

“Alright!” Jack speaks into a microphone, you listen to the electric tone. “Everyone, return to your rooms! You’ll be sent upstairs one by one, and after that, your goal is to find the path to the third floor!” You head back to your room and wait, as Jack advertises pogeey bait: “Today’s fights are sponsored by: The NatBis Company! Hungry for our fights? Grab some NatBis popcorn and enjoy the show! Find their products in most grocery stores near you!”

Some time after that ad, the door unlocks once more, and now you face the empty common room floor. The three doors on the South are identified, in the Jazz Club you will do or die. You step forward, and make your choice, climbing to the jazz club with no voice.

You step into **The Jazz Club**, a cramped low-ceiling room. The lighting is entirely red, and it feels like you’re in a bloody gloom. A low stage dominates one entire wall, filled with instruments big and small. Dinner tables (covered with crisp tablecloths) and wooden stools crowd the floor, and you make your way past every door. The sleek wooden floor accentuates the room’s style, and arrayed on the wall are musicians for a while.

As you emerge through other doors, you find other clubrooms just like the first, all bathed in red lighting. Some styles differ – one room with a non-alcoholic bar you are sighting. Another room showcases its murals, painted over every wall though it were its own world. But every room in this Jazzy area feels almost-intimate, fine for a dandy vampire, your cape unfurled.

You see across the room one who you expected, the maid Lele Lorelai has arrived as selected. You tell her that which she already knows, the reason you’re here, here to bring woe. “Madame, let us purge the game of the unworzy. My fangs and your steel vill end ze game early.”

But first you must search to find things for tomorrow, **4 dollars** and **Blink Boots** ought to bring sorrow. **Fantastical Snakes** make their home in the club, you’ll be sure to take that back to the hub.

You now lead the way through the room, your cloak fluttering in the dim red gloom.

You hear from your old friend cloak, and listen to the voice that spoke: “*behind you.*”

Your cloak giving you that early alarm, you whirl to face a boy who is armed. The blond-haired Fran splashes the man, with an unknown liquid thrown from his hand. You look down on him with baleful gaze, intent on ending his European days. Fran sees his fate and tries to dodge, but his neck ends up inside your claws. You bite down on him with pointed teeth, and despite his screams you know he’ll find no relief.

Calling from another table, Saul advises as he’s able: “You shouldn’t get so close to a vampire, you know! They bite!” You’ll deal with that ghoul later tonight.

But you realize too late the boy was not quite done, for in that vial he threw was poison! Your ancient blood bubbles and churns, it feels as though your body burns! Your hurl and puke to get

the poison out, your victory against Fran not quite a rout. Coughing up blood, you heave and hack, Fran loosens himself and promptly makes tracks. You know the boy is much worse off, but you can't even stand with your nasty cough. Lele aims at the boy's back, but your raised hand stops her attack. "No need for you to waste your shots, I'll yet make him pay wiz all I've got."

She lowers her shotgun once again, and you start to search for other men. Saul the ghoul has left the stage, but you have patience befitting a man of your age.

You step through a door into another clubhouse, looking to crush another louse.

"THERE YOU ARE, ABOMINATION." The muscled man is at his station.

Thomas Volk stands upon the stage, ready to turn another page. With boxing shorts and brass knuckles he stands, you feel his life is in your hands. "Your life ends tonight, *monster*," are the words he musters.

You leave Ms. Lele far behind, with speed through the tables you wind. You take the stage all on your own, to face the boxer all alone. With a swing of your arm and one command, bat familiars fly as Thomas stands! He's forced back under their wings and fangs, though he breaks many bats, most still remain. The lights are dimmed as Thomas battles, as you drawn your cane which rattles. As familiars gnash and bite as you bade, you twist your cane, unsheathing a blade.

You level your blade and then step forward, a sickening *shlunk!* is Thomas' reward. You've run the man through, and in his chest your blade struck true. On Thomas' chest a crimson stain, blood drips onto the floor like rain.

Thomas hisses through gritted teeth, you're sure that death will bring relief. Time to put him out of his misery, the death of your first ene- *ohshitWHAM!*

You're knocked out of your unique way of seeing the world as instead of standing there and taking it, Thomas instead tensed every tendon in his right arm, rearing back, muscles pulsing, and the next thing you see is the ceiling as his brass knuckles connect with your skull. The supersonic impact sends you reeling back, and with the sword still firmly in your grasp you inadvertently take it right back out of Thomas's body. Blood splatters on the ground sickeningly.

Thomas uppercuts the last few bat familiars still flapping around. Those are going to be hard to replace in this situation. You shake off the daze, your head already swollen, bruised, and bloodied from just one hit. Well then, let's begin! You charge back at the man, hoping to skewer him once more, and you unleash a frenzy of slashes. As you move in for your first swing though, Thomas deflects the sword with a backhand, knocking it aside. You quickly bring it around again, still having superior reach, but it's deflected once again – Can it be that Thomas is *blocking* the cane with his brass knuckles? He's punching into your swings, one fist fending off the sword, the other always aimed your head in a dual threat! This time it's you who's forced

onto the retreat, moving like a fencer. Every slash is deflected, while every punch is avoided, and you both trade offense and defense in every breath.

Suddenly, Thomas grabs the blade of your cane sword and yanks it out of your hands, then in a flash, he grabs your collar! He pulls you right up to his face closer before he – bites your neck!?

You're surprised, unbelievably so. To think that Volk was another vampire of such caliber. It is very rare, to the point of almost never happening, that a fellow vampire is able to get the upper hand on you, even with the element of surprise. But Volk is strong. Stronger than you now, even. Even as you struggle helplessly against his iron grip, you cannot help but respect him for his strength. If it were just the two of you fighting, your search for the Step would come to an end here – if it were just the two of you.

BLAM

While you were grappled by Thomas, Lele had run up alongside you, pressing her shotgun against Volk's midsection. Thomas's muscular guts explode into the air, and he lets go of your neck, gasping, looking at Lele in shock. "He... was mine!" His face is a mixture of surprise and anger, and his hands release your collar. You stumble backwards, away from the mighty young vampire.

Lele glares right back at Volk, aiming the shotgun at his face to finish the job, but he has some strength remaining. With unbelievable speed he bats her barrel aside, and his metal-laden fist rushes towards Lele's face. You've been hit by those, and you know a young woman like her is unlikely to survive such a blow. The split-second before his knuckles connect, you grab Lele by the back collar, throwing her aside, sending her tumbling. Her head is slightly battered and bleeding but you managed to save her from taking the full force of Thomas' blow.

Still, Thomas is in no position to pursue either of you, falling to one knee, blood gushing out into an enormous pool at his feet.

From across the room, Lele looks Thomas in the eyes, leveling her shotgun right at him before firing once more. His head snaps backwards, and he collapses to the ground. The bloody pool expands yet more. The death of a worthy adversary.

Lele opens the breach, ejecting the two shells, before loading two more. You pick up your sword cane, whipping it free of blood on the floor, before returning it to its sheath. You are tired, more than you have been in a while, and lean on the cane. You try not to show it though.

"A fine show you put on, I see, let us continue on our journey," you acknowledge Lele. She had done a fine job.

Together you move away, leaving the fallen corpse of Thomas.

The two of you move through the room, looking for that ghoul who you know to be around the premises. He must have run off into the darkness with Fran. This time Lele is in the lead, sweeping rooms with her shotgun first.

There's eventually a small private lounge, cozy, with soft felt couches, and as you look inside, there's Saul. He's reclined on a couch at the moment, glancing up as the two of you enter. He waves a little. "Well, if it isn't the two of y- HEY!"

This time victory will be yours, as you twist open your sword cane once more. You race forward, slashing at the ghoul who has to tumble off the couch to dodge. That slash rips a long ragged streak through the sofa! Even weakened, you're still more than a match for the feeble ghoul, as once again you begin a flurry of pokes with your sword.

Saul has to stagger backwards, grunting as the blade pierces his arms and hands up and down as he tries to block with his bare hands. Unlike that mighty Thomas, Saul has no way to defend against your blows, and his yellow mock-blood flows onto the seats and floors and pillows.

"Saul!" Fran calls, rushing in from some unknown direction. He's carrying another vial of whatever he used before, and your attention snaps to him. With the amount of damage Thomas dealt to you, another splash from that vial could be fatal, even for you. You'll need time to recover before facing that weapon again, some sort of toxin which loosed the blood inside you.

That split-second distraction is all Saul needs to counterattack, but his meek scratches with his long claw-like nails hardly deserve your notice. Maybe you get a small cut, but it's really nothing. With your free arm you fling Saul off him.

BANG

Lele fires towards Fran, recognizing his danger to you, but misses entirely, as you quickly back away from the blond boy, leveling your sword at his chest. Saul jumps onto you from behind and tries applying a choke around your throat! Pathetic, really. You grab a forearm and bite down on Saul's hand, and you hear a sickening *CRUNCH*. The abhorrent taste of ghoul juice fills your mouth, but it will suffice for now. Saul recoils in pain as you jump away from him and Fran.

It's a difficult situation. Now that you have your sword drawn, you have some advantage, but you need to keep him far enough away that he can't splash you. Both of you have the means of killing the other. You aren't sure you have the advantage any more after Thomas, though.

BANG

Lele fires a shotgun round, not at Fran, but at Saul, who howls as his un-bitten hand is shredded. Fran grimaces, but doesn't try to make a move to help Saul. It's a standoff, as neither can leave an opening for the other. Whoever moves first may lose.

Saul is in a frantic melee with Lele now, charging her as she attempted to reload her shotgun, but you can't pay much attention to that.

Well, for a young European to pose such a threat to you, perhaps he's head and shoulders above most Europeans. You click your heels together and raise your cane sword straight up in front of your face. A duelist's salute, before leveling it at the boy's chest again. You think you can get him before he gets you.

“YOU.”

Your head snaps back to the entryway, where you see a dead man walking. Even with his ruptured open belly, barely held together with boxing tape, even with blood dripping from his ravaged face, Thomas will not just lay down and die.

“Oh, there you are,” hisses Saul, as he stands up, kicking Lele's shotgun away. “Would you mind escorting them out of-”

“DIE.”

Almost all of Thomas' hatred is directed straight at you. He begins storming across the room, straight towards you.

In an instant you realize that facing Fran and his deadly poison, as well as the shockingly resilient Thomas, is a losing proposition. You hate to admit it, but it's time for a hasty tactical retreat.

Making a split-second decision, you leap towards Lele, knocking Saul aside, and with a whirl your cape is swished over her. You duck your head inside with her. This is a trick you don't know if you'll be able to perform again, as you feel your cape's magic weaken as it teleports you and Lele back out into one of the other rooms, where you had left a familiar behind.

Lele seems shocked, both having seen the inside of your cape, full of eyes, as well as your sudden reappearance here. Well, no need to explain to her how you did it, you can let that be a mystery.

“I fear our plan has fallen through... I have not seen Ms. Kogi, have you?” You ask her.

“No, no I haven't.” Lele sighs. “Let's get out of here.”

You agree. Though Lele is doing well, you are not, and so it's time to go to the third floor. No sign of many of your enemies who you plotted on slaying tonight, what a disappointment.

The two of you make your way through the Jazz rooms, finding a nondescript door. Opening it, you see the starkly different environment of a narrow steel spiral staircase, dimly lit. You both make your way up.

You're in another room which looks very similar to yesterday's. The two of you are split up, guided to your bedrooms by a guard, who closes and locks the door behind you. Time to wait for tomorrow.

Engagements witnessed:

Fran (assisted by Saul) vs Castle (assisted by Lele)

Castle (assisted by Lele) vs Thomas

Lele (assisted by Castle) vs Thomas

Castle (assisted by Lele) vs Saul (assisted by Fran and Thomas)

Lele (assisted by Castle) vs Saul (assisted by Fran and Thomas)