

Quinn: Hey, folks, Quinn here. Thanks so much for tuning into Episode 6 of Monster Hour. We actually decided not to do an intermission this episode, because there just wasn't a good spot to cut away from the action. And we would never subject you, our dear listeners, to the real monster, that is a poorly timed ad break.

So, before I jump in, I just want to give a quick shoutout to everybody who has helped spread the word about the show. It's been a few weeks since we launched, and since then, we've heard from a number of folks who have never played Monster of the Week or listened to an actual play podcast who are really enjoying it. We would love to bring more of those folks into the Monster Hour community. So, if you're enjoying the show and you haven't already done so, I hope you'll consider leaving us a rating and review or recommending us to a friend, because it really is the best way to help new folks find out about the show.

And speaking of the show, I think it's about time we got to it.

[Monster Hour theme]

Quinn: Hello, everyone, and welcome to Monster Hour. I am Quinn, your Keeper of Monster and Mysteries. Joining me today are: Kyle.

Kyle: Hi. I'm playing Alvin the Monstrous.

Quinn: Teo.

Teo: Hello. I'm playing Constance the Expert.

Quinn: And Hannah.

Hannah: I'm Hannah, and I'm playing JR the Crooked.

Quinn: Last time you all rendezvoused at the Prospector, where JR had an encounter with the Strigoi. You then went for a bit of a hike. JR, you gave a quick call to your new friend on the force, Chief Stoney, and learned that the call that got Constance in a little bit of trouble-

Teo: Oh, yeah.

Hannah: [laughs]

Quinn: -had likely come from her neighbor, Ethel. Following your hike, you made your way to Firmament college and elected to go to the old Ponderosa dorm where Alvin and Leon had spent their college heydays. While there, you located a dorm room that appeared to be in some disarray, the door was ajar and broken. As you stepped further in, JR, the closet door in the back rolled open and something leapt out at you. That's where we'll pick up today.

Kyle: What if it's a cat?

Hannah: [laughs]

Kyle: What if it's a cat?

Teo: It could be a cat.

Hannah: It could be a cat. Quinn, is it a cat?

Quinn: It's Pandora's closet. You'll never know until what's in there and open the door leaps out at you-

Kyle: Mm-hmm.

Quinn: -which is happening now.

Hannah: Okay. Real quick. Can you paint us a picture of where all of us are in the dorm room?

Quinn: Yeah, absolutely. JR, you are the furthest in. You stepped pretty close to the closet to investigate the hiking boots.

Teo: Thank you.

Hannah: Fuck me.

Kyle: You're the adult!

Quinn: Yes. JR, how old are you again? You're in your mid-30s?

Hannah: Early 30s. Yeah.

Quinn: Early 30s. Okay. Yes. So, slightly older than Constance. So, JR, you are the furthest in. Alvin, you, I believe, are still in the doorframe. Constance, you are still out in the hallway.

Teo: I'm smart.

Kyle: [laughs]

Quinn: That set the scene?

Hannah: Yeah.

Kyle: The smart person.

Quinn: Okay.

Teo: [laughs] So, disappointed.

Hannah: [laughs]

Kyle: I close the door.

Hannah: [laughs]

Quinn: Well, enough of that.

Kyle: Slowly.

Hannah: [laughs]

Kyle: Oh, no.

Quinn: Nothing to see in here.

Hannah: [laughs]

Teo: Sorry. We've derailed you enough.

Quinn: Yeah. You can only put this off for so long.

Hannah: Death is inevitable.

Kyle: We're going to die laughing, Quinn. We're going to die laughing.

[laughter]

Hannah: I just imagine our characters are like standing around while we're off goofing and they're like, "Come on. Can we get this--?" Like, "There's something in the closet that's about to bite me. Can you just hurry up?" [laughs]

Quinn: Yup.

Hannah: All right. Okay, Quinn.

Quinn: Okay. So, JR, you're in an ill-fated position as this closet door scrapes open against the metallic railings, and this figure from the darkness lurches out towards you. You are off guard, and so you're not going to be able to do much. But if you want to try to dive out of the way, I'll let you roll Act Under Pressure to do that.

Hannah: Yeah, I'd like to do that. Act Under Pressure?

Quinn: Yeah. Roll +Cool.

Hannah: All right. [rolls dice] Well, that's a 6.

Kyle: [laughs]

Quinn: Yup. On a 6, I get to take a hard move.

Kyle: Can I help?

Quinn: Yeah, I think you're close enough. You could potentially Help Out. How are you helping?

Kyle: Let's see. I could react in such a way to distract whatever's leaping out. If it's leaping out at JR, it may think that JR is the only thing here. So, if I give out a yell as well, maybe that's startling to it.

Quinn: Yeah. Roll to help out. It's also +Cool for Help Out.

Kyle: Oh, shit.

[laughter]

Kyle: [rolls dice]

Teo: Oh, no.

Kyle: That's a 5.

[laughter]

Hannah: I'm sorry. What was that, Alvin? 5?

Quinn: 5, I believe.

Hannah: One less than I rolled. Okay.

Kyle: Well, I rolled a 6.

Teo: Okay. You have to account for that -1 Cool.

Hannah: You roll the 6-- [crosstalk] Okay.

Kyle: I do still yell out though. That still happens.

Hannah: [laughs]

Quinn: You do yell out.

Kyle: I go “arrgghh!”

Hannah: [laughs]

Quinn: Yes. Yes, you do.

Kyle: [howls]

Quinn: [laughs] Okay. JR, you try to spring away. I think you spring backwards, and Alvin, you step forwards, and the two of you just run into one another.

Kyle: [laughs]

Hannah: Yikes.

Teo: Cool.

Quinn: Also, both of you mark experience.

Kyle: Hooray.

Hannah: Yay.

Kyle: Good news.

Hannah: Going to level up-

Kyle: For later.

Hannah: -if we survive.

Kyle: Yeah, [crosstalk] to live.

Quinn: We'll deal with that at the end of the episode if you live. So, the two of you collide in Alvin, your attempt to help, and JR your attempt to get away, and this figure springs forward. JR, you feel something heavy strike you in the head, and you take one harm, and you're knocked to the ground in a daze. Alvin, you stumble backwards, and you hit the desk at an awkward angle, and the corner of it just stabs into your back, and you also take one harm.

Kyle: Here's a very important question. Is it a silver desk?

Hannah: [laughs]

Quinn: It is not a silver desk.

Kyle: Perfect. Then, I take one less harm from being Immortal.

Quinn: Yes.

Hannah: Ooh.

Kyle: Yeah.

Quinn: So, you are okay. But, JR, you take one harm and you are knocked to the ground.

Hannah: Great.

Quinn: Alvin, as you snap to, you realize that the person in front of you is not the Strigoi, but it is Leon.

Hannah: Fucking Leon.

Quinn: And he is wild eyed, and he is gripping a metal baseball bat with both hands. He actually takes a lurching step towards you before you see a look of surprise and recognition come over his face. There's a dull thud as the bat falls to the floor. He takes three big steps forward towards you again, and then throws both of his arms around you in a big hug.

Kyle: [as Alvin] *Jesus Christ, Leon. What are you doing here?*

Hannah: [as JR] *Yeah, what are you doing here?*

Quinn: [as Leon] *You said this is where your - werewolf-ism, I guess - you said this is where it started, right, here at FC? This is where you were living when you dropped out. That's why, right? It was because of this.*

Kyle: [as Alvin] *Yeah.*

Quinn: [as Leon] *Well, if it started here, I thought maybe there were answers here.*

Kyle: [as Alvin] *Yeah, maybe. I don't know. Do you think it's related to why I'm like this? And my claws, which had shot out at the sign of danger, are slowly squishing themselves back into my fingers.*

Quinn: [as Leon] *I don't know. I just thought maybe I could find some-- But you saw it out there, right? The vampire thing that art girl was telling us about? I was in here looking, and I saw this broken door. But before I could even get here, I saw it coming up the stairwell. I hid in here before it could see me, but it was right out there. Did you really not--*

And Constance--

Hannah: Oh, no.

Kyle: Oh, no.

Teo: Goddamn it.

Hannah: Oh.

Quinn: As you're listening to this conversation from outside in the hallway, you suddenly feel this sharp pain in your side. You look down, and you see that someone has grabbed you by the torso. For a moment, I think there's this confusion, because you're looking down at these hands and you don't understand where the pain is coming from. And then, you see the blood start to seep out through your shirt. And then, the doorway is getting smaller and smaller, and you realize that you are being dragged down this hallway towards the stairwell. Please take two harm.

Teo: Argh!

Quinn: Constance, what do you do?

Teo: The initial moment of confusion leads to "aaaah" kind of thing, but less comical and more terrified. I'd like to say that as I'm being dragged away, I start violently with whatever force I still have, trying to pad my left side where I have my little purse thing on me, if it's still there, because I-- [crosstalk] Yeah.

Quinn: Constance, did you bring any weapons with you?

Teo: Well--

[laughter]

Kyle: To school?

Teo: Now, Monster weapons? No.

Quinn: I didn't think so.

Teo: Human weapons, for sure. I most definitely have pepper spray and it is 100% from my mother because [Kyle laughs] to quote her, my neighborhood was "going bad." So, it is the best pepper spray that wealthy Firmament money can buy.

Quinn: Okay, I will come up with stats for pepper spray in a moment, because I think that that makes narrative sense that you would not have any of your weapons, because I don't think we talked about using any, but that you would have pepper spray, because that's definitely something your mom would give you.

Teo: Oh, yeah.

Quinn: Alvin, as you're speaking to Leon, and he's asking you if you saw this thing, suddenly, there is a sharp scream from outside. And, JR, I think you are coming to, and you see Leon and Alvin, and you hear this scream.

Kyle: The sound of the yell, I think Alvin jumps right out of the hallway. My legs grow a little bit. Knees kind of bend backwards.

Hannah: Creepy weirdo.

Quinn: You step out into the hallway, and you can see-- You step out into the hallway, and you can see there is this trail of blood leading away as she is being dragged, kicking, and screaming away by the Strigoi. He has his claws dug into her torso. You can see the gleam of the aviators as he is dragging her very, very quickly.

Kyle: Still wearing the Aviators.

Hannah: Well, he's not going to sacrifice style, okay? Those shades are super bitchin'.

Kyle: [laughs] Strigoi's kind of tall and lanky, right?

Quinn: Yes.

Kyle: Yeah, Alvin's going to leap and try to tackle the Strigoi. I suppose it may be Protect Someone?

Quinn: This is definitely a Protect Someone roll, which is +Tough.

Kyle: Finally, a roll I'm good at. [rolls dice] Quite. 11.

Hannah: Yeah.

Quinn: Okay. When you Protect Someone and roll +Tough, on a 7+, you protect them, but you're going to suffer some or all of the harm. On a 10+, you get to choose an extra effect. You suffer little harm. All impending danger is now focused on you. You inflict harm on the enemy, or you hold the enemy back. So, you definitely are going to protect Constance-

Teo: Thank you.

Quinn: -but you also get an extra effect.

Kyle: Get an extra thing. I think since Alvin's trying a tackle maneuver, you hold the enemy back.

Quinn: Yeah, I like that.

Kyle: Grabbing hold, sinking my own claws into it to try to hang on.

Quinn: So, Constance, I think you see Alvin step out of the dorm. And even more so than just a minute ago, he looks bestial. He looks feral. His hair has grown longer, and you can see the claws protruding from the gloves that he's wearing. He drops to all fours and bounds forward, and in just a few leaps, tackles the Strigoi, and the two of them roll away from you. Alvin, you tackle this creature and you pin it to the ground. As you do so-

Kyle: I growl in its face.

Quinn: It hisses back in that same unnatural serpentine way.

Teo: I told you it hissed.

[laughter]

Quinn: I do think, because Protect Someone, you're going to take some of the harm. Constance already suffered some, but it does dig its claws into you as you tackle it, and you take one harm.

Kyle: Now, are they silver?

Quinn: No, they are not silver.

[laughter]

Kyle: Okay.

Quinn: JR-

Hannah: All right.

Quinn: -you've stood back up, and Leon is looking a bit scared and a bit stunned, and Alvin is ducked out of the room.

Hannah: I lean into Leon, and I go, [as JR] *We'll talk about this later* and I point to the baseball bat and then I storm out of the room.

Kyle: [laughs]

Quinn: [as Leon] *I thought you were a Strigoi!*

Hannah: [laughs] So, how far away is it now?

Quinn: I think they're only about 20 ft down the hallway.

Hannah: Okay. I don't really want to take a shot at them, because I [Kyle laughs] would maybe hit Alvin, although the bullets are not silver to my knowledge.

Kyle: Okay. Well.

Hannah: Yeah, you know what? My gun only does one harm.

[laughter]

Hannah: I'm going to shoot at it.

Kyle: You remember your memory of a few seconds ago when Alvin didn't seem that hurt by the table.

Hannah: [laughs]

Kyle: So, surely, if he gets hit by a bullet, probably fine.

Hannah: Okay. Well, hold on. You know what? I don't think I will fire at it right just yet. I'm going to go over and see how Constance is doing.

Teo: Thank you.

Hannah: And maybe try and drag her a little bit away from-

Kyle: Always dragging.

Hannah: -vampire-werewolf fight.

Quinn: Oh, God, I've created a *Twilight* fan fiction and I didn't even mean to!

Hannah: [laughs]

Kyle: Alvin's shirt tears.

Hannah: Oh, his muscles-

Quinn: The Strigoi shirt tears.

Hannah: -rippling in the dim light of the dorm room.

[laughter]

Hannah: Yeah, I want to see if I get Constance away.

Kyle: You don't know whose claw is whose.

Hannah: [laughs] Get Constance away from this, but then also, I got to call Stoney. He told me really specifically that if I don't call him, he's going to put me under the jail.

Quinn: You go to Constance, you help her up, and you move further down the hallway towards the dorm room where Leon has stepped out. You reach into the pockets of your smock for your phone and remember that it went sailing over the cliffside.

Hannah: Rest in peace, Razr flip phone.

Quinn: Constance, what are you doing?

Teo: I think right now, I have a lot of adrenaline running, so I probably don't feel much, but can I tell from looking down, is this like a "Ooh, I'm going to need a blood donor" amount of blood. Is this three hamsters? How many hamsters of blood is this?

Hannah: Oh, God.

Kyle: What's the blood rating here?

Quinn: You are bleeding a lot. In game mechanics terms, two harm doesn't make you unstable, but it's not a pretty sight, for sure.

Teo: [as Constance] *Thank you, JR, for getting me up. I got to ride out the adrenaline while I have it. I don't think that Alvin is going to be, Oh, okay alone. We got to go in there.* I think I yell at Leon to call the police.

Hannah: Uh-oh.

Teo: Well, because Constance isn't going to remember/know that you had that conversation. So, naturally I'm going to be like, [as Constance] *Leon, call the police, call everybody.*

Quinn: Leon's like, [as Leon] *I don't have my phone. Can I have-- Give me your phone.*

Hannah: [as JR] *Constance, give me your phone.*

Teo: I throw my phone.

Hannah: [as JR] *No, Constance!*

Teo: Yeah, because I'm confused as to what you're upset about.

Hannah: Yeah, I'm snatching that phone.

Quinn: Okay. I want to clarify here. Constance, did you give the phone to Leon or did you give it to JR?

Teo: I threw the phone at Leon.

Quinn: I love this. JR, Act Under Pressure to try to grab that phone before Leon does that.

Hannah: [laughs]

Quinn: So, Constance has thrown this phone, and it's slow-motion sailing through the air, [rolls dice] and both you and Leon are reaching for it, like, arms up.

Hannah: It's a fucking 5.

Kyle: [laughs]

Hannah: Goddamn it.

Quinn: So, on a miss, I get to take a hard move, also mark experience. On a miss, I get to take a hard move, which is that Leon grabs the phone, he just leaps forward, and he pulls it open, and snaps like five pictures.

Hannah: Oh my God!

Teo: Oh, the worst!

Quinn: And then, you can see him punch in 911 and starts dialing.

Alvin, as you are tangling with this Strigoi, you have it pinned down for a minute, but it plants both feet on your chest, kicks you off, and you land a few feet away. And as you get your bearings and it rights itself and stands back up, it gets its first full look at you, drops down to all fours and lets out this low, long, rumbling growl that you haven't heard it make before, and it reverberates down this hallway that you're standing in. Alvin, you feel your hair, which has now grown to an abnormal level for a human start to stand on end. And as it does so, it grows thicker and more pronounced even. You hear your heartbeat thundering in your eardrums as you square off against this Strigoi.

Kyle: There's a look in Alvin's eyes for a moment of fear, but quickly his pupils morph into vertical slits and turn yellow as he thunders on his chest and just leaps at the Strigoi.

Quinn: Roll to Kick Some Ass.

Teo: Woo!

Kyle: Kick [rolls dice] Ah, 9.

Quinn: On a 7 to 9, you inflict harm as established. So, the two of you leap into the air and your bodies collide. And there is this loud thunk as the two of you hit one of the walls and just start tearing into each other. Alvin, what is the harm for your claws to harm?

Kyle: Two harm, and they ignore armor.

Quinn: You drive one of your claws into this Strigoi's body, and you can see this wound open up, but there's no blood coming out of it.

Kyle: Cool.

Hannah: Gross.

Quinn: It's just this open perforation.

Hannah: Gross.

Quinn: And you do it again, and you see that again, there's almost nothing. You punch higher up towards where its heart ought to be. And you see this tiny little dribble, but there's almost nothing. And it in turn, starts ripping into you with its claws, these thick, blackened, long nails, and you take two harm. Constance and JR, you see the two of them just in this fierce melee.

Hannah: Gross. [crosstalk] That's all I have to say. It's disgusting.

Teo: [as Constance] *JR, we got to help him!*

Hannah: I'm getting that phone from Leon. I'm getting-- I don't know if that's a roll to Kick Some Ass or what?

Kyle: [laughs]

Quinn: That's a good question. I don't think it's Kick Some Ass unless you want to hurt Leon, which maybe you.

[laughter]

Teo: Doesn't everybody?

Hannah: Could this be a Manipulate Somebody?

Quinn: If you want to grab it from him, I think it's going to be an Act Under Pressure. If you want to try to persuade him to give it to you, then it's a Manipulate Someone. It's all about how you're going to go about it.

Hannah: I'm going to try and manipulate him, and I'm going to use my move, which is what will convince him to give me that phone.

Quinn: Your grifter ability?

Hannah: Yeah.

Quinn: Okay. You don't know Leon well, but you know two things about him. The first is that he is deeply committed to stories and telling the truth, and there are pictures on that phone that are just wild. The other thing that you know is that Leon is Alvin's best friend, and he already once turned down the biggest story of his life because it would have put Alvin in

danger. The way that Leon will give you that phone is if you can convince him that he needs to do it to protect Alvin.

Hannah: Okay. So, I am not pointing the gun at him, but I still have the gun in my hand, and I look at Leon and I go, [as JR] *Leon, if you don't give me that goddamn phone. I need to call somebody who can help us, and we'll also make sure nobody finds out about what's going on with Alvin. Do you want the authorities to know what's going on with Alvin? Because they're not going to see it the same way you and I see it. They're going to think he's dangerous. Now, give me that phone.* [rolls dice] That is a 12.

Kyle: Oh, shit.

Quinn: I think that's fitting, because it's a very compelling argument. Leon just stares at you blankly for a second, and then he looks back at Alvin, who is very, very wolfish at this point and is battling this undead abomination. You hear dispatch come on, says, "911. What's your emergency?" And he takes the phone, hangs up, and he hands it to you.

Hannah: All right. Yeah.

Kyle: I'm just imagining on the dispatch on the other end. You're like, "Hi, 911. Who's there?" Roar, hiss, crash, crash, crash. Beep.

[laughter]

Teo: Not great.

Kyle: [laughs]

Quinn: Must have been those punks from the local animal shelter again.

[laughter]

Quinn: Alvin, the Strigoi pushes you away, and the two of you disengage for just a moment, and it hisses again, and it drops to all fours, but immediately springs up, reaches the ceiling, and it digs its claws into it, and then it digs its feet into it and it starts crawling upside down on the ceiling towards Constance, JR, and Leon.

Hannah: Oh, I don't like this at all. I don't like this at all.

Quinn: I think, as it does so, those Aviators fall away, and you can see for the first time, its eyes, and there's no white to them. It's all this deep orange iris with a snake slit that's completely narrow, and it starts clambering on the ceiling towards the three of them.

Kyle: I'll also growl out, [as Alvin] *Constance, it doesn't bleed, if that helps anything. I don't know if you read anything about it doesn't bleed. It's not bleeding.*

Teo: [as Constance] *Boy, that would be a nice thing.*

[laughter]

Teo: I think Constance thinks--

Kyle: Jealous.

[laughter]

Teo: I think Constance thinks that internally and chuckles a little bit but doesn't actually have the wherewithal to say that out loud.

Kyle: [crosstalk] you got any great ideas?

Teo: As soon as I see it pop up onto the ceiling and I hear Alvin's thing about the blood, I start to remember some of those weird stories and that passage I read and I go, [as Constance, thinking] *Head. Okay, it's the head. The head is weak. It wears Aviators. Why does it do that?* And as it's within range of me, I would like to lift up the pepper spray that I found in my wallet, and my goal is to spray it in the eyes based on the knowledge of something with the head but I'm a little fuzzy right now, and this is the best way to protect myself. And is there any way I could convince you that's an Act Under Pressure?

Kyle: [laughs]

Quinn: So, here's what I'll give you.

[laughter]

Quinn: What I have come up with for pepper spray as a stat line for the weapon. Pepper spray is a zero harm close blinding.

Teo: All right.

Quinn: You could potentially get the Strigoi before it could get you. And because of that, I will make it an Act Under Pressure, specifically because a nightmare vampire is crawling on the ceiling towards you, and you're going to need to keep your cool in the situation to pull this off.

Kyle: It's kind of more of a defensive move than an offensive attack, right?

Quinn: Yeah, exactly. So, go ahead and roll +Cool.

Teo: Dope. Dope. Dope. Now, because I'm doing this because I've Read About This Sort of Thing about head-- [crosstalk]

Quinn: Oh, yes. You have your move.

Teo: Yeah. So, I get to roll +Sharp. A-ha.

Kyle: [laughs]

Teo: This is all my plan. Okay. [rolls dice] That is a 10.

Kyle: Whoa.

Hannah: All right.

Quinn: On a 10+, you do what you set out to do. So, this thing is clambering on the ceiling towards you, and you pull out your pepper spray, and a big jet shoots out towards it and strikes it in the face, and it screams and drops to the ground in front of you, and you can see those big harvest moon eyes are red and puffy.

Hannah: Aww. Give him some Visine. Is this your new pet?

Kyle: No, don't.

[laughter]

Teo: Sorry. Go on, Quinn.

Hannah: His little eyes hurt.

Quinn: It does not appear to have had the same effect as it would have on a human, because it is pretty quickly on its feet again, but it appears that you've inhibited it a little bit.

Teo: Can I say that this is the moment that I actually look around me and realize that JR is not next to me?

[laughter]

Quinn: Yeah. It's like a few feet in front of you, and JR is like 5ft back, and Alvin's 10ft ahead of you. So, it's you and Strigoi that you just pepper sprayed.

Teo: Yeah, because I'm like, [as Constance] *Wow, did you see that, JR--? Oh, no.*

[laughter]

Kyle: I'd see it fall from the ceiling and give another roar. I'll be like, [as Alvin] *That'll do.* I would jump right back on its back. Alvin is feeling the bloodlust.

Quinn: Okay. Go ahead and roll to kick some ass again.

Kyle: [dice rolls] Yikes. Glad I got a plus two. 7.

Quinn: So, you inflict harm as established?

Kyle: Yup.

Quinn: I think you get the jump on it a little bit and briefly pin it, but it rolls back around and the two of you are just once again tearing at each other. Alvin, take two harm and you deal another two harm to the Strigoi.

Teo: Shit.

Quinn: Again, these large lacerations open up over the Strigoi's body. But even as these wounds open, they look almost semi-healed already. They look like a cut that's been there for a day.

Kyle: Give another look to Constance and be like, [as Alvin] *Any ideas?*

Teo: [as Constance] *Huh? What?*

Kyle: [as Alvin] *Come on, think.*

Teo: [as Constance] *JR?*

Hannah: All right.

Quinn: JR, you're calling Stoney?

Hannah: Yup.

Quinn: It rings two or three times and-- Actually, I think it only rings once and hear Stoney come on the line, say, [as Stoney] *Hello? JR?*

Hannah: [as JR] *Remember how you told me to give you a call? I'm giving you that call. We are at the dorms, and there is a thing here that's attacking us. You should get here, because somebody already called 911. Not me though. I remember what you said. I remember very clearly. Anyway, yes.*

Quinn: [as Stoney] *Is it the thing?*

Hannah: [as JR] *Yeah, it's the thing and you should hurry. It's not going well.*

Quinn: [as Stoney] *I'm on my way*, and the phone line goes dead.

Hannah: Do I have enough time to take a shot at the Strigoi?

Quinn: Oh, sure. Yeah.

Hannah: All right. This is Kick Some Ass, which I am not very good at.

Kyle: [laughs]

Hannah: We'll see. At least I had a good role to get the phone. [dice rolls]

Teo: I did say JR in a way of like JR help, would that count as my often right?

[laughter]

Quinn: No.

Teo: Goddang it.

Hannah: Well, that's a 4. Argh.

Quinn: On a miss, I get to take a hard move-

Hannah: Shit.

Quinn: -which is that, you hang up on the line with Stoney and you pull your revolver out and you open fire. Alvin and the Strigoi are still trading blows, and you strike Alvin.

Teo: Oh.

Quinn: So, what is the harm on your weapon?

Hannah: It's a one harm.

Kyle: Oh. Eh.

Hannah: Just a little love tap.

Kyle: [laughs]

Quinn: You see the bullets bury themselves into Alvin's shirt, but there's no blood that comes out, which I think might be a little alarming to you as well.

Hannah: Yeah, it's weird.

Quinn: He seems unfazed by taking three bullets or four bullets in the back.

Hannah: Yeah, it's a little weird.

Kyle: What the hell?

Quinn: But as this happens, the Strigoi spins him around and tosses him. And it looks at Constance and Constance knocks you aside with a forearm and pins you into the wall. And, JR, it leaps towards you.

Hannah: Shit.

Quinn: And almost in the same way as it did before with that cat-like leap, pins you down and starts tearing into you, and you take two harm.

Hannah: I am now unstable.

Kyle: Ooh.

Hannah: Yeah. Do you want to explain to the listening audience what unstable means?

Quinn: So, once you reach four harm, your wounds are now considered unstable, which means that if you don't get medical treatment, they will continue to get worse, and you will continue to take harm until you die. So, JR, I think it's not just reminiscent of what happened before. It just goes for the same spots. It knows where it struck you before, and it tears into those stitches, and they just burst open.

Hannah: Fucking great. Ah, it's Stoney's artwork. Oh, God.

Quinn: There are these just ribbons of blood that paint the walls around this hallway.

Hannah: All right, I'm screaming a whole lot. Just like, imagine the dulcet tones of JR shrieking, because this hurts a whole lot.

Quinn: It flies pretty much every-- and Constance, I think some of it gets on you, and some of it gets on Leon, who takes a step back and screams, and it's got JR pinned pretty good.

Hannah: [as JR, meekly] *Help me.*

Kyle: Alvin will call out, [as Alvin] *Leon, home run Derby!*

Quinn: You'll have to explain what that means to me, Quinn, so that-- [crosstalk]

Kyle: Oh, Leon has a baseball bat, doesn't he?

Quinn: I think he dropped it in the room.

Hannah: Yeah, he dropped in the room. It scared him.

Kyle: Oh, never mind then. [laughs]

Quinn: He'll go back and get it if you want him to, like, if you ask him to.

Kyle: Yeah, we need all hands on deck, I think.

Quinn: Leon looks at you, and you can see the fear in his eyes, but nods and blitzes past the Strigoi back into the dorm room, and you can hear the soft grading of metal on linoleum as he picks up the bat.

Teo: [as Constance] *Go for the head. Go for the head.*

Quinn: But that's all he's going to do for now.

Teo: Oh, okay.

Kyle: Okey-dokey. Could I go for the head? Can I follow her correct instructions?

Teo: My "Often Right" instructions?

Quinn: Yeah, sure.

Teo: It is advice.

Quinn: I'm not going to let you do this all combat, but now.

[laughter]

Quinn: If this is the instance that you want to use this, you can use your often right ability, because you are right. You distinctly recall from reading your Buni's books that you need to remove the head and burn the body or the Strigoi will not die. So, if this is your often right guidance, then, yeah, you can get a plus one, Alvin.

Kyle: I think it makes sense too, because it's a corrective measure. Alvin's been just, like, wildly stabbing with claws.

Quinn: Yeah.

Kyle: So, now, he's got helpful guidance. [rolls dice] That's way better. Holy crap. That's a 13!

Hannah: Yeah! Woo!

Quinn: All right. So, on a 10+, you inflict harm, but you also get to choose an extra effect.

Hannah: Please get it off me.

Quinn: Take plus one forward or give plus one forward to another hunter. You can inflict terrible harm, which is plus one harm. You will suffer less harm, or you force them where you want them.

Kyle: I'm tempted to do suffer less harm, because I'm close to unstable as well. But I think the instructions, the situation, and the bloodlust would lead Alvin to leap and try to grasp the neck of the Strigoi, claws out, and try to hurl it away from JR.

Quinn: So, that's you force them where you want them, I assume?

Kyle: Yeah.

Quinn: Okay. You do. So, you leap forward, and you grab the Strigoi by the neck and dig your claws into it, and you pull it off of JR and hurl it away. As you do so, it rakes you as well. Again, you're going to suffer two harm.

Kyle: Eh, there's unstable. That's 4.

Hannah: Oh, boy.

Quinn: So, you're tougher than you imagine. You're tougher than you ever thought you would be. But this ongoing melee with this creature is taking its toll, and you start to feel weak.

Kyle: Yeah. Same effect of clawing at its neck? Same thing with the wounds?

Quinn: Yes. You can see the wounds that you inflicted, they remain open but unbloodied. Again, as though you had cut into a body post mortem, as though you had wounded someone that was already dead and exsanguinated.

Kyle: Good word.

Hannah: JR's really not doing well. None of us are. But I'd like to try and-- I've already called for help. So, in theory, Stoney should be here soon, but I'd like to try and-- I've still got my skeleton key in my pocket, and I want to try and do some magic. I want to see if I can damage it using magic.

Quinn: So, it sounds like the effect that you're trying to do is just inflict harm?

Hannah: Yup, yup. I just want to hurt it.

Quinn: Okay. What do you do? Tell me how this works, because you've done magic exactly once before with this key. You know it opens doors. You know it opens a lot of doors.

Hannah: Right.

Quinn: But magic is new. So, what do you do?

Hannah: Okay. So, last time, I basically threw up my hand and said stop and it stopped it. So, I think this time I'm going to hold up my hand and go "No!"

Kyle: [laughs]

Quinn: Okay.

Kyle: Alvin sits down.

[laughter]

Hannah: Good boy, Alvin. All right, let's see if this does what I wanted to do. I've not been rolling super well this time. [rolls dice]

Quinn: Yeah. Roll +Weird.

Hannah: Okay. That's a 9.

Quinn: On a 7 to 9, it works, but it's imperfect.

Hannah: Okay.

Quinn: Choose your effect, which is inflict harm, and a glitch, and I get to decide how the glitch plays out.

Hannah: Great.

Quinn: So, the glitches are the effect is weakened, the effect is of a short duration, you take one harm, ignore armor, the magic draws immediate, unwelcome attention, or it has a problematic side effect.

Hannah: Let's say problematic side effect.

Quinn: So, JR, you pull out your key and you shout no. What does it look like when you do this magic?

Hannah: I don't think there's really a whole lot of flash or flare or anything that goes on with it. The key is going to glow, because that's what it does when it sort of does magic. I imagine it a bit just like a ripple going through the air, but there's not going to be a flash, there's not going to be sparkles, there's not going to be light or anything like that.

Quinn: You see this shockwave pulse out from the skeleton key, and it strikes the Strigoi, and you see another laceration open up, and it looks confused, almost like it doesn't really understand what you did. And then, it sees the key, and it drops down to all fours in a crouch, like it's ready to pounce. You're holding the key out, and you can see around the exterior, the sigils glowing. And again, you don't really understand what they say, but you can make them out pretty clearly.

As you're looking at them, it's getting hotter. It's hotter than last time, and suddenly, it's too hot to hold. You drop the key to the ground, and it starts to smoke on the carpet, and you see the Strigoi lunge for it.

Hannah: Goddamn it.

Quinn: I think it's at this moment also that Leon comes wheeling out of the dorm room.

Kyle: Yeah, my boy!

Teo: Let's all calm down. It's just Leon.

Hannah: Leon, Leon, Leon.

Quinn: I like how Constance is still skeptical. [laughs]

Teo: Yeah. Constance does not-- It's going to take a lot to get Leon warmed up for her.

Hannah: I'm not real happy about it, but I'll take any help.

[laughter]

Hannah: I don't know why I said it like that.

[laughter]

Quinn: So, Leon rounds the corner, and the four of you are squared up one side of the hallway closer to the dorm room. And the Strigoi, not far away, is bounding towards this scorching hot key that JR has just dropped on the ground. What do you do?

Kyle: I'd like to try to intercept the Strigoi.

Quinn: Alvin, Leon rounds the corner out, looks at you, sees the look in your eye, and leaps forward as you leap forward, and the two of you jump towards this key as the Strigoi goes.

Kyle: Just like old times.

Quinn: I guess. Not really at all like old times.

[laughter]

Kyle: So, he's leaping towards the key?

Quinn: He's leaping forward. I don't think he understands what the key is, why it's important, but he has seen you jumping forward, and he is also ready to engage the Strigoi. He doesn't really understand what the key is.

Kyle: I think with that realization that you had mentioned of the level of his wounds brings Alvin back in a little bit, and he remembers what they learned about cutting off the head, and he pulls out his big knife, and he would like to leap-- while doing that leaping to intercept the Strigoi, and he'd like to try to pin it with one clawed hand and try to drive the knife into its neck with the other one.

Quinn: So, you can get to the Strigoi or the key, but you're not going to be able to do both.

Kyle: Right. Yeah. I think Alvin, also similar to Leon, doesn't really know what the deal with the key is. This is the first time he's seen it do anything or even really see it. I don't think Alvin's seen this key before.

Quinn: Yeah. You saw it open the door, but you haven't seen it do any magic.

Kyle: Yeah, you'd see it open the door.

Quinn: Although, arguably, opening the door is magic, although just a different kind.

Kyle: It's pretty magic because it's a skeleton key that opened an electronic door-

Quinn: Yeah, pretty weird.

Kyle: -kind of weird. Even so, I think Alvin is still zeroed in on this monster.

Quinn: Okay. Definitely roll to Kick Some Ass. And take +1 because you have Leon with you. Although forewarning, if things go badly, they will also go badly for Leon.

Kyle: Yeah. Okay. [rolls dice] 9. [crosstalk] Oh, wait, with the plus one, you said plus one?

Quinn: I did.

Kyle: 10. Hah!

Quinn: Okay. On a 1+, you both inflict harm, and you get to choose an extra effect. Take plus 1 forward or give plus 1 forward to another hunter, you can inflict terrible harm, you can suffer less harm, or you can force them where you want them.

Kyle: I think in this case with what I described, it's kind of inflict more harm.

Quinn: Yeah. I think it should be inflict terrible harm.

Kyle: Yeah.

Quinn: So, you leap forward, and the Strigoi, I think, sees you and sees that it's not going to make it to the key in time, and pulls up. Leon hits it with his bat, but it doesn't really even seem to faze this creature. You hear the sound of metal hitting dull flesh, but there's no reaction. And instead, the two of you monstrous creatures collide again just in front of the key, and you stab it in the neck with your big knife. What's the harm rating on your big knife?

Kyle: The big knife is just one harm.

Quinn: So, with your +1, that deals two harm.

Kyle: Correct.

Quinn: I think your ferocity probably even alarms you at this point. You punch it through the throat and get its head about halfway off.

Hannah: Whoa. Woo.

Quinn: It digs its claws into you, but it's not nearly as strong as it was.

Kyle: That's good.

Quinn: You do still take two harm, but you can feel the vitality, the ferocity of this creature fading. Its head lulls to the side a little bit, and it scurries away, and holds up a hand and rights its head and is holding it in place.

Kyle: Like a Nearly Headless Nick situation.

Quinn: Yes. As it does that, for the first time, you see what might resemble a human emotion in this creature's face, and it is fear.

Kyle: I give it a big roar. We'll add that in post-- [roars]

Quinn: Without pause, it turns and starts sprinting down the hallway.

Kyle: That ain't going to fly.

Quinn: JR, what do you do?

Hannah: I'm going to snatch the key back up.

Quinn: You grab it and it is hot. And if you try to hold onto it's going to hurt you.

Hannah: Can I stuff it in my pocket?

Quinn: If you pick it up, it's going to hurt you.

Hannah: Like, is it going to hurt me or is it going to hurt me where you're going to make me mark a harm? How much is it really going to hurt me? Is it going to hurt him emotionally?

Quinn: It is like touching an oven that has been on for hours.

Hannah: Shit. Shit.

Quinn: It's literally smoking and singeing the carpet.

Hannah: So, I'd go to pick it up and I drop it again because it's still hot. I don't think I'm really in much of a position to go chasing after it since I'm unstable.

Kyle: Don't you have a gun?

Quinn: For the record, Alvin, I believe, is in the worst spot, which is five harm.

Hannah: Oh, boy.

Kyle: I am at five.

Hannah: Oh, God, so much blood.

Quinn: And four is unstable and seven is dead.

Hannah: Great.

Teo: Yeah.

Hannah: All right. Well, I'm going to shoot at the Strigoi then.

Kyle: Shoot its head off.

Teo: All right. Shoot its head off.

Hannah: Shoot its head off.

Quinn: Okay.

Hannah: [rolls dice] That's a 3.

Quinn: Okay.

Teo: Oh, my God.

Hannah: [crosstalk]

Kyle: [laughs]

Teo: Oh, my God, who did you shoot?

Kyle: You're going to level up twice.

Hannah: I might.

Quinn: So, just to set the record straight a little bit here, this wouldn't be a Kick Some Ass because you're not within its range, but I do think it would be an Act Under Pressure to get your shot.

Hannah: Oh, okay. Well, then it's a 4.

[laughter]

Hannah: So much better.

Kyle: Cool.

Hannah: Excellent.

Quinn: That does mean you're not going to suffer harm, because the Strigoi is not close enough to harm and it's actively attempting to get away.

Hannah: Right.

Quinn: But I do need to come up with a hard move.

So, I think everyone is on edge. Is that fair?

Hannah: That's fair.

Kyle: Yes.

Teo: Yes, and bleeding.

Quinn: Yeah.

Teo: Except the Strigoi! Anyway. Sorry.

Hannah: And Leon.

Quinn: No, but the Strigoi is in bad shape.

Teo: Yeah.

Quinn: I think part of what's put you on edge is the fact that you basically have decapitated this thing, and it just held its head in place and is running away in a deeply macabre scene. And so, JR, again, I think you find yourself slightly flustered. You open fire as this thing is running away, and Alvin and Leon have just jumped out ahead, and you wing Leon in the shoulder, and he goes down.

Hannah: Shit.

Kyle: You've shot both of us.

Teo: [laughs]

Hannah: Only person that I haven't shot is Constance. Just you wait-- [crosstalk]

Kyle: And the monster!

[laughter]

Quinn: You hit him in the shoulder, so you don't know how bad it is, but he screams and falls.

Hannah: Somebody else want to do something? Somebody else want to try and be a hero? Because I'm not doing super well at it.

Teo: Okay. So, Constance sees this happen in her kind of in and out of reality, because she's going to probably pass out soon phase. She makes-- [crosstalk]

Quinn: Constance has suffered the least harm of anybody. [laughs]

Teo: Yeah, but Constance is a little lightweight in the--

Kyle: In the blood bathing?

Teo: Look, everyone feels their 1 to 10 pain scale differently.

Hannah: [crosstalk] true. Very true.

Teo: Constance is a little bit of a wimp, okay?

Quinn: Okay. Fair enough.

Teo: First, she makes a mental note, [as Constance, thinking] *Mm, teach JR Forward into the left. The hunting principle.* I think I've got my pepper spray and nothing else on me, and this thing is running away. I move around along the wall. I find the very regulation-placed fire alarm, and I pull it. My hope is that it's one of those fire alarms that automatically triggers the sprinklers, but basically, I'm trying to startle the Strigoi as it is running away.

Quinn: Mm, okay.

Hannah: Bold move.

Quinn: I'm trying to decide if this is a roll, and here's what I'll say. Alvin, you're going after the Strigoi, right?

Kyle: Yeah, he was chasing after the Strigoi. Leon's yell, haven't decided if that's going to stop him or not. I'm still thinking about it.

Quinn: Well, I'm going to call you up for a decision here, because I think the effect of Constance's action is going to be a bonus to your catching this Strigoi before it gets away.

Kyle: I think what it is as he's bounding after the Strigoi, he sees Leon go down, sees JR with gun outstretched-

[laughter]

Kyle: -and knows that JR also shot him earlier.

Quinn: [laughs]

Kyle: I think the quick mental calculation is that as long as the Strigoi is still up, JR is going to keep missing.

[laughter]

Kyle: So, we got to get the Strigoi down quickly.

Teo: [laughs] So, I can shoot it.

Kyle: So, he's going to double his efforts to run fast. I could pull out the No Limits move as well, similar to what we did for the police station.

Quinn: I think no limits is the perfect move for this, because you are trying to keep up with a supernaturally fast creature, and I think the only way you can do it is to be supernatural. So, roll plus weird. Roll No Limits. And take +1, because as this alarm goes off and the sprinkler system does go on overhead, this Strigoi pauses for a half second to look back, cradling its head in its hands.

Kyle: [laughs] Sorry, I just had a funny image of it holding its head and turning his head backwards, just pivoting around on his half neck.

Quinn: Yes. It's a deeply weird visual.

Kyle: Okay. Well, that's good.

Quinn: Roll +Weird and take a +1 bonus.

Kyle: Knock on wood, but I'm excited about this roll. [dice rolls] That is a 12. It is 8 plus 4.

Quinn: What does it look like, Alvin?

Kyle: I think as the Strigoi is stopping and pivoting its head around, it exposes the last half of its neck. And Alvin, on all fours, bounding towards the Strigoi, does a leap up and off of the wall and hits it horizontally with its claws striking directly at the neck.

Quinn: You part this pallid flesh from the shoulders to the neck, and the Strigoi's head rolls off to the ground.

Hannah: Yeah. Woo.

Kyle: [howls]

Quinn: The body stumbles backwards into the stairwell and collapses.

Hannah: [as JR] *Huh. All right.*

Teo: [as Constance] *Burn it!*

Quinn: And Constance, as you say that, you see the eyes of the Strigoi flip to you.

Teo: Ah, fuck.

Quinn: Its mouth starts to move, and you can hear in deep, low tones these strange intonations and incantations in a language that you don't recognize. What do you do?

Teo: I look at it and say, [speaking in Romanian].

Quinn: If it understands, it doesn't appear to respond. I assume that was Romanian?

Teo: It was, yes.

Hannah: Is it saying what it was saying to me back in the alleyway?

Quinn: No. So, there is a severed head on the ground that is talking.

Hannah: [laughs]

Kyle: I kick it down the hallway back like a soccer ball.

Quinn: [laughing] Oh, my goodness. Okay. It's not even a move. You just kick this head, and it rolls down the hallway.

[laughter]

Teo: Oh, we're all going to need so much therapy.

Quinn: JR and Constance, you see this newly severed head-

Hannah: Oh, God. [laughs]

Quinn: -reciting these incantations. And Alvin, who just decapitated it, comes back and just soccer boots it towards you. This head speaking these rituals is flying towards you.

Hannah: All right, hold on. I got something. So, I'm going to pick up the Aviators.

Kyle: Don't shoot it.

Hannah: No, I'm going to pick up the Aviators where they fell off of the Strigoi, and I'm going to go, [as JR] *Well, it really looks like you lost your head*, and then put them on.

[laughter]

Teo: Oh my God!

Kyle: No, you're going to turn into a Strigoi!

Quinn: Okay. Roll +Cool.

[laughter]

Quinn: To see how cool this is, roll +Cool.

[laughter]

Hannah: [rolls dice] It's a 7. Ah.

Quinn: Okay. It's a mixed success.

Hannah: It's cool. It's cool.

Quinn: You can choose to impress one of the three people around you, Leon, Alvin, or Constance.

Kyle: Who you just shot.

Hannah: I think I want to make Leon think I'm cool, because I did just shoot him in the shoulder.

Quinn: Leon gives you a thumbs up from his supine position, bleeding on the carpet.

[laughter]

Kyle: It lasts like 10 seconds. You shoot Leon, put on sunglasses, and give him a little okay sign?

Hannah: Yes.

Quinn: [laughs]

Kyle: While yourself also bleeding.

Kyle: Like, "Don't worry. I meant to do this."

Hannah: Yup.

Teo: Oh, God.

Quinn: Okay, let's return to reality here.

Teo: It's okay. Was it, burn the head or burn the body? I remember it as burn the head.

Hannah: I thought it was head.

Kyle: I have, in my notes, to kill is remove the head and burn the body.

Teo: Well, then, yeah, we should burn the body. Burn the body.

Kyle: You yell that out. Alvin will grab the body and huck it down the hallway.

Hannah: [laughs]

Quinn: Okay.

Kyle: [howls]

[laughter]

Teo: Oh, boy.

Kyle: I have no fire. [laughs]

Quinn: So, this head goes sailing towards JR and Constance.

Hannah: [laughs]

Quinn: I think it just rolls to a stop in front of you, and it is continuing these words. And then suddenly, it stops and then its mouth opens wide. You can see the rows of teeth, and you can even see behind them a second row of humanoid teeth that have shrunk back in this mouth. As it opens its mouth, you start to see this strange substance emerge. It's difficult to put your finger on even a shape, but it's somewhere between a cloud and a pattern of light. It's wispy and ephemeral, and it is starting to pour out of the Strigoi's head.

Hannah: That's not good.

Quinn: Alvin, you chuck the body down the stairs, [Hannah laughs] unless you weren't serious about that.

Kyle: I think burn the body, in Alvin's memory of living here in this dorm, was there a kitchen anywhere in the dorm, or was there a cafeteria with a kitchen nearby?

Quinn: I think there is a cafeteria at the first floor, and I think that you would be safe to assume that a cafeteria means there's a kitchen.

Kyle: So, I guess he'll hold up the body and be like, [as Alvin] *Anybody have fire for this?*

Quinn: I will remind you that the overhead sprinklers are on because Constance pulled the fire-- [crosstalk]

Kyle: It is. Very well. Okay.

Hannah: And my key's all hot.

Quinn: Yes.

Kyle: Yeah. I think the kitchen might be the closest thing that we can get to that could feasibly burn it. We could go down a floor, maybe.

Teo: Yeah, just go down a floor or a kitchen. I think keeping them separate is important too. I'm nervous that it can do some sort of weird voodoo to put itself back together, if given the chance.

Hannah: I'm worried it's going to try and take over somebody, like the steam's going to go into somebody else, and we're going to get another Strigoi.

Teo: Oh, yeah. I'm definitely worried about that too. I'm just also worried about having the body and the head in the same place. Well, ultimately, Alvin, you're the one who is near it. Your decision what you do.

Kyle: I'll grab it, give a little howl, and bound off towards the cafeteria.

Quinn: All right. Alvin, you heave this body and you take off downstairs. Constance, JR, there is a severed head in front of you, and it appears to be leaking something strange, and that something is gathering at its base.

Teo: Do you think we should throw a blanket over it? I'm just saying so it's not able to have contact with the air?

Hannah: It's not like come rolling towards us. I think we should go.

Teo: Okay.

Hannah: Okay, here, I take off my jacket, and I hand it to you. If you want to cover it up, you can cover it up, but I think we should-- [crosstalk]

Teo: You are right. I throw the jacket onto the head and start motioning for us to go the other way.

Hannah: Okay.

Teo: My thought is that if Alvin can get the job done or we go downstairs and help him get the job done, we probably will have time to investigate the head after. I haven't read anything about it. I don't know anything about-- I don't know. I don't know. We'll have to--

Quinn: Constance, you have a move that you could use if you wanted to learn more or know more.

Teo: As in Past Lives?

Quinn: Yes.

Hannah: Ooh.

Quinn: Your lore library is not your only reference point for this Strigoi.

Teo: That's a good point. And up until now, Constance has used her pepper spray and pulled a fire alarm. So, maybe it's Constance's turn to try to do something more helpful.

[laughter]

Teo: Yeah, I think we're hesitating and Constance would like to use past lives.

Quinn: So, I think you and JR are standing in front of this head, and you are just lost. No fairy tales prepared you for this. And in that moment of utter confusion, you feel a presence. Roll plus weird.

Teo: [dice rolls] Oh, good God. That's a 4.

Kyle: You have luck.

Hannah: [laughs]

Kyle: You have luck.

Teo: I have luck.

Quinn: You do have luck. We haven't really talked about luck, but basically, all characters have a certain amount of it. I think it's seven points.

Kyle: Correct.

Quinn: You can use luck to automatically turn any failure into success or to negate any harm from a single attack. But when you run out of luck, you are doomed, which means I can make a hard move whenever I want. So, it's a very finite resource, but I believe no one has used any luck. So, Constance, would you like to use luck?

Teo: I would like to cash in one luck point, please.

Quinn: Yeah. With a full success using luck, the past life has something useful to offer. You can ask the keeper two of the questions below. What did a past life discover about blank? How did a past life deal with blank? What important hidden secret can a past life show me the way to? What did a past life learn too late to help them? Or, what can specific past life blank tell me? That last one isn't really applicable, because you really only have one past life - for now, anyway. But those first four, certainly.

Teo: And I get to fill in the blank?

Quinn: Yeah. I assume the blank is Strigoi, but--

Teo: Well, tell me--

Quinn: It can be more specific too.

Teo: Okay. I was going to say, how did a past life deal with-- [crosstalk]

Kyle: My mom.

[laughter]

Quinn: Yeah, fuck this Strigoi situation. Like, I can deal with that in one question. I want to know how Buni dealt with my mother.

[laughter]

Kyle: You got two questions to ask, right?

Teo: Oh, my God, that is true. I have two. I can burn one. No. What important hidden secrets can a past life show me the way to, and what did a past life discover about the Strigoi head?

Quinn: Constance, you feel this presence, and then suddenly, everything goes black. JR, you see, as you're getting ready to hightail it out of there, you see Constance suddenly lean against the wall looking very lightheaded, and then her eyes roll back into their sockets, and she slumps down.

Hannah: Yeah...

Quinn: Constance, you are in your studio, and there is sunlight streaming in through the windows. Your eyes are drawn to the flash of movement, and you see a young girl reaching

for a polished elk antler that's mounted on the wall. You hear yourself say in this strange, deep voice that isn't yours. [as Buni] *Listen here, little one. I told you not to play with those antiques. If you don't behave yourself, then the Strigoi is going to appear at night and gobble you up.* And you hear this little girl say, *What's a Strigoi? It's a monster, a terrible one that rides dead bodies like horses. Don't worry though, your Buni will keep you safe.*

And then in a flash, it's gone and you're somewhere else.

It's nighttime, and the only thing that you can see in the tar, thick darkness is a small flame that's standing idly beside you. From the shadows comes this tall, lean man with thick, dark hair. In one hand, he's dragging a bloodstained burlap sack that appears to have something large and very heavy in it. The other is clutching a clump of stringy hair that is attached to a severed head. The man nods grimly, and heaves the sack towards you. You raise this light that you're holding, and suddenly a gout of fire springs forth to embrace this decidedly body shaped bag. But as that happens, this severed head begins to whisper in ragged breaths. And suddenly, this wispy, multicolored cloud billows out of its mouth and disappears into the night sky. You look at this man, and he is crestfallen.

And that scene too fades away, and suddenly you're back.

Teo: [as Constance] *Oh, can't explain where I went, but we have to burn that body before it finishes that incantation. We have to stop it from finishing that incantation. That is how the Strigoi will escape and do this all over again.*

Hannah: [as JR] *Uh, okay, I'm following you. You can tell me where you went later. Can we contain the wispy thing? What if we--?*

Teo: [as Constance] *We can't let this cloud of puff stuff dissipate. It can't be let to finish its little ritual.*

Hannah: [as JR] *I don't really know if I want touch it, because it might--*

Teo: [as Constance] *It might be real gross and potentially deadly. Yes, for sure.*

Hannah: [as JR] *Well, I'm worried that the wispy stuff is going to get on me.*

Quinn: Let's jump to Alvin. Alvin, you have reached the first floor of Ponderosa Hall and made your way through the darkened entryway over to the food court.

Kyle: I want to look around to where the food comes out. If there's a counter where they'd put out late night pizzas or something like that, I want to go behind the counter.

Quinn: You can see a handful of classic kitchen doorways, the thick, durable plastic ones that just bend as opposed to actually open like full doors. You can see two or three of those all leading back to one area that you're pretty darn sure is where the kitchen is and where that kitchen equipment would be.

Kyle: Yeah, I go right through the closest door.

Quinn: It is dark, but you can still make out from the sensors that are on and the indicator lights that are on, the metallic gleam of various industrial appliances, big sinks, and giant ranges, and ovens, and dishwashers. Everything that you would need to feed hundreds of students on any given day. And you flip on the lights, and this room comes to life in front of you.

Kyle: I'd like to open up an oven, pull out all the trays, and try to stuff this body inside, [Hannah laughs] trying not to think too closely about what it looks like.

Quinn: Yeah, there's no roll here. You do it. You push this body inside, you crank the heat, and now all you can do is wait.

Kyle: I want to see if I can find a pen and paper and try to write an out of order sign on the oven.

Hannah: Oh, Alvin, always thinking of others.

Quinn: Okay.

Kyle: [laughs]

Quinn: It's very good. Constance, JR, the incantations have stopped.

Teo: But I haven't seen the cloud go up like I did in my--

Quinn: No, it hasn't and it's still coming out.

Teo: Okay.

Quinn: It doesn't appear to be happening nearly as quickly. As more of this accumulates, it's taking on a different form. It's not so much of a fog as it is almost like a pattern of light or like a bubble, but not so much static or self-contained as it is fluttering and blurring and shifting on the ground.

Hannah: Okay. I've got an idea. We'll see how this goes. I'm going to try to use magic on it. I know that the key is hot. I'm hoping it's cooled down a little bit. But honestly, at this point, I think this is the option to go for besides hitting it with a baseball bat, which we could still do. I don't want to take that fully off the table. But one of the things that I can do under magic, assuming it works, is trap a specific person, minion or monster. And so, I think what I'd like to do is try and trap it before the smoke goes somewhere else.

Quinn: So, you're picking up the key and--

Hannah: Yeah.

Quinn: Okay. You run over and grab the key, and it's still hot, for sure.

Hannah: Okay.

Quinn: It hurts holding it in your hand.

Hannah: Yeah.

Quinn: But you grit your teeth, and you pick it up, and you point it at this severed Strigoi head that is spilling out this bizarre substance. What do you say?

Hannah: I point to it, and I go, *Stay*.

Teo: Yes.

Hannah: [rolls dice] And that's a 6. You know what? We'll go ahead and use a luck point now. Just so folks at home who are listening, as a Crooked special, whenever I spend a luck point, somebody from my past will reappear in my life and it just says soon.

[laughter]

Hannah: Yeah, that's real cool. All right, I'm going to use a luck point. So, it goes straight to 12.

Quinn: JR, you grab this key, and it's hot. It burns you. You take one harm from grabbing it and holding onto it, but you point it at this Strigoi and you shout, *Stay*. And as you clasp it in your hand, you can see this light coming from it. You know what it is even though you can't see it through your own hands, you know that it's those sigils. You can feel the heat intensifying. For a second, nothing seems to happen and you think maybe it's gone wrong. You think maybe your luck's run out.

But then, this strange substance which now has gathered in a pool, you can see, actually, as it's gathered, it's gained this form to it, this swirl of prismatic colors. It's almost like looking at a photo negative, but all the shades and hues are starting to shift and change. It's semitransparent. What little you can see through it in the background is changing too. It's moving in these strange configurations that don't seem to make sense, but at the same time feel right as you hold them in your eyes. This cloud, as you point the key at it, starts to quiver and pulsate and spasm, and then it starts to spasm more quickly, and it starts to flail wildly, and then it starts to recede back into this severed head.

Hannah: Yay.

Teo: Whoa. Sorry, I'm taken aback by the visual.

Quinn: I think it's at that moment. Alvin, you're downstairs in the kitchen just waiting. Upstairs, Constance, you're still recovering from this vision that you receive. And JR, you're holding this key as it burns, as it sears into your hands, and then you see this shape start to burn. It's slow at first. Around the edges, you can see this red-orange glow. Then quickly, it begins to pick up speed, suddenly, the whole thing is aflame, and then in a flash, it's gone.

Teo: Oh fuck!

Hannah: [as JR] *Hey, look at that...* and I drop the key.

Quinn: You look down at your hand, and you can see about half the symbols burnt into your flesh.

Hannah: Huh. Maybe we should have hit with a baseball bat.

[laughter]

Teo: Constance kneels down next to JR and puts her hand on JR's back and just does an attempt at a friendly pat, [as Constance] *You did it*.

Hannah: [as JR] *Yeah, you'll forgive me if I don't hug you back. These are a little crispy right now. Do you know first aid?*

Teo: [as Constance] *I don't think any of us are in a position to give each other first aid. I believe I have some of your insides on me.*

Kyle: Alvin will be limping back up the stairs, and I want to go check on Leon.

Hannah: Oh, shit. [laughs] Poor Leon. Totally forgot about-- He got shot. [laughs]

Teo: He's fine.

Kyle: By somebody.

Quinn: You make it back up to the third floor, and you see a small fire just in the center of the hall. JR and Constance are awkwardly embracing in front of it. And Leon, gunshot wound to the shoulder, is laying about 10 ft ahead of them towards you in the hall.

Hannah: [as JR, weakly] *Hey, Alvin.*

Kyle: [as Alvin] *Seems like it may have worked?*

Hannah: [as JR] *Think so.*

Teo: [as Constance] *As far as I'm concerned, this totally makes up for the whole shooting half team thing.*

Hannah: [as JR] *I don't feel very good.*

Teo: [as Constance] *Yeah. Shouldn't the police be here? Shouldn't the fire department be here by now-*

Hannah: [as JR] *One would fucking hope.* [laughs]

Teo: *-at least?*

Kyle: [crosstalk] ambulance. [as Alvin] *Leon, are you okay?*

Quinn: Leon stirs a little bit, and with one arm outstretched, gives a high five and then coughs and you can see this spurt of blood come out.

Hannah: Fuck.

Kyle: [as Alvin] *It's going to be okay, buddy. Pressure on the wound?*

Hannah: [as JR] *Yup, pressure on the wound. Yup.*

Teo: [as Constance] Yes.

Kyle: We all put pressure on all of our wounds.

Teo: We're in a circle, putting pressure on each other's.

Kyle: Just everyone squeeze and pushing on all the wounds.

Hannah: For me, wounds because my hand is burned.

Quinn: I think the four of you come together, and it's not too much longer before Chief Stoney appears in the entryway to the stairwell and bounds towards the four of you.

Hannah: [as JR, weakly] *Hey, Stoney, good to see you.*

Teo: [as Constance, weakly] *Please tell me you brought an ambulance.*

Hannah: [as JR, weakly] *We're all dying.*

[laughter]

Kyle: [baby wails]

Quinn: I think Stoney looks at the four of you. He's got a bit of a grimace on his face. He says, [as Stoney] *Is it dead?*

Kyle: Alvin nods solemnly.

Hannah: [as JR] *Yeah, it's dead.*

Teo: [as Constance] *We burned the body. We cut off the head-*

Quinn: [as Stoney] *Why?*

Teo: [as Constance] *-before it could disappear.*

Quinn: [as Stoney] *Never mind. Okay, come on. You got to get out of here. We got to get you out of here right now. Come on. Follow me.*

Kyle: Alvin helps Leon up, arm over the shoulder.

Hannah: I think Constance and I are supporting each other.

Teo: Yup.

Quinn: He leads you to an emergency stairwell, and he turns to you, JR, and says, [as Stoney] *Just get off campus. I'll take care of the rest.*

Hannah: [as JR] *You got it, Chief Stoney.*

Quinn: I think the arrival of these police vehicles, which you can hear towards the front of the dorm draws the attention away from an already underpopulated campus, and you're able to slip away. You're able to get medical treatment for your injuries, and I think you're able to come up with a story that is maybe not convincing, but you don't seem to get the heat that you ought to for it.

Hannah: Wonder how that could have--

Quinn: I'm going to ask the question I usually ask, but I guess, with bigger stakes. What's next?

Teo: This has all happened in the span of two and a half days, maybe two days. Constance would probably want the three of us to sit down and ask ourselves if we think this is really the end of the occurrences in Firmament or just the beginning. We've seen it now, so we can't pretend like we haven't. So, what do we want to do about it? But she wants to definitely take a nap first.

She is opening her studio to these folks who have now saved her life in many ways, but that would be Constance's go-to, would be like, [as Constance] *I want to rest. I want to come back fresh faced and showered and preferably not covered in blood and talk about whether we can pretend Firmament is normal after this.*

Kyle: In the same vein, Alvin would sheepishly be like, [as Alvin] *I know it may sound a little forward, but after all that we've seen, would you mind--? Could I just crash at your place for a little while?*

Teo: [as Constance] *Yeah.*

Hannah: JR's kind of an asshole. So, she just assumed she'd still be staying at your place.

[laughter]

Kyle: She's already grabbed a closet space and hung up all her PJs.

Hannah: Yup. But I want to find out some more about the key. I've got this thing burned into my hand now. It's not something I was able to do before, and so I'd like to see if I can figure out what it is that I can do and what the limitations are on it. But for the time being, I take very long showers.

Teo: Yeah, we're going to have to talk about your part of the electric and water bill.

Quinn: I think as we draw to the end of our first mystery, that is the scene that we see. The three of you, somewhat improbably, at Constance's studio, this eclectic bohemian

too-small-for-three-people space, JR hanging up her suits and laying out her gear. Alvin out on the small back patio, trimming all of the hair that has grown on his body. Constance nursing a headache and taking some Tums and thumbing through all the books from her Buni that she hasn't looked through in a while.

As the three of you start to have those conversations about what comes next, we fade away and then we fade into a different scene.

We see the Prospector back to its dingy, divyself, the regular crowd of ne'er-do-wells milling between the booths and the pool tables. There's a plastic pitcher on the bar that's filled with crumpled bills and loose change, and there's a sign next to it that reads, "Get well soon, Jasper." A thick hand drops a \$20 bill into it, and we follow it to see Chief Stoney as he saddles up to the bar.

He orders a drink and starts leafing through a copy of the Firmament Daily Herald. When he reaches the police blotter, he pauses, and we can see over his shoulder the lead story in big, bold letters. *FPD identifies tourist Alex Luple as suspect in homicide case. Whereabouts of John Rollins, a possible second victim, remain unknown.*

We see Jasper sitting in a hospital bed at Firmament in general. He's hooked up to an IV, and there are monitors chirring away in the background. He's awake, but wary. Bandage covering his shoulder is stained with a blossom of crimson. He snaps to attention, however, when the door opens and a figure steps inside.

Jasper eyes Leon with wariness and apprehension as the young reporter takes a seat next to the bed and draws a laptop from his bag. Every inch of it is decorated with stickers, including a large, faded Jackalope decal and a shiny new one in all capital letters that reads simply, "I Want to Believe." Leon flips open the laptop and shows the screen to Jasper. He stares at it for a moment and then nods as his apprehension melts away and is replaced with a steely resolve.

We see Magda Rodescu sitting alone in her study, illuminated only by the flickering light of the nearby fireplace. There's an old scrapbook open in her lap. The photos inside are all black and white, and the pages are beginning to yellow and curl. Her hand rests one in particular, partially obscuring it. It's a portrait of a young couple standing outside a small farmstead. The woman bears a striking resemblance to Magda and Constance both, albeit with a hardened look about her. The man is tall and angular and sporting a rugged beard.

And for a moment, Magda tightens her grip and her fingernail presses into the film. Threatens to pierce it. And then, with a ragged sigh, she lets go and we see the missing piece of the picture.

Two little girls in matching outfits, posing for a family photo.

[Monster Hour theme]

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