

Nance's Fashion Review

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Nance's Fashion Review

by [SLWalker](#)

Summary

(2152) - Not long after landing on Chara II, Arnie's still living in a tent, Nance is just starting to make full use of her hologram projection abilities and fashion atrocities are committed.

One of the better things invented in the past fifty years was the remote controlled airbed.

Thing of genius, that. Self-contained inside of a smallish box, one touch of the remote would see it open and roll the bed out. From there, settings could be chosen to inflate it to the right firmness. Once it was finished blowing up, just put some bedding on it and sleep; it would keep track of the firmness setting and adjust silently in the night to maintain it. And the best part -- *the very best part* -- was the damn thing would also re-pack itself right back into its box without so much as a hitch.

No more wrestling with unweildy, thick, welded plastic in some attempt to compress an airbed back into a shape even twice the size as the box it came from. No more slow overnight air leaks and waking up with a sore back. It was highly puncture resistant, easily repaired, affordable and very portable, which made it one of the most useful things created in recent times.

Or, it was if you liked sleeping in tents, anyway.

The other option was sleeping in a guest room provided by Nance's relatives, and since Arnie valued his life to some degree, he dodged their invitation with as much grace as he could muster. Admittedly, it probably still looked like he was fleeing for his life, but he did *try* to be diplomatic about it.

He absolutely refused to die because one of the Smiths brained him with a coat-rack on accident. That kind of thing *happened* around those people.

So, because he was an old hand at living outdoors, he just pitched a tent on the rolling, grassy hill where the base was going to be built. It was close to the temporary headquarters that housed Nance's many, many servers and her communications equipment -- as well as a small board room (for her), and a shower and bathroom (for him) -- so he was available to work for her at basically any hour. It certainly beat the possible broken limbs or concussions that surrounded her kin.

The hill was a truly lovely bit of real-estate, too, with a view to distant weathered mountains over a broad, rolling valley bottomed by prairie. A lake twinkled out there, which turned into a river that ran along the heart of it. It was pastoral and aside the occasional odd bush or tree, it looked a lot like Earth.

Which was funny, because it took them nearly a hundred days in space to get here from Earth. And that was on the fastest warp-capable ship the Red Cross owned, because the Red Cross had a special dispensation from the new Terran Empire to even *have* warp drive. The colonists who had arrived before them on Chara II had launched in sleeper ships and spent almost thirty years in space, pushed along by the flood of Empire expansion and growth. On most colonies, that was waves and waves of settlers, and most of them born into a conquered, subjugated civilization. On Chara II, it was all Nance's people, carefully handpicked and seeded into the ship's rosters thanks to her back doors.

Once the Fourth World rallied around the dangers of the other species out in the galaxy, things had improved greatly on Earth for humans, provided you didn't mind the genocide and the wholesale destruction of every culture and religion that didn't fit the Fourth World doctrine. It was exhausting and infuriating and heartbreaking how many people were willing to go along with it, but understandable in a way: They had been suffering a long time and wanted to stop. And the only way to stop was by turning the guns outwards, into the rest of the galaxy.

Bitter thing, really; it was only the Fourth World's -- later Terran Empire's -- desire to conquer space and every species they encountered that

allowed ShadowKnight to even be here. From the technology, originally stolen from the Vulcans, to the way that the Blacks had twisted the profiteering around to benefit the insurgency, even as they invested in the cutting edge tech that allowed the Empire to expand.

It turned out that it was impossible to survive a burgeoning fascist society with clean hands. And the only other choice was to die martyrs to their cause.

Arnie had to hope that being out here, so far from Earth, would give them a chance to scrub at least some of the grime off of their souls.

He didn't feel that had happened yet, as he was laying on that brilliant airbed and looking up at the play of light and breeze across the top of the tent, but at least it seemed *possible* here.

His wrist-comm -- a fairly new thing engineered on the ship that had brought them -- beeped at him, pulling him out of his introspection; it was supposedly his day off, but Arnie was used to not delineating those anymore. He took his other arm from behind his head and hit the button on the side. "Yes?"

There was only one person who had this frequency. And she was less than a hundred yards away. "*Busy?*" Nance asked, sounding cheerful.

"Not really." Given her tone, she was probably calling him because she was lonely. While she brought a lot of information with her, the subspace link to Earth wasn't operational yet, so she was cut off from the heartbeat of Earth and the Empire both. "Need me over there?"

"I wouldn't mind some company. And a second opinion?"

He raised an eyebrow there, despite knowing she wouldn't see it. "I'll be over in a few."

Before they had gotten here, Nance's hologram had been a flickery, half-body thing that reminded them both of Star Wars; transparent and tinged blue, prone to sideband distortion. (She made a few jokes about that, too, up to and including projecting herself in a black robe and fake-croaking some lines out in a melodramatic manner. Arnie was the only one who got those jokes, though, so they fell a bit flat.) But here, on Chara II and powered by the high-density solar cells and storage, Nance could generate a full-body hologram and not worry about catching the notice of authorities for the power draw. She was still confined to her board room, relying on stationary holo-emitters and a bunch of pinhole cameras, but it was a major improvement.

At least-- it was a major improvement in her projection capabilities.

It didn't do *anything* for her fashion sense.

"What are you wearing?" Arnie asked, after a good minute where he just gaped.

Nance beamed back at him, putting her arms out to her sides and splaying her fingers out. "I was testing the range of my projection abilities. I think it's kind of neat."

It looked like someone had molded popcorn into bricks, then proceeded to pile those into strange configurations that sort of approximated a dress. It was a huge affair, seemingly held together by silver wire, and the longer he stared at it, the more Arnie wondered *why* anyone would even conceive of something like this, let alone wear it. "--where did you find it?" he asked, leaning this way and that, still jaw-dropped by the spectacle.

"It was in an old fashion database." She tried to twirl, but half the dress flickered out before stabilizing again, and she stopped. "It looked interesting."

"That's one way of putting it."

"Doesn't work?" Nance asked, looking down over herself. "You look like you just bit a lemon."

Arnie made an effort to stop looking like he bit a lemon, but he couldn't quite wipe all the grimace off his face. "It's a little much. It looks like a mutant that escaped from a popcorn factory and is now attempting to devour you from the feet up."

"Popcorn mutant, eh?" Nance tilted her head, thoughtfully. "I can see that. How about this?"

Her projection flickered into a poofy pink dress that ended just below the knees. Arnie was starting to worry his face might get stuck this way. "Cotton candy mutant, this time."

Nance picked at the edge of it, then shrugged and tried a third. "And this?"

Arnie gave a helpless quirk of the brows. "Caught in the drapes in a condemned Victorian?"

That made her grin, and she flickered one more time, back to the basic ShadowKnight jumpsuit. "And this?"

He nodded emphatically, hoping that was the end of Nance's Fashion Review, at least for today. "That's good. A classic, really. Stick with that

one."

"You're so predictable," Nance answered, with a fond look. Then she shook her head and gestured to the table. "Since I have you here, though, want to go over the construction timeline? The architects just delivered the revised prints. If we agree, they can break ground right away."

We. Almost a hundred years later, *we*. Sometimes, it still caught Arnie off-guard; even though it had been quite a long time since it had been fact, some part of him couldn't help but wonder how they'd survived this long, long enough for them to even become a *we*.

Let alone long enough to live on a new world; to maybe wash their souls a bit cleaner.

"Yeah. Let me get a quick shower and something to eat and I'll be right back," he said, before turning to go do those things. Going over a construction timeline sounded like a good way to spend the day.

And maybe when they finished that, he could bring up the concept of a lightbee for her to consider, too.

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