

“Time to head back to your rooms!” Jack calls. “We’ll do this just like we did last night, and like we’ll be doing tomorrow night!” Well nothing to do but wait now, as you return to your room. It seems Jack has another ad read though. “Today’s fights are sponsored by: Palmeiser! Watching at a sports bar? Order up a round! Be sure to drink responsibly, and don’t drink before heading home, after all fatalities are meant to be kept in here!”

Some time after that ad, the door unlocks, and you face the empty common room. There are lights above the three doors on the south side of the room, identifying each. The doors you entered from on the North Side had no lights illuminating them, and ropes in front of them, making clear where you need to go. You step forward, and make your choice, before the door opens and you climb up a dimly lit stairwell to the fourth floor.

The Sacrificial Descent. Today, that smarmy little girl will be the sacrifice you offer up for strength. And you know just where to find her.

You step into the **Mob Hideout**, a sneaky den of rotten cigarette smoke and stinging cheap booze. The main den features a poker table in the center with cards strewn about amid the scuffed threadbare green fabric, and several worn milk crates upside-down as seats. Every corner’s stuffed with junk: a crooked pool table, a couch with ripped upholstery, empty violin cases, a huge nightstand and radio, a dartboard with most numbers peeled off, ... The posters on the wall are either popular movie stars in three-piece suits or pinup girls in bikinis.

But several corridors spread out like a spiderweb, and if you follow one it only winds down narrow hallways with twists and turns, occasionally crossing paths with other hallways – a maze to throw off intruders. But who knows what items might be hidden in these unexplored avenues?

There’ll be time to finish her off in a bit, might as well pick up whatever trash they’ve left laying around. An **Alamo Spirit?** You aren’t planning on kicking the bucket any time soon. **Balder’s Glasses** are nice though, as is that **57-Leaf Clover**. There are **\$8** on a table.

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Now, how would the gang get in here? Though the lower levels? No... too many guards. But they’re sure to answer the call... if the network was kind enough to air you when you said your key phrase. Ah, of course. You stroll through the room, navigating the maze, until you come to a room with a window.

It seems that Kogi is there. She has a lot more friends than you anticipated. Lele, Fran, Amy, and Hachizaki are all crowded around her, all looking at a telescope. It seems she set it up, and is looking out the window, having a conversation.

Irritating. Ideally you would have liked to do this with no witnesses.

## CRACK

There's a sound, as the window beyond Kogi has a crack spread across it from the lower corner. Well, the hearts are beating now. Might as well make do with what you have!

"*About time!*" you call, causing Kogi to whirl towards you as the glass behind her shatters.

Hachi tries to run towards the ladder your cultists are climbing, likely to kick at it, but that punk isn't going anywhere. Sprinting forward, you snag him by the shoulder. "*Come on kid, the show's just getting started!*"

Leading the way, a man with an asymmetrical face, pieced together clearly from different people – ah, it's Mr. Scarlet. He climbs into the room, pushing himself up with his hands, followed by two men and two women. You never bothered to learn the names of your human wicked hearts, not yet having achieved salvation, but those rebuilt into follies, given new names, you recall them.

Through a speaker hidden somewhere near the window, Jack's voice blares. "Hey there, trespassers, this is a private show, leave now or charges will be pressed!"

Hahaha! Does he really think that's going to work!? Rules, laws, none of it matters! "*Kogi, lovely Lele, Hachi punk, Fran, and Amy! The rest of the nation, meet my wicked hearts!*"

Mr. Scarlet reaches into a coat pocket, withdrawing a box of .50 ACP ammunition, perfect for Lefty and Righty. You open the chamber of Lefty, and take a handful of ammunition, quickly loading it before doing the same to Righty. Your other hearts are doing what they can to keep you safe, from a gang of angry friends of Kogi's surrounding you now.

"Wh- hey!" You hear Jack's voice over the speakers, suddenly replaced by Dennis. "Verdan! Get your suicidal freaks out of here before I come down and get rid of them myself, walking corpse!"

"*HAHAHAHAH! Sorry Dan, they're a part of me, my many wicked hearts, they have just as much right to be here as I do!*" you cackle. Now that they're in, you feel the odds in your favor. This is your game now, not the network's!

As you laugh, you catch a glimpse of Kogi trying to sneak away in the commotion, and your eyes lock onto her. She freezes for an instant before grabbing a hold of her telescope and hurling it at you before trying to sprint away.

Mr. Scarlet is quicker though, the box of ammunition already stashed back in his coat pocket, he leaps at her, wrapping her up around her shoulders. Your other cultists surround you, keeping Kogi's allies engaged and busy.

“Kogi!” you hear Amy cry out. You can hear the growl of Lele as she tries to swing a bat at one of your men, who fends her off. Hachizaki is held off by one of the women, Fran held by one of the men.

You hear Dennis’ voice crackle over the speakers again: “Attention, everyone in the Mob Hideout! Intruders from outside have entered! If they interfere, you may deal with them in self-defense! BBN will pay your legal fees if charges are pressed!”

Dennis, however, is just background noise to you, as you point Righty at Kogi’s forehead. She stares down the barrel over her glasses. Mr. Scarlet’s grip is sure. She’s done for.

Struggling, Kogi spits out: **“RUN!”**

## **BANG**

It was always that simple. All the big brains in the world won’t do jack to stop a big bullet. Speaking of all those brains, they’re all over the wall, floor, and Mr. Scarlet, who doesn’t even flinch as the shot goes off right in front of him. He lets go of Kogi, her corpse collapsing to the ground.

That’s how it should be, no dodging, no big fight, just people you can shoot in the head who die when you do so. Why do things always have to be so difficult?

You turn back to the others, with a wicked grin on your face. *“Come on now, let’s go back to my place!”* Hachizaki and Amy have sprinted away already, though.

Lele is struggling against one of your men, who’s keeping the fight close while she tries to put space between him to swing her bat. Fran, however, stands in shock – his eyes are glazed over in sorrow, looking between you and the corpse of Kogi, unable to breathe.

You come up behind the man fighting with Lele, lightly tapping the back of his head with Lefty’s barrel. *“Hey now, don’t damage those goods, I love her you know.”*

Quickly he lets go of her, and you take stock of the situation. You and your men, Lele, and Fran are the only one’s left. And Kogi’s corpse! *“Right, best hurry, my hearts, before security arrives. Lele, my love, come with me.”*

Despite your generous offer, she glares at you with unbridled anger in her eyes. Why? You love her, she knows. She does realize she’s hopelessly outnumbered at least. She grips her bat tightly, looking between you and your cultists, before lowering it in resignation. “Fine,” she spits out.

*“Hands off her,”* you make sure your soldiers know. You glance at Fran. *“Love him too, he can come with us.”*

After tugging Kogi's WASA jacket off her corpse and slinging it over your shoulder, you pace through the halls, cultists at your sides. There's got to be a place for the head of the mob, the capo or whatever they're called. Seems like a good place for you.

Walking alongside you, Lele continues glaring a hole into you. Your men follow behind in a line, keeping Fran at the rear.

"What the hell are you thinking," Lele hisses at you.

*"Nothing much, once it's all sorted I'm sure the network won't mind. Just adding a little excitement to the night!"*

"Calling other people in to kill for you?" she barks.

*"Or die. That's what friends are for, you know."*

Suddenly, Polly rounds a corner. Coming face-to-face with the sight of you and your entourage, she gasps.

*"Ah, little red, come and join the fun!"* you say, slowing for her to join you. She eyes the bloody jacket slung over your shoulder nervously.

"*What's the matter little red?*" you ask. Her eyes glance behind you for a brief second--

Pain ripples all throughout your body, sending you reeling, falling to the ground. What the hell! Oooh! From behind, Lele cracked your head open with her baseball bat. *Shit!*

You try to string words together, as you hear Lele shout to Polly: "He killed Kogi!"

There's the sound of the scuffle above you, and you can hear both your guards grunting and Lele shouting. As you take your time getting up and recuperating, you watch them do a number on her. You don't want that. *"hey, knock it off,"* you slur out, but the beating continues. One man delivers a gut punch to Lele, sending her to the ground. One of the women kicks her in the head. They can't hear you. Maybe they'll hear this!

## **BANG BANG BANG**

You fire three shots into the roof. That gets everyone to stop.

*"I tooold you I didn't want her hurrt,"* you manage to sputter. *"I looove her. Why don't you love me, Lele?"*

She staggers back to her feet as you look up at her from your seat on the ground. She grits her teeth. She won't give you an answer. Why? You rub the side of your head, aching from the wooden club.

"Let's get out of here, Polly!" she calls to the magical girl. Polly looks down at you and at Kogi's jacket. Her lip trembles briefly, before she rushes by you to the maid, and the two run away together. You hold up a hand to stop any of your men's would-be pursuits.

*"Why... her too. Don't they understand me? Why don't they want my love?"* You're only depressed for a moment. You have to find this Mob room's headquarters, a fitting place for your message to the wicked hearts of the world.

Somewhere in the chaos Fran slinked off out of sight too. It's just you and your 5 wicked hearts.

"Come on," you say to them, sweeping through the corridors until you find what you're looking for. A room with a desk in it, as well as electric lighting, and on the desk is a prominent microphone that will surely ring your voice to the world. You and your hearts file in. A cushioned chair sits behind the desk. There are posters on the wall, as before, as well as a stained full ashtray. This seems like a good place for a mob boss.

Now, you have the world's attention, what to say-

"Shit!" You hear one of your men shout, as you whirl to see--

*"Haaaaachi!"*

Like a storm, coming in from behind, the boy slashes right by your first human of yours, cutting a gash across his stomach, whirling his knife at your other cultists, he leaps across the desk at you.

You don't draw your gun, instead throwing a punch into his gut in midair. You connect! The blow sends him flying right back across the desk. He keeps a firm grip on his red knife. Nevertheless, he's back up, twirling the knife, keeping your cultists at bay. It's a cramped room.

*"What's a matter, Hachi? Or do you prefer Hachi-kuuuuun? Hahahaha!"*

You whip out Lefty and Righty, aiming straight at his heart, as your wounded man leaps onto the boy in a pincer attack. *"Yeah, hold that punk right there."* Hachi stabs into the man's arms repeatedly, as you aim.

## **BANG BANG BANG**

At the last minute Hachi musters up the strength to twist his body, jerking your own cultist in the way of your bullets, blasting the wicked heart's chest into bloody explosions. *Tch.*

A woman leaps at the boy, but Hachizaki slips out of her grasp.

## **BANG BANG**

You shoot at him again, but he ducks low, his belly almost touching the ground, scampering on the ground like an animal, your bullets hitting the floor behind him.

*“What’s a matter, Hachi-kun?”* you taunt, laughing. He really is a bug, crawling underneath furniture.

You aim at the lower corner of the desk, waiting for him to peek around his cover, while your hearts rush him from the other side. The size of the room works to his advantage, as your cultists fumble over each other.

*“Your girlfriend end up being a bit of an airhead? Hahahaha!”*

He jumps over the desk!

## **BANG**

Your shot misses entirely, blasting the ceiling as Hachizaki leaps at you. You have much more mass though, and block his knife swing with your guns, wielding them like clubs.

*“Don’t worry Hachi, I know you wanted a piece of her! If you head back there now I’m sure she’s still warm!”*

With a wide hook you crack him against the head with Righty, sending him head-over-heels.

You re-aim at him as one of the women charges around the desk behind him.

## **BANG BANG**

Lefty and Righty shout, and the geyser of blood reveals they connected with Hachizaki’s arms. Only a grazing wound on each, but a graze from a .50 caliber pistol is still devastating. Unfortunately, the collateral is rough as one of those grazing shots hits that woman in the stomach, sending her tumbling back into the way of your cultists.

Hachizaki’s eyes go wide from the hit, but he charges ahead once again. “I think it’s time you show me your *real* wicked heart!” he shouts.

You quickly adjust, realizing that you’ve shot your 12 shots – shit why didn’t you reload after Kogi! Before you can bring around your gun to block, Hachizaki is inside your guard.

## SCHTICK

You feel it, a stab right into one of the old sutures where you were sewn together. How could he tell!? No fucking way he happened to ride the exact line!

Hachizaki wrenches his red knife upwards, searing through your body, from your lower left belly to your upper right torso, carving a jagged path. Inside you, your organs scream in red rage. What the hell is this kid!?

“HAAAAAAH!” You bring down Righty atop his head, smashing his skull and sending him crumpling to the floor, Mr. Scarlet shoving your wounded woman henchman away to stumble at him.

You hold your guts together with one hand, gripping tightly, your nails digging into your skin, as your blood spills out in front of you. “*One hell of a wicked heart you have on yourself, kid!*” you shout. Despite the situation, there’s a smile on your face. The thrill!

Mr. Scarlet wrangles Hachizaki to the ground, even as he takes a stab to the gut from the feisty boy. Using some judo trick, Hachi flips him over. Again he leaps back onto the desk. Your few remaining cultists, still tripping over themselves try to restrain him, but he glares only at you. Defiant even after arms bleeding from your inflicted wounds. “You’re finished already,” he whispers. And a second later, with surprise no longer on his side, he dashes away in retreat. Pathetic, but smart.

Mr. Scarlet helps you to the boss chair. You slump down in it. Even if it was likely meant for someone smaller, you feel the cushions envelop you. It would be easy to go to sleep here, but you know you can’t, or else you’re unlikely to reawaken.

“So, was this the excitement you wanted?” You hear a voice from a door. It’s just Fran again.

“*Come in, come in,*” you mumble to him. “*I take it I can’t count on you as a wicked heart, can I, blondie?*”

“You can. In a way,” he says.

What a night. No rest for the wicked.

You flick open Lefty, spent brass falling to the floor, as Mr. Scarlet takes the rounds out again, for you to load them. You have Righty placed on the desk in front of you. Fran slowly walks around the desk. You motion for your wicked hearts to move out of his way. This is between you and him now.

Mr. Scarlet picks up your chair, reorienting it towards Fran, as you click the chamber closed on Lefty. *"This is it."*

## **BANG**

One shot. That's all you're able to get off, as Fran closes the distance in an instant dash. You see the path of the bullet make a hole in his blonde hair.

His hand touches your chest wound, the other holding your gun arm. Cold. Ice cold. A freezing, burning sensation spreads through your very being, causing you to shiver. Some sort of ice magic into your open wound. Your blood freezes. Lefty drops from your hands.

"Father—" murmurs Mr. Scarlet for the first time.

Ah, so this is it.

"Shhh," says Fran, as you can feel your inner burning blood transform to cold running through your body. His right hand no longer needs to hold your gun at bay, and he now runs it through your silver hair. "I love you too."

Ah, so that's how it is. You feel your heart stop beating, no longer able to pump. Here's where the end is. You smile. At least you were killed by someone who loved you.

You gaze into his eyes. *"Don't forget... that wicked hearts... never falter."* You smile at Fran.

"FAAATHER!" Ah, how you wish Mr. Scarlet had never opened his mouth. It would have been better to die in the cold silence.

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## **You have died.**

*Thanks for playing, Browneye. Verdan was a very wacky character who even now I'm not sure I've done justice, just because he was so far out there. He really brought an element of crazy to the game I'm sure that even a werewolf couldn't match.*