

The building where 'The Foundry' hotel is located could not be more unwelcoming if it tried. It's a large, rectangular building tucked away in a side street. The old windows have been blocked by pieces of black-painted wood to keep prying eyes from seeing inside. A single pair of glass doors and a sign stating the hotel's name and prices are the only visible features.

"There are no windows?" Asia murmurs uncertainly.

"I didn't know that brutalism was in fashion around here," Barbara quips.

Stepping through the doors and into the lobby, the lack of descript features continues. A large empty sitting area is all that greets your group on the inside. The spot where a receptionist's desk used to be is clearly marked with white marks on the wooden floorboards. A collection of coloured signs bearing ranges of numbers direct visitors to their rooms.

At least the place is being maintained. It's already a step up from the average cheap motel in this city...

"They really have nobody working here?" you wonder aloud, "It's like they're asking for someone to vandalize the place."

It's kind of eerie. The corridors are deceptively long given the small footprint of the building, lined with nothing but identical numbered doors and the bare minimum of lighting. Otherwise – there are no other defining landmarks for people to navigate by. Your rooms are right next to each other, tucked into one of the corners of the bottom floor.

"Alright, let's make sure to keep in contact in case something odd happens."

The girls concur and split off into their groups, disappearing behind the black doors. Rias takes your hand and pulls you across the threshold. What lies beyond is a surprisingly normal-looking hotel room, sans windows. A king-sized bed dominates the floor space. There's a small bathroom to your left, though there is no door to maintain your privacy while you use it.

"A little anticlimactic."

Rias crosses her arms and turns her nose up into the air in a rare display of her blue-blooded upbringing, "What a stuffy bedroom. Would it have killed them to include a window?"

What does scream at you is the pair of VR headsets lying on the bed. There's also a conspicuously placed stereo on the bedside table. You walk over and press play. It comes to life and begins to play a pre-recorded message from the tape.

"Welcome to The Foundry! This hotel is powered by the Fantasia System, which allows our guests to immerse themselves in a fully realised fantasy world. There are no boundaries and no limitations. Our system will automatically detect your most heartfelt desires and bring them to life."

You recall reading something about that in one of the online reviews.

The headsets don't look like they've been made by a third party. You take one of them into your hands and inspect the build quality. It has the smell of a device recently cleaned using wet wipes. Other guests must have used this room recently.

"Please be considerate of the other guests and treat the room, and the Fantasia Headsets, with care. The process of utilising the headsets will now be outlined. Ensure that you are comfortable on the bed and that you have an appropriate amount of room. Fit the headset tightly around your head

using the adjustable straps, and press the button on the left side to initialise the boot process. The system will handle everything from there. Thank you for staying with us, and enjoy a glimpse into a new world shaped by you.”

An off-kilter jingle plays as the tape comes to a stop. How oddly lo-fi.

Barbara starts a group call from her room. You put it on the speaker so that Rias can hear too.

“I’ve picked apart one of these headsets to make sure that there are no nasty surprises waiting for us. I can’t see any mechanism that would suggest a means to cause harm to the customers. They’re standard pieces of equipment.”

She works fast. You’ve only just finished listening to the tape recording and Barbara has already dismantled and investigated one of the VR sets for herself.

“You sure?” Koneko responds from her end.

“I am. I have a lot of experience in checking devices for traps like these. They should be safe to use, and the only for us to learn what’s going on is to try them for ourselves. Let’s take a look around and see what the secret is.”

The call ends.

“Shall we?” Rias murmurs.

She kicks away her shoes and slides onto the bed with the VR device in her hands. You join her on the other side. The headset slips on easily enough, but you can’t help but feel that lying on the bed is going to shatter whatever illusion the ‘owners’ are trying to convey. Is this just a way for them to generate some easy money using off-the-shelf VR technology?

Pulling the straps taught and making sure that Rias’ hand is firmly intertwined with yours, you press the button and immediately feel your stomach do a backflip as the entire world lights up with artificial light. Your physical body is disconnected from the synapses in your brain, and control is handed over to an unseen force.

You find yourself standing in... another hotel lobby, though this one is much more affluent and well-decorated than the empty space of the building in reality. Gilded walls, huge paintings, and expensive wooden furniture are present wherever you look. Also unlike the real hotel – there’s actually someone standing behind the reception desk.

You look down and your own hands and marvel at the immersive sensation of touching your own palms. This is way more than just a VR headset. This feels real. You then notice that Rias is absent from your side, even though she was on the bed with you moments ago. Approaching the receptionist to get answers, you discover that she bears the form of a kitsune – with a pair of large fox ears and a trio of bushy, swaying tails.

“Hello?”

“Good evening, my name is Lena! And I’ll be your guide. Welcome to the Fantasia System!”

You can’t help but feel like you’ve seen this somewhere before.

“Uh, hello Lena. I was wondering where my fiancé went. She was in the room with me before.”

“Oh! My apologies, sir. She is presently in a separate instance to us, speaking with another copy of me. I’m afraid that the system can only speak with multiple users by splitting them into different lobbies. You can reunite with your partner by visiting her room after we finish speaking.”

“Okay. So, what is this place exactly?”

Lena smirks proudly, “This is the real face of the Foundry Hotel. You and your lovely fiancé have both been given rooms at the top of the stairs there. When you enter – all of your wildest fantasies will come true! According to our research experiencing an aspirational goal is highly motivating, and our customers agree.”

“So I just go into my room and all of my dreams will play out?”

“Correct! There’s no need to hold back or worry. Your physical body is safe and sound in the bed where you left it. If you’d like to experience a collaborative fantasy with your partner, ring the doorbell outside of her room and she can grant you access. You can also explore the rest of the hotel from here, we have a pool, a spa, a beach, and other facilities within walking distance.”

“But I’m the only person here,” you observe.

“That’s because you can bring people from within the fantasy back into the hotel. Don’t worry about other guests. This hotel is you and your partners to enjoy. There are also no limitations on what the Fantasia System can recreate for you. Even the more... explicit ideas.”

“Is that a sly implication about using this thing for sex?”

“Not exactly sex but... yes – you can use it for that.”

Now you understand why this place is so damn popular with single folks too. A fully immersive way to get your rocks off with no limits? They must be using it to sleep with their crushes and fictional characters. That sounds pretty unethical to you – especially if they use it to recreate someone they know in real life.

“The point is, none of your records are preserved and we take customer confidentiality very seriously. Please enjoy your time with us, and if you’d like to request an extension, visit me here and ask.”

“Thanks. I’ll keep that in mind.”

You leave her at the desk and climb up the stairs to reach the doors. The hotel is designed as if it’s meant to accept hundreds or even thousands of guests. Both sides of the corridor seem to stretch on forever. You can’t even see the end of the hallway from where you stand. Getting lost by wandering down one of them does not sound appealing right now.

You walk to Rias’ door and press the buzzer. A moment later the door clicks and opens slightly, allowing you to step through and into Rias’ deepest, darkest fantasy for yourself. Though to describe it as a fantasy may be inaccurate because what lies beyond the threshold is a sight that may become true in due course.

You’re in a large throne room, decorated in her typically esoteric gothic manner. The Gremory family crest is embedded onto the floor in colourful tiles. Rias is sitting on the arm of the throne, and hundreds of other women mull around the chamber in various states of dress. A closer inspection reveals them to be a combination of girls you are already involved with and others from different media franchises.

As you approach Rias, you slowly start to piece together what this fantasy is meant to represent.

“I see you wasted no time in having your fun.”

Rias giggles, now wearing an elegant red dress that matches the colour of her hair.

“There was only one future in mind when I came here. I imagine that the creators of this hotel were disappointed to find that there is no room for doubt or speculation when it comes to creating this landscape.”

“I know where this is. It’s the throne room at your estate.”

Rias smiles, “Exactly, and these ladies are all of the wives you’ll claim before long.”

“Are you sure this is your fantasy? I thought I’d be the one dreaming of hundreds of wives, not you.”

Rias puffs out her chest and pulls you down onto the throne by your arm, “Of course it is. As a devil, there is nothing I desire more than to see my beloved husband establish his dominion over the Underworld. As a powerful devil, it’s only natural that you will be wed to hundreds of equally powerful women, who will have their own peerages to bolster our strength. To stand by your side at this time is the most wonderful future I can imagine!”

Rias’ speech attracts the attention of the gathered women, who turn your way and have a variety of different reactions, generally hovering around love-struck infatuation. You notice the rest of the ORC with Venelana, Irina, Grayfia, Kuroka, Yasaka, Raynere, Rossweisse, Serafall, Kuroka, and Ravel to name a few. The girls from To Love-Ru are also present with Mikado.

But Rias’ dream harem is not constrained by her knowledge of her home world. She’s been studying some of the franchises you speak to Mitsuru about closely. There’s Barbara and an accompanying swell of DC girls to your left, along with girls from the Marvel universe. Including Wonder Woman, Supergirl, Power Girl, Raven, Starfire, Blackfire, Harley Quinn, Sue Storm, Black Widow, Scarlet Witch, Ghost Spider, and Huntress. And that’s just the people you recognize at a glance!

There’s a huge number of servants from Fate to your right, with Fujimaru and Rin heading the pack as the (presumed) masters. You’re not even going to try counting all of them. You do spot a handful of different Saber variants near the front of their group.

You start rattling off more names. Lucy, Erza, Juvia, Mirajane and more from Fairy Tail. Tsunade, Hinata, Sakura and Ino from Naruto. Nami, Robin, Yamato and Boa from One Piece. Akame, Esdeath and Leone from Akame ga Kill. Every girl you can recall from My Hero Academia. Shinobu, Mitsuri, Nezuko and Daki from Demon Slayer.

Bleach, Black Clover, Jujutsu Kaisen and Fire Force inflate the numbers even more.

There’s a fighting game segment consisting of Chun-Li and other girls from Street Fighter, Soul Calibur, Guilty Gear, Blazblue, Dead or Alive and King of Fighters. There are the ninjas from Senran Kagura and the Taimanin franchise as well, hiding in the shadows and keeping a watchful eye for any intruders.

There are some other choice picks hidden beneath the weight of those long-running franchises. Ryuko, Satsuki and Nonon stand out. Power and Makima are here (but who knows how you’ll win those two over.) You also spot Yor and the Sailor Senshi among the throng. Tatsumaki and Fubuki are here, as are Tifa and Yuffie. Revvy and her merry band of criminals from Black Lagoon are lurking near the back.

Persona, Neptunia, League of Legends, Metroid, Hellsing, Overlord, Xenoblade, Symphogear, Date a Live and pretty much every major female character from RWBY, they're all included too.

Your eyes are starting to spin at this point.

The other large grouping is for characters from various gacha games. Genshin Impact, Star Rail, Azur Lane, Girls Frontline, Blue Archive and more add some truly ridiculous numbers. It would take you all day to pick through them and identify each game. You've only scratched the surface though. It's hard to describe how obscenely large this room is and how many different women are standing in it.

"I know you think highly of me, and Chun did say I have two hundred wives in the manga, but isn't this a bit much?" you crack.

Rias doesn't see the issue; "I decided to do some homework of my own and find all of the most appropriate partners for you. This is just a small selection of the true figure. If you intend to become the most powerful devil in the multiverse – you'll need the extra hands."

Rias never met your 'son' from the future. She has no idea just how accurate this future might be. He described you as the 'Incandescent Devil Emperor,' which is an appropriately chuuni name for a guy with a collection of abilities stolen from other media franchises. If anybody is going to have this many wives, it's the Incandescent Devil Emperor.

Rias scans the crowd with pride in her gaze, but that quickly turns to a look of panic as she brushes against something she didn't expect to see. You follow her eyeline and spot someone special at the front of the crowd.

"Mitsuru?"

Rias inhales sharply, "Ah. Yes, Mitsuru. It only makes sense that she'd be here too, correct?"

Rias' control over this realm is limited. It's a pure expression of her inner id. Her wants, desires and expectations are being given physical form. She can't stop the truth from leaking into her world, or you from seeing it.

"Are you saying that Mitsuru is going to join us?"

"She's already with us."

"I don't mean like that. Mitsuru... there's no way."

Rias becomes pensive as she considers your doubts. She hadn't planned on telling you anything about Mitsuru's feelings, but now the cat was out of the bag. Her answer is to come out with the truth. If it serves to push Mitsuru in the right direction, she's going to do it.

"Why not? Why wouldn't Mitsuru feel that way?"

You shrug, "For one thing, Mitsuru isn't from a universe where sharing your husband with hundreds of other women is normal."

"Most devils don't get more than ten. That's what makes you so special, hubby."

She can't resist flattery or flirtation even at a time like this.

"I guess I got so comfortable with having her around that I never considered it," you admit, "But judging from that distressed look you just sent her way, she told you to keep it a secret from me."

Rias' smile falters, "Yes, she did. I gave her some advice but she wanted to handle it on her own terms."

"That's a shame, but there's no need to get torn up about it. You didn't mean to spill the beans."

"I may not be like Mitsuru, but I understand her struggle. She doesn't have the same confidence that Akeno or I possess."

"Confidence is understating it. You jumped my bones the first time we met."

"A lady knows what she wants," she pouts.

"But you know, I'm really happy that you're going to those lengths for Mitsuru. I've been her only friend for a very long time. Having someone watch her back and help her out is nice."

"Any friend of yours is a friend of the ORC. And I should say - she can be incredibly attractive when she wants to be."

"Mitsuru is always coming up with new gadgets for us to use. So, there's going to be plenty of time for us to awkwardly stumble around this problem until it suddenly gets resolved all at once."

Rias laughs, "I look forward to it."

"But man! I had no idea that you were spending so much time coming up with this crazy-ass harem for me. Did you make a list?"

Rias averts her eyes, "Perhaps I did. As the head lady, it's my responsibility to properly manage the daily workings of the Master's harem. It was one of the first skills that my Mother taught me when I became the heir apparent. While your wives may all be dedicated to a collective goal and unified in their love of you - that doesn't mean that conflict is non-existent. Naturally, some personalities will clash and compete."

"Sure. You've always been a good mediator for the girls, but I was more wondering how you found the time to follow up on franchises that only exist in our world and not yours."

"Mitsuru gave me some assistance. We discovered that it was impossible to transfer physical objects permanently into your world without an anchor holding it here, but I could bring a hard drive with me and write data onto it to take back without any issue."

"Mitsuru gave you copies of every anime, cartoon, comic, manga and game that I like."

"That's right. It's been very interesting discovering such a plethora of new stories and characters. She even allowed me to watch 'High School DxD,' which was a curious experience. It's amazing how quickly our lives can diverge from a few small changes."

"Like Issei getting a girlfriend?"

"Yes, I was thinking of her. Within the narrative of the series - she isn't deemed worthy of being mentioned. Yet in our reality she's the only girl Issei has eyes for... most of the time, anyway."

"Getting a girlfriend didn't stop that guy from being a pervert. Not that I can blame him when he's surrounded by so many beauties."

You lean back in the comfortable chair and reckon with the scale of Rias' ambition. You never intended to summon this many women, but who knows how things will turn out as your battle

against the Interdimensional Commune escalates. It might be the only way to counter them as they deploy more powerful weapons and dangerous strategies.

And while it's absurd to say – there's a sense of intoxicating power that flows over you regarding this throne room. In reality, it's unlikely that this many people will gather in one place. They have lives and responsibilities and struggles beyond helping you with yours.

"I wonder what Koneko, Asia and Barbara are experiencing right now."

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Koneko wanted to do nothing more than turn back and leave the hotel as soon as her eyes locked on to the Kitsune standing behind the reception desk of the 'real' lobby. What a ridiculous waste of her time this was turning out to be. The very concept of a magical hotel that could make all of her dreams come sounded like a bad joke.

Koneko didn't 'dream' of anything. She already had more than she could ask for, standing by Rias' side and paying her back for the second chance she offered her. To ask for more would be an exercise in hubris. But she couldn't leave until the appointment was over, and she wanted to be there for Asia in case she was placed into danger.

She marched up the stairs and stepped into the room designated for her, expecting nothing more than a fancy light show to wow the idiots who paid for a ticket. What happened instead was more interesting. The entire space, formerly a blank white chamber, shifted and morphed in front of her eyes, expanding out and transforming into a perfect replica of the clubroom at her academy.

"The Club?" she whispered.

Of course it was the club, Koneko reasoned. There was no meaning in a future she couldn't see and the Occult Research Club was her life. It was what she wanted. The system was taking her memoirs and projecting them into the space within her mind where the play was currently being staged. How else were they able to recreate it in such fine detail?

Koneko ran her hand across the fabric of the couch and nodded. True to life. A particular sensation alerted her to the fact that something was different. She focused on her muscles and felt her ears twitch and her tail sway. She was in her true form for some reason. Koneko was used to concealing her appendages while at the school, and she rarely revealed them beyond that for fear of causing more damage than she intended.

After your training and the rating game that followed, Koneko came to understand that her fears were unfounded. She was much older than she was back then, and Kuroka did what she did because she wanted to, not because she lost control in a moment of passion. She was the one in control of her own power.

Still – she didn't want to become famous across the campus for coming to school with a pair of 'fake' cat ears and a tail every day. That was the sort of attention that she did not covet.

"Koneko, are you here?"

That was a familiar, masculine voice – one that did not belong to Issei or Kiba. You stepped through the door with a smile on your face. There were no major changes to your body or appearance, but Koneko could sense that you were now infused with the power of an evil piece. There was also a conspicuous silver band around your ring finger, topped with a vibrant gem that changed colours under the light.

“Oh, you’re here,” Koneko replied, unsure of what to say.

“Yeah. This clubhouse is pretty empty now that the seniors have graduated. I wanted to come over and spend more time with you, Asia, Irina and Xenovia, but I couldn’t find the time. Rias has been keeping me busy with the baby and all.”

“Baby?”

You frowned, “Are you sure you’re okay Koneko, you’re looking a little flushed?”

Koneko really didn’t understand what was going on. You were talking about all kinds of different events that hadn’t occurred in reality. Her self-denial meant that she was incapable of accepting that all of this was because of her own thoughts and desires. She was piecing together what this scenario was meant to be. Rias and the others were no longer at the academy, and enough time had passed that you’d both become a devil and blessed Rias with her first child.

“I’m fine,” Koneko said sternly, “You don’t need to come to the academy. Wouldn’t it be easier for us to meet elsewhere?”

“It’s not a problem when I can teleport here using my magic. Not that I can make the return trip with how much energy I can store...”

Koneko tried to still her beating heart. She was in control of the situation. There was no need to lose her cool just because she was in the room alone with you. Koneko sat on the couch and remained silent while you poked around the room, eventually stumbling upon the most recent volume of Harem Hero that had been left on the table by Xenovia.

You slipped through the pages with a sly smile, “I should find the time to read some more of this. Have you been keeping up too?”

Koneko shook her head, even though she was lying; she was an almost religious follower of the manga and anime herself – sneaking away copies to watch and read in private without the other club members judging her.

“Why would I need to read that when I’m experiencing the real thing?” she observed.

You laughed heartily and flumped down onto the couch next to her. Koneko tensed up at the close proximity. So casually too, it was starting to make her worry about what this dream really was.

“Getting to spend time with you is nice. Akeno and Xenovia have been trying to jump my bones non-stop since the baby was delivered. Venelana is trying to kill me, I swear. She knew how much carnage she’d cause by lifting the pregnancy ban on those two. But now that the Gremory clan has another head, we don’t need to worry about splitting the family’s authority. They want to make up for lost time...”

“What a bunch of perverts,” Koneko huffed, “Is sleeping with you the only thing they think about?”

“Those two have been holding themselves back for two years now. I was expecting it. Asia won’t say so, but she’s the same way too.”

“I’m not,” Koneko snapped, even though she knew that this wasn’t really you – or a real argument.

She was not expecting what happened next. Koneko froze up as you reached over and dragged her onto your lap. Fingers and palms started to run through her short white hair, attacking the areas where she was the most sensitive. Her ears and tail twitched happily against her wishes.



“Is that your way of saying you want to spend the evening cuddling and watching TV again?”

Koneko really, really wanted to do that, but she was not honest enough to admit it.

Having a boy who was not a pervert express confidence in her abilities and a belief that she was in control was unusual. At the time she dismissed the effort that went into constructing a chamber that could contain her full destructive power, but the truth was that it was a touching idea from a group of people whom she continuously kept at arm’s length.

Connecting with Rias and the others, showing her true self, and no longer living in fear of her own birth. They were all eminently appealing to Koneko. New desires had been piled on top thanks to your intervention. She started to think that perhaps being with you like Rias and Akeno wouldn’t be such a bad thing after all.

But Koneko was as prideful as any human girl her age. She hated the idea of turning back on her previously established position and being mocked for doing so. Rias and Akeno were just waiting for the moment where they could needle her for every dismissive comment she’d made about their engagement, digging up all of that dirt and burying her in it until she cried uncle.

All of this introspection was disrupted by a loud ping and a pop-up-window that appeared in front of Koneko. Spooked and panicked, she lashed out and selected the first option she could see without reading the prompt. Koneko stared blankly at the wall. Seconds later Asia appeared in a flash of pixels, standing there with a gobsmacked expression.

“K-Koneko-chan?”

Koneko hissed and leapt out of your arms, pointing an accusatory finger in her direction.

“Asia, what are you doing here?”

“You let me in. I rang the doorbell and... is this really your biggest fantasy?”

“No, of course it isn’t. Why would my biggest fantasy be sitting in here with Rias’ husband?”

Asia was innocent to a fault, but not ignorant. Koneko was less subtle than she liked to believe. Koneko had started to developed a doe-eyed response to seeing you on screen during the ORC’s watching sessions.

“I see. I was wondering if you were okay, but I suppose I’ll leave you to enjoy it.”

“I’m not enjoying this,” Koneko protested – her pleas falling on deaf ears.

