with a sleepy grunt.

She looked up at her coworker as they typed away at the computer, seemingly very focused on inventory. Whilst they’d worked together for some time Rose still wasn’t completely used to her coworker’s appearance. Towering over her, although kinda short to a regular person, was a brightly coloured puppet-like creature. Rose remembers coming in to open the store one day to find it already opened and shortly after greeted by this felt-faced being. Initially, she thought someone in a suit had broken in, but after a lot of convincing Rose slowly came to accept the truth.

The thing is, this store was magic, or more accurately she was? The whole situation is still a little confusing in the details and felt very chicken and egg. But since Rose was a fairy, the store had become her domain, which meant that it had some magic and a will all of its own. In turn, the colourful puppet before her now was in reality a manifestation of that will. It was all too much to think about right now though as Rose shook her head and called up to her colleague instead “busy tonight Mop?” she inquired cheerfully.

“Hmm?” the light blue felt face turned to her “oh we’ve had like two customers come through” they continued to type on the computer “not that you’d know sleeping on the job” they teased.

“Listen okay... I haven’t had a lot of good sleep lately and this wrist wrest is a lot more comfortable than you’d expect” protested the small fairy in return. Mop’s large fuzzy hand lifted from the keyboard for a moment and hovered over

Rose's head, gently covering her face with the felt palm.

"I know small fry, just teasing" they continued, returning her hand to work. Rose grumped a small blush on her cheeks embarrassed. "You know I can handle this on my own, I'm just happy to have the company, even if she's spending half of her time daydreaming" continued the puppet, her slightly animal-like muzzle contorting into a smile "take your time to wake up".

The genuine kindness in Mop's words caught Rose slightly off guard, but she took it to heart as she just nodded in response, moving to the edge of the vinyl counter top to sit. From this angle, the disparity in scale between the two was only more apparent. Looking down at Mop's plush-like feet, up their noodle-like legs that matched her equally noodly arms, connected to a reasonably fem but still distinctly bean-shaped plush body. It's hard to believe that Rose thought at one point they may have just been a person in a suit. Proportions like these just weren't natural, not that Rose could really say much about being natural considering her own tiny stature.

Rose looked down at her own legs, covered in small freckles where there hadn't been that long ago. Though they were the least intensive change she'd gone through. Thinking back on how it had all started, it was hard to piece together the exact order of events. Having spent much of her life dreaming about her various passions, Rose had been representing herself online as a fairy but was just a regular person. One night she'd had a peculiar dream, she remembered being face to face with herself in a mirror, except it wasn't herself. It was her fairy self, but she felt right, everything about that expression was on a deep level correct.

Moments later, she had embraced the mirror version of herself. Rose remembered crying, smiling and having a sense that everything was going to be

okay now, before waking up in her bed slightly nauseous. Later that day she'd been presented with the opportunity of a lifetime, an old family friend has a small video rental that he'd been looking to sell and move on from, but had offered to let Rose take it over and run it if she wanted to. She'd accepted the offer and within the month was running what could only be considered a failing business, but one that she'd found joy in. Then the strange occurrences began. Only a week or so into working there, profits would as if by magic be good every day. It made no real sense as the number of customers daily would often be in the single digits and normally only get one or two films and maybe a snack. But when it came to counting the till at closing, they'd always be in the green for that day by a few hundred dollars. Checking the books, the system and one day even just leaving the till open to watch, everything would be normal and line up just fine, but close came around and there would be high profits.

This was just the start though as other things slowly started changing. At first the carpet, Rose came in one day to find the old grey and torn up flooring had been replaced with new plush and high-quality space-themed arcade carpeting. She wasn't going to complain but it made no sense. Rose had spent hours pouring over the security feed that day, expecting to see her old family friend or maybe an old employee break in to switch out the flooring. But to her surprise, she watched how in a small window of around fifteen minutes during the night the grey carpet had slowly faded into the new. It looked almost like a bad photo filter and Rose had convinced herself that was what it was, that someone had doctored the footage. But she had a gut feeling that she was wrong.

A gut feeling that turned out to be right. Over the next week, many other changes occurred. Rose came in one day to find that the front of the shop had a face lift, new vibrant indigo paint with a glowing sign that read Cosmic Video. Until then the store didn't really have a name, so it was an improvement but not one that she'd signed up for. All the benches and shelves were swapped out

for newer ones, the ceiling got new paint and even the entire employee lounge was renovated to be more comfortable. Rose had tried installing her own security cameras, hiding them well where she was certain whoever was responsible wouldn't find them, but they just confirmed the same strange phenomenon of things fading into a new form.

It was around this time that Rose met up with the old family friend again, filled with so many questions and ready to get her answers. Except things didn't go that way, he met her in a cafe, seemingly much older than he had been just a few months prior, smiling warmly he had said "I see the shops started making you feel more at home" the phrasing having caught Rose completely off guard "I know you must have a lot of questions, but rest assured they will be answered in time" he had groaned a little pulling some paperwork out of his bag. It looked old, Rose remembers remarking on how old it had looked, but no matter how hard she tried to remember, couldn't recall what was spoken. He'd handed her the deeds to the property, she remembered protesting and that he had been insistent. Something about it being the estate's will and that it was her time now. Everything had been too much to take in and before she knew it, their talk had ended and she never saw him again.

In the time after that, Rose decided to camp out in the building. It was hers now after all so she could finally catch who was tampering with her footage and upgrading the establishment. That night she set up in the dark behind the counter and just sat waiting, hours rolled by until the red light of sunrise crept into the building. She'd stayed awake and heard not a sound, nor seen a single shadow out of place. Walking through the DVD isles she found not a single thing changed, confident that she had scared off the perpetrators. Starting the motions of getting ready for the day, turning on screens, booting up systems and finally opening the door to take her two-for-one deal sign out. Shuffling the metal advertisement out onto the cement street before turning around in

shock. Looking in through the narrow corridor of the entrance way something seemed off.

She stepped back through the store's threshold to find that the layout of the store had completely changed. DVD isles were now arranged in different row orientations, and the hanging televisions whilst still old CRT's were now larger and playing new advertisements boasting Cosmic Video branding. The counter had been completely replaced with a new one that was much easier to navigate but still felt the same and lastly all the lighting had been changed for coloured LED's that cycled between pink and blue.

“What the fuck” Rose couldn't help herself from exclaiming, “no way in hell did this just happen” she panicked slightly returning behind the counter to see that her sleeping bag and pillow were still in their place. “Okay Rose calm down, your store just... magically changed everything about itself.” She took stock of her surroundings, noting that the new layout was much better and the more colourful space theming did suit her tastes more. After a few moments of staring in disbelief, she couldn't help herself but call out.

“So what's the deal? You haunted or something?” she directed towards the storefront “Like I appreciate you cleaning yourself up and all, but it's a bit creepy” she continued, before waiting as if for the store to respond. To her surprise though, it did!

“Don't you worry your pretty head about it little lady” came the voice of a cowboy on the televisions. The direct line caused Rose to jump as she looked up at the screens, and an ad for some cowboy movie she had never seen before continued to play.

“Oh shit, just an ad” she sighed in relief “You nearly had me there!” she jested out towards the store but it called back.

“Listen hear mam” the cowboy on the television piped up again, Rose couldn’t help but watch in mild fear “I know this whole situation may be hard to understand, but just know that I’m here to help you!” the cowboy continued, talking to a bartender on the screen, but it felt like it was directly to Rose herself. “Listen I know you’ve only just come into owning this establishment, but understand that it has a history” the cowboy continued motioning around a saloon “if you treat it right it’ll treat you right back you hear?” he paused waiting for the bartender to respond.

“I think so” Rose whispered under her breath in perfect sync with the woman on screen. This caused her to jump in shock, still watching the screen with bated breath. The footage cut to a close-up of the cowboy smiling kindly “Now don’t go getting yourself into a panic lass” he reassured cupping the woman on the screens cheek “You just keep running things like normal and it’ll all work out, this legacy is yours now and we’re all excited to see what you do with the place” at this the ad suddenly cuts off, playing a two dollar Tuesday rental ident instead.

Rose remembers sitting there speechless for some time, unable to move or look away from the television. But the ad never came back on and nor did it line up with any of her other questions from there on. Eventually, she got back to work, familiarising herself with the new layout and accepting internally that she may in fact have come into the possession of a magical video rental.

The next few weeks continued actually pretty normal, no noticeable changes happened to the store, the number of customers didn’t really change either and the income stayed abnormally high. Due to some complications in her home

life, Rose temporarily moved into the back staff room some nights to rest, but no other disturbances really occurred. That was until one day looking in the mirror Rose started to notice some changes, she'd been gaining new freckles all over her body. Freckles weren't uncommon for her or her family, but this was a lot of new ones considering that she didn't go out in direct sunlight very often. She'd also noticed that her face and ears seemed to be a bit pointer than they had been before.

At first, she thought this was her imagination, but it was the next change that made her realise something was up. She'd started to get shorter. It was a subtle change, her clothes were feeling a bit baggier and she noticed she couldn't see the top of shelves without standing on her toes. Deciding to measure herself she found that she was a few centimetres shorter than she thought. This wasn't at first enough to alarm her, until a few days later she found that she couldn't see on top of shelves even on her tiptoes. This combined with her pants wanting to fall down caused her to measure again, once again a few more centimetres shorter. "Oh crap am I shrinking?" she'd thought out loud and for the first time in a while, the television responded, this time a cartoon doctor on screen standing in front of some zany machine.

"Why yes my dear you have shrunk!" he cackled "now now don't you worry, this is all part of the procedure I assure you" he continued talking down to his diminutive lab partner "this new perspective on life is just one important step in your growth into being your best self!" he cackled again before the video cut off to an ad for pizza. Suffice it to say this took Rose aback, but at this point, she had no reason not to trust the store, so she continued as normal for the time.

During this period, the store got chattier. Rose would occasionally speak out loud and the televisions would often answer with a line or two, always spoken through the voice of whatever character was on screen. It was during this period



that the back of the store slowly started gathering a collection of arcade machines. It started with just a lone pinball table, but then expanded into a couple of cabinets and an air hockey table. The number of customers picked up with this as well, going from single digits most days to often pushing into the low teens as people would stick around to play a few games at the back.

All the while, Rose was still losing tiny bits of height. It was pretty slow at first, just a couple of centimetres every other day, but one day Rose woke up to find herself significantly shorter, unable to look over the counter top anymore as she wandered to the front of the store. She hadn't noticed at first as her employee outfit had changed scale with her, but when she went to close the returns box it finally dawned on her sleep-addled brain. "Wait, that's not right" she commented out loud, before getting a response from behind her.

"No you look right to me" it teased

Now, this wouldn't be abnormal as she was quite used to the store talking to her through the televisions, but this voice was much closer and the screens weren't on yet. Scared she turned around slowly to be met by the smiling face of a colourful puppet.

Of course, now this was her friend Mop, but in that moment she panicked and froze on the spot. "Whoa calm down, it's all good" the puppet-like creature insisted standing back a bit to create some space and show it wasn't a threat "we've talked before, I just thought it'd be better for me to help out directly!" it took her a moment to process what this could mean.

"Y...You're the store?" she stammered out through her panic.

"Uh... something like that?" the puppet responded, its mouth flopping in a way

that didn't really line up with its words "look what's important right now is I'm here to help out" they motioned to the returns box Rose was struggling to manage "it looks like you could really use it"

She took a moment to consider the puppet's words and to look them over. Their light blue felt was clad with the Cosmic Video employee outfit and they even had a name badge slung around their neck on a colourful lanyard. Rose tried to make eye contact with the puppet, but it was difficult through their wild hair which covered most of their head. It looked like it was made out of a pink mop. "Th...Thanks, I guess? Umm..." she paused not sure what to say next.

"You can call me Mop!" the puppet said cheerfully, striding over towards Rose and leaning over her to pick up the returns box and lift it to the counter. "It's because of..." they started

"The mop for your hair?" Rose cut them off.

"Yeah! You got it" they laughed, starting all the regular opening routines for the store. Mop moved around like an absolute pro who'd been working there for years. Rose took a step back and just let them work, as she grew accustomed to her new shorter scale.

This was how the two had met, things continued this way for a while until one morning Rose awoke in the back of the store at a truly diminutive stature. Only around ten centimetres in scale. She recalls that Mop closed the store for that day and helped her get used to the new scale. Her glowing cyan wings and antennae followed the next day. They weren't real, in that her hand would just pass through the glowing light, but she did find eventually that she could fly and even move objects around as though she was her original size.

It had now been a couple of months since then. Minor changes to the store had happened, the uniforms were updated and the branding shifted to Cosmic Arcade and Video, but mostly things continued as normally as they could. Rose was a fairy now and worked with an oversized puppet monster. But none of this felt out of place or wrong, in fact, it wasn't even seen as odd to the customers that still visited. None of them commented on the strange staff and when Rose did try to confront them about it they all were simply dismissive. It's not that they couldn't see Rose was a small fairy now, they just didn't seem to think it was remarkable at all.

"Hey! Earth to Rose!" came Mop's mildly concerned voice, Rose looked up realising that she'd spent the last few minutes daydreaming about the past, in which time Mop had finally finished sorting out the inventory issue on the computer "what's the matter daydreaming about cute girls again?" they teased.

"Wh...What no!" Rose protested, flustering once again "I was just thinking about the past".

"Sure sure cutie" Mop continued to tease, leaning against the counter opposite Rose "I've seen how you get when I put certain cartoons on the tv's" pausing with a knowing smile.

"I... umm" Rose had been ambushed, she had genuinely been thinking about the past, but her thoughts were now turning to Mop's teasing "I just think that the characters are neat is all".

"Uh huh, okay then" Mop continues with a clearly unconvinced tone "Look I think it's cute that you're so into all those cartoon ladies" they motioned towards the televisions. Rose recognised one of her big crushes, a sporty cartoon rabbit on the screen. The movie she was from was pretty average, but

Rose always appreciated her character a lot. “Wouldn’t you want to go on a date with her or something?” inquired Mop, still teasing.

“Well... I mean... yeah obviously” Rose admitted in defeat “she’s really cute and works so hard, how can you not find that appealing?” the little fairy cleared her throat fluttering into the air “besides she’s out of my league anyways”.

“Oh I don’t know about that” flirted Mop, leaning close to the fluttering fairy feigning to pluck her from the air “you’re quite the catch after all” they laughed.

“Okay okay, that’s enough teasing” Rose insisted before starting to fly away from the counter “and again that’s not what I was thinking about” she huffed heading out towards the DVD isles.

“Alright miss grumpy guts, maybe you should be thinking about them” they teased one last time “maybe it’ll put you in a better mood” they called out before getting back to work.

Rose took her time browsing through the isles, marvelling at how they were like buildings to her now. Taking in the covers of DVD cases like they were full-sized cinema posters. She thought to herself how this honestly made the experience of looking for something to watch so much more engaging. Perhaps she could talk to Mop about getting some life-size poster cutouts or something along those lines. Looking from case to case she was soon greeted with the image of a cute mouse girl and her team of adventuring buddies. Volume one of a cartoon series Rose was also quite fond of.

She spent a while looking up and down the engineer mouse, observing that on the case she was probably close to her actual size and how close that was to her

own. Fluttering down onto the edge of the shelf to compare height more directly. Finding herself face to face with the printing of the cartoon character, the mouse's soft face having a wink and warm smile. In an instant Rose found herself blushing quite deeply. "Okay, maybe Mop was right about my interests" she grumbled under her breath before fluttering quickly away from the cartoon section.

The action movie aisle seemed like a better choice to browse for now, Rose thought as she let her cheeks calm down, avoiding Mop so she wouldn't see and tease her more. She marvelled at the shelves and how wide their collection was, they really did have everything. From the most popular recent films to old hidden gems. Rose was even convinced that they had some films that didn't really exist!

Fluttering a little too close to a shelf though she accidentally knocked over a DVD case, landing with a soft thud on the carpet. Rose groaned at her clumsiness and descended towards the case on the floor, getting ready to pick it up before a large gloved hand beat her to it. Surprised, Rose fluttered back and looked up at the person who just picked up the case. She hadn't heard a customer come in and was ready to apologise until she was met eye-to-eye with a cowboy.

She instantly recognised the man from her past and the early days of the store. It was him, the voice the store had used to talk to her the first time. Stammering herself he spoke first "Careful now little lady, you dropped this," he said in that same sweet tone from the trailer, placing the DVD back on the shelf, which Rose now recognised as an old western called Midway Saloon. "I best be on my way," he said before Rose could respond, tipping his hat before strolling around the corner of the aisle. Rose flew after him as fast as she could but by the time he'd rounded the corner, he was gone.

This wasn't the first time a character from one of the films on her shelves had come to life, it had happened once or twice before when she had come into work and seen Mop chatting with various popular characters who she'd first thought were customers. But this is the first time one had interacted with her so directly. Fatigued and a little shaken by everything going on that day and the deep reflection on the past, Rose headed back towards the front counter.

Mop was still behind, now scanning in a small pile of returned films. "I'm going to call it early today I think Mop, I'm really tired" she sighed.

"Oh yeah?" the puppet person responded "s'all good you do look exhausted" they continued "I'll close up don't worry about it".

"Thanks, Mop" Rose waved. Gathering up her things from behind the counter to get ready to leave.

"Yeah, don't sweat it, I'll be here tomorrow and you can tell me all about those cute cartoon girls of yours" they teased, clearly having not stopped that line of thought.

"MOP!" exclaimed Rose indignantly through a blush "you can't just...".

"Oh I can just!" they teased "who knows maybe I'll set you up on a date" Mop continued laughing to themselves.

"I..." Rose started but then chose not to respond, best not to encourage whatever they were planning "I'm going home, talk to you tomorrow brat".

"Okay Okay, travel safe small fry" Mop smiled before opening the door for Rose.

It wasn't a long flight back to the apartment where Rose lived, but for the entire journey, she couldn't help but run Mop's last words through her head. "Set me up on a date huh?" she mused aloud "what did she mean by that".

Relaxing onto her greatly oversized couch for the evening, she drifted off to rest. Whatever it meant, only tomorrow would tell.

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