

Barbara, by comparison to Koneko and Rias, was taking a more deliberate approach to exploring the hotel. She stopped in the lobby after donning the helmet and considered her surroundings with the analytical eye that made her such an effective crime-fighter back in her home dimension.

“A fully immersive VR environment, with sensation feedback and cognitive manipulation?”

Barbara pressed her palm against one of the couches in the sitting area and marvelled at the realistic feeling of the fabric against her skin. The others were right to be concerned, this sort of technology was far beyond the level that they were used to. A leap like this could only be undertaken by an outside interloper.

“Ma’am, are you okay?” Lena inquired from behind the desk.

“Sure. I was just admiring the lobby, that’s all.”

The kitsune giggled, “You’re the first guest I’ve seen who is more interested in the hotel than the rooms...”

Barbara shrugged, “I’m here for a few hours yet - and I like to take a deliberate pace with this sort of thing. This is all very impressive. I didn’t know they made virtual reality environments this advanced.”

Lena smiled patiently, “The Fantasia System used here is extremely innovative, presently we’re the only commercial company utilising it to provide a service to the public. I’m afraid I cannot share more specifics about how it works. Apologies.”

Barbara laughed it off, “Oh, don’t worry. I wasn’t expecting you to spill all of your private corporate details to a random guest. I’m going to check out the room. I’ll call for you if I need anything.”

“Of course. Enjoy your stay, Ma’am.”

Barbara moved up the stairs to the designated room. She found it curious that there were corridors that seemingly stretched on forever on both of her flanks. Were there other guests staying in them? Or was it set dressing for the sake of creating a fantastical impression? She stepped through the door to her room revealing, put simply, a hotel room. There were no windows, but a large king-sized bed and plenty of luxurious furniture were available to use.

It was nice, nicer than any hotel Barbara had ever paid to stay in. But the hotel room wasn’t the reason why people kept coming back and singing the place’s praises. The Fantasia System that they loved to boast about was the key selling point. From the moment that she entered the room and closed the door behind her, the space started to shift. A pedestal rose from the empty space in the middle of the floor and a screen flickered to life.

“Place your hand here to activate...”

Barbara followed the screen’s instructions. Once her bio-signature was confirmed, the screen switched to a list of different options for her to tinker with. Selecting ‘quick setup’ results in a series of pre-set scenarios appearing, posed in the form of what desires Barbara wanted to experience. Love, wealth, adventure, or comfort and relaxation.

Barbara wasn’t interested in any of those for the time being. She backed out and entered the ‘custom’ menu, which included a non-specific option that generated an environment based on the user’s personal experiences. She hesitated. Would they figure out who she was if she used that?

Batgirl wasn't even real in this universe, she was a fictional character. It must have been the case that other visitors used the system to live out their fantasies before.

Barbara took the plunge and allowed the system to take the wheel. The room disappeared into a cloud of neon-cyan cubes, before quickly rearranging themselves into a familiar location from the depths of her mind. They were in the clock tower she used as a base. The details were so precise that she knew immediately that it was a one-to-one replica.

She looked down, she was even wearing her undersuit after returning from an evening's crime-busting. The cowl and her armour were already placed onto the workbench for repair and analysis. Barbara remained cautious, walking over to her supercomputer and sitting down in the chair.

"This is odd," she mused to herself, "They must have some way of externalising our thoughts."

Barbara's mind consisted of two distinct halves. The one that was dedicated entirely to juggling various criminal masterminds, and the other that tried to make it through her daily life as the daughter of the police commissioner. She nearly leapt out of her skin when she heard a knocking on the reinforced metal door.

She turned to the security monitor and discovered that Kara waiting with a duffel bag slung over her shoulder. Barbara released the locks and allowed her inside.

"Hey, Kara."

"Barb! I'm really glad that you decided to invite me over. We never get some time to talk these days."

"Not unless the world's ending, no."

Her blue eyes trailed up and down her body. Kara laughed, "Jeeze Barb – you're already organizing girls' nights right after coming back from your patrol? Why don't you try and take it easy once in a while?"

Barbara blushed, "Ah, I wasn't expecting you to arrive so soon. Do you mind if I slip into something more comfortable?"

"Go ahead. I'll find a patch and stake my claim."

Barbara headed into the armoury and removed the stab-proof fabric that a majority of her costume was made from. Wearing the cape and cowl was a great honour, a heavy responsibility, and a serious pain in the ass. It was like being wrapped up in an uncomfortable blanket for hours and hours on end. It wasn't very good at keeping out the cold either. It struck that perfect balance between making her stew in her own sweat and shivering every time a stiff breeze rolled through.

"Maybe Mitsuru can whip up some new kind of breathable material?" she pondered. That girl was on another level. Barbara donned a pair of fluffy slippers and a tracksuit to kick around the attic with. Kara was already crashing on one of the couches when she returned, wearing a similarly relaxed t-shirt and bed-shorts combo that showed off her toned body.

"You've had a healthy glow ever since you started dating you-know-who."

Barbara was not afraid to admit that she did have a new spring in her step because of you, "Is it that obvious? I think Bruce is starting to suspect something."

“As good as detective as Bruce is, I doubt he’d reach the conclusion that you’re dating a guy from another universe, who bears a striking resemblance to a fictional character from ours.”

“I don’t know, he’s seen some crazy stuff over the years.”

Kara crossed her arms, “I’m gonna’ be honest – it makes me kinda’ jealous to see you hopping around the place and having so much fun. It’s not every day that your dream guy falls into your lap like that.”

Barbara reminded herself that this was a simulation. This discussion was based on one she’d had with Kara before, in a different context, but along the same lines. Kara had expressed her interest in joining the harem and becoming one of your many, many lovers. Barbara promised to put a good word in for her in response.

You were very clear with your desire to add Kara to the crew, but then Kara let it slip to some of the other heroines she knew and suddenly all of them wanted in. Even Raven, who was unpersonable at the best of times, raised the spectre of being summoned and turned into one of your lovers. Barbara found the thought amusing. All of the Earth’s mightiest heroines dedicating themselves to one man. If anybody could do it, it was you.

And, on a more practical front, it would make those aliens learn really fast about how dangerous Supergirl could be.

But you were rightfully concerned about escalating matters out of control. There was little doubt in Barbara’s mind that the aliens had their ways and means, including using kryptonite to weaken their foes. It was a tactical game of trying to get one over on the other side, and you couldn’t print enough cards to beat them in a slugfest.

“Oh! He must really want to see you in a sexy version of your outfit, right?”

Barbara pinched the bridge of her nose, “No, he hasn’t asked me to do that yet.”

“What a waste! But I guess that doing it in your costume is harder than mine.”

“It’d have to be made especially for the occasion. If we get that far and he has to strip through four different protective layers to see me naked, he’s going to give up and go to sleep.”

Kara snorted and laughed, “I thought he was the most dedicated guy you could think of?”

“Even he has his limits, Kara. Asking a layman to take all of that stuff off before we get to the main event is totally unreasonable. It takes me ten minutes and I’ve had years of experience.”

“You could whip him into shape with a little effort I’m sure,” Kara joked.

Barbara had to admit that the Fantasia System was every bit as impressive as the reviews claimed. It was almost enough to make her forget that the Kara she was speaking with was being generated by her own thoughts and desires. Anyone not coming into the hotel with a cynical, hyperaware view like her would happily be swept up in living out their dreams.

There was one stray thought that occurred to Barbara when she first heard about the hotel, and that was the experience that she assumed most visitors would be seeking. The pedestal in her hotel room even came with a ‘love’ pre-set. Barbara didn’t need that in her free-form experience since she was already dating her dream man, but it did make her consider the potential for more explicit experiences using the technology.

Sure – a big company wouldn't want their work to be associated with smut, but who was to say that there weren't intentional loopholes left for regular visitors to exploit? The simulation reacted automatically to what Barbara was thinking, so she turned to her blonde friend and focused on making her do something uncharacteristically daring.

What surprised her was how easy it was to blow past the safeguards, if there were even any to worry about in the first place. Kara, without explanation, reached under her top and removed it to reveal her bra. A few seconds later and that was also discarded down the back of the couch, revealing her bare chest.

"Uh, Kara?"

Kara blinked, "Something wrong, Barb?"

"Why'd you take your bra off?"

Kara was confused, "Don't we always do this during our little sleepovers? You said I could get comfortable however I wanted, and sometimes I like to let my girls hang free."

To stress her point, Kara pushed her arms together and jiggled her chest back and forth. Kara was way too much of a goodie-two shoes to do something like that. Barbara had her answer. There were no guardrails at all. The reason the hotel was so popular was because singles and couples could use the system to fulfil their sexual fantasies without oversight.

It was a nightmarish tangle of ethical problems and would certainly land the parent company in hot water. The only reason such a thing would be possible was if the company had no intention of sticking around for the long run. They wanted to lure as many people into the hotel as possible by letting them do whatever they pleased.

But for what purpose? The headsets had no mechanism to harm the user, so the effect must have been psychological. Barbara's rouge's gallery involved many villains who weaponized the human mind against itself. She dispelled the current simulation and found herself back in the hotel room.

She needed to speak with Lena again and ask some questions.

She was standing in the same place with the same smile. She perked up as Barbara approached.

"Hello, I hope that you're enjoying your stay!"

Barbara played her part; "I am. I stepped out to clear my head because of how amazing that is. I can't believe technology like that exists!"

The kitsune brimmed with pride at the fake praise, "Thank you very much! I can understand feeling overwhelmed by the options available. Please take all the time you need."

"I was wondering, how long are you allowed to extend your stay for?"

Lena fell silent for a second while she processed the question.

"There is no limit on how long our guests can stay for. The hourly rate remains the same no matter the length of your booking."

"No limit? But what about my real body? I'd need to eat and drink eventually. Do I need to wake up and serve myself?"

“Rest assured – no matter how long you stay here with us in the Fantasia System, all of your needs will be taken care of. Can I take this as a request to extend your stay? We offer packages of weeks and months if you’d like to maintain your room over a long period.”

“Ah, no. I’m afraid I don’t have my wallet with me today because a friend booked for us. I’ll consider it.”

Lena smiled, “Of course. If you do wish to leave the simulation and maintain your own bodily functions, you may leave through the hotel’s front door. Your room will remain as it is until your booking lapses.”

Barbara was getting a bad feeling about this place. She needed to do more research about the other customers. She made a beeline for the door and stepped into the white void, waking suddenly in the real bed inside of the physical hotel. She’d only been in there for what felt like a few minutes – but two whole hours had passed right beneath her nose. That explained why there were no clocks in the building. Without her wristwatch, she’d have no way of knowing.

“They want people to stay here for a long time... maybe forever?”

That sounded all kinds of bad. Hundreds of people could go missing overnight if the simulation convinced them to stay. Barbara removed the headset and leapt out of bed to go and warn the others before things got serious.

She poured out into the corridor and turned to her left to find the rooms, but there was yet another surprise waiting. There were no more doors. The corridor ended abruptly where there was once a series of additional rooms.

“Oh, is that how you’re going to play?” Barbara growled.

She remembered the room numbers – she just had to find them before the place could reconfigure again.

