Horror mystery gameplay

Sutton Farm part 2 looks at Libre SRP rules through a different lens, centering in at the logic around skill checks and yes-no questions.

For reference, for this game session I brought a different third-party ruleset, the Savage Worlds core rulebook.

Setting: Modern-day horror mystery in a fictional southeastern US town named Petersville (e.g., in the Carolinas).
Time of Year: Fall (November).
Protagonist thumbnail sketch: Kristen (Peele) Perez is in her early 40s. She is coming to Petersville to deal with her missing older brother Marvin Peele's estate (Marvin was an IT admin for Petersville University).
Meaningful successes to win: 2

Scene 1: Cutscene

Opening: Civilized scene. Kristen Peele Perez is clearing out the second story walk-up apartment that Marvin had in Petersville. There she will find some of clues related to Marvin's investigation prior to his disappearance.
<Scene qualities> Cramped, windy, lack/hungry/poor.
Modify the opening slightly to incorporate scene qualities: much of Marvin's things are already packed in boxes filling the apartment (cramped). It's windy outside, and Kirsten has some windows open despite the cold to freshen the stale air. There are some poor/homeless folks outside in case that becomes relevant.

Usually recruiting an ally requires structured questions for persons and/or skill check. Because the potential ally is Kristen's husband Mateo Perez, we'll handwave that down to a single YNQ: Is Mateo there with Kirstin?

Raise 1 Shift from 50/50 moderate to "Likely" because of the close relationship. A "No" would mean he's back up North because of his job and to mind the kids. If "Yes", we'll next ask if the kids are here, too (at unmodified 50/50 moderate). A "No" would mean they're in the care of grandparents or friends of the family.

Result: No, Mateo is not there. I might try this YNQ again if factors change, to get husband Mateo down in a future cutscene.

I'll add a person of interest as a neighbor for dialog, but keep that person in a back pocket for now. <person> Conscript/militia. First thing that comes to mind in this context is an overly eager National Guardsman? We'll assign that likely. If not, the second-most likely might be a firearms enthusiast -- probably the one who loaned Marvin the gun he had in Part 1 [a nice tie-in, so we'll say also likely odds!] If no again, rule of three will make it an eager teenager who's signed up for military service and is soon to leave.

Result: No, not national guardsman.

Result (follow-up): Yes, gun enthusiast. *Flipped a coin for male. Assign a random (d20) trait: Lazy. Come up with a random name: Bailey Draver.*

<window dressing: second-story walkup. Solid oak doors & hardwood floors, chilly, kitchen with dirty pots & pans, mediocre apartment furniture, mix of computers on a power strip, ceiling fan, bed & bedding, worn sofa & large TV…>

Test plot stress at 8. Scene opens.

Finally, I get to show that assigning missions isn't always an active dialog. I'll introduce by saying Kristen comes across some of Marvin's printed emails and written notes. That's what will guide the structured questions for persons.

"Does the person (in this case email correspondence) have a need?" No roll required to get a mission: Automatically yes.

"What does the person need?" In this case also no need to roll, it's a follow on of Sutton Farm Part 1: (mission) "Investigate" (subject, in this case a person) "Marvin Peele".

"What is the reason behind the need?" - unnecessary, she's his sister and he's missing! That's motivation enough.

"Does the email reference an item to help with the mission?" Let's say likely Yes? If Yes, then follow-up with Very Likely a reference to Alyssa Smith's envelope of cash from part 1? If not the envelope, Likely the gun he borrowed? If not the gun, then we'll roll a random item that might have relevance or be a red herring.

Result: Yes, an item is referenced.
Result (follow-up): Yes, a clue about the envelope of money and the name Alyssa Smith.

"Does the email list the destination place of the mission?" That seems Very Likely Yes? Sutton Farm played a central role in Part 1, so on "Yes", we'll say the result is automatically Sutton Farm.

Result: Yes. *Sutton Farm is referenced.*

"Will the person supply special equipment for the mission?" Hm, I'd have said no, but there is Marvin's neighbor, gun enthusiast Bailey. Let's say 50/50 moderate that he and the gun are mentioned? So if yes, the result is automatically Bailey Draver.

Result: No.

"Is there another person to contact for more information?" Let's say it's Likely that the Parker Family of Peter's Junction is referenced. Even though Marvin's scene with the Parker family was a let-down in Part 1, they were a central theme to that story. So if yes, we can follow up asking (let's say 50/50 moderate each) whether it references Benson/Belle/Miranda and/or Peter's Junction.

Result: Yes, Parker family is jotted down in Marvin's notes.

Result (follow-up): No. No mention specifically of Benson & Belle or Miranda Parker.

Result (follow-up): No. No mention of Peter's Junction.

That's it - we've played out the structured questions. Let's have Kristen do a look around, and then introduce Bailey for additional dialog.

Skill check Exposing the Unknown [to uncover an as-yet unknown clue]: There are no scene quality modifiers. Failure would mean nothing is here, and no more searching allowed - that's as mild a consequence as you can get.

RPG result: <SUCCESS>.

Follow-up YNQ: Is there something to be revealed? I'll say 50/50 moderate because this is a random search, not tied to anything obvious from Part 1 that would be revealed.

Result: Yes. *In this case, looking through the apartment, the only thing I can think of that would be revealed would be a random item. <Item> Indeterminate clothing. I only have one idea for this roll result. Handwave that Kristen finds in the hamper the outfit Marvin wore when he walked around in the fields by Sutton farm, which is dotted with the sandy soil and still smells of stale sweat. Yuck.*

[[ok we've gotten a bunch of worthwhile information and now let's transition to bring in Bailey Draver for a dialog. I'll handwave that the conversation happens outside, which brings in the 'lack/hungry/poor' scene quality and supports 'windy' as well -- though it loses 'cramped'.]]

There are introductions and small talk. Clearly she asks Bailey if he knew Marvin and he says yes. Let's see if Kristen is persuasive enough asking for help that she can get Bailey to bring up the pistol he loaned Marvin the last time he saw him. I'll assess a penalty because loaning someone a handgun (with shady legal implications) is not something that someone would want to admit. Consequence for failure would be Bailey clams up on anything meaningful, which ends the conversation.

RPG result: <SUCCESS> (with raise. That's Savage Worlds swinginess.)

Bailey spills the beans about loaning Marvin a gun the last time he saw him. That begs the follow-up YNQ - did Marvin also mention Sutton Farm in the conversation? No idea, so 50/50 moderate.

Result: No.

We're on a roll, so Kristen will try to persuade Bailey to be an ally for this mission. A bonus because Bailey is culpable with the whole gun thing; but also a penalty because he's lazy. I decide the two cancel each other out. The first attempt botches the skill check; I spend a "bennie" (1 of 3 for the story) on a re-roll.

RPG Result: <SUCCESS>

Bailey is persuaded, but now we need to follow up with a YNQ Bailey is available. Let's say it's 50/50 moderate.

Result: No. *But as with husband Mateo above, the door is open to try this YNQ again if/when factors change.*

[[ok we'll do another transition and squeeze in that Kristen is using Marvin's computer to do some searches on Alyssa Smith and the Parker family.]]

Skill check to find Alyssa Smith? Consequence for failure will be -- that Internet access has already been shut off to the apartment, so no investigative work can be done from this location for the scene.

       RPG Result: <FAIL>. *No Internet for you!*

I think that should wrap it up, though note (in retrospect) that I forgot to ask about whether there's any information about Jessup Sutton. I got impatient: Time for Kristen to get out doing stuff.

Plot stress is 22 (and no unexpected events tripped all scene). Test plot stress. Scene closes.

Quick Summary: Kristen has picked up the following clues: A reference to Alyssa Smith and the envelope of money. Sutton Farm written down and underlined. Reference of the Parker family, but lacking any further information or context. Neighbor Bailey admitting he loaned Marvin a pistol the last time he saw him weeks ago. And the soiled clothing in the hamper.

Scene 2: Obstacle scene
This is a tough one. Sutton Farm is the obvious clue, but if Kristen goes there next scene, based on what's been established about the farm in Part 1, that could end quickly and badly.
       I don't have an obvious lead on the other clues for Kristen, either. So, I can start the scene with Kristen doing research, or I could handwave that Kristen got useful information and move to more action.
       After giving it some thought, I figure I'll try to start with a search at the university library. That can also include interviews with Marvin's co-workers. I have misgivings doing this as an obstacle scene with consequences. It should probably be another cutscene. But I'm going to take the risk.

Opening: Civilized scene. Kristen goes to Petersville university library to do research and have a lunch interview with one of Marvin's co-workers.
Ante in with expected skill checks: Investigate (to find out more about Alyssa and/or the Parker family); Persuade (to get beyond bland platitudes to get some meaningful information out of co-workers); Notice (looking around Marvin's office to find additional clues on his research -- maybe a reference to Jessup?)

<Scene qualities>Luxury digs, hazy, blowing winds.

Hm, in part 1, 'luxury digs' was the chancellor's place. Seems that this is the chancellor's place again (let's ask a YNQ estimating it's Very Likely). If no on chancellor's place, we'll default to a formal reception and meeting room in the library. Hazy could mean the chancellor is a smoker (I think that should be Likely because it meets the scene quality requirements). If no on tobacco smoke, then I'll default to an unseasonably humid November day. Blowing winds could be just windiness, or the ventilation system: Is that worth a roll? Probably not, I'll handwave it.

Result: Yes. *The scene takes place in the chancellor's residence, so this is not the scene as expected.*

TRIGGERS UNEXPECTED EVENT. (plot stress was 27, is now 13). *We could roll it up right now, but let's get to that in a moment.*

Result: Yes. *The haziness is tobacco smoke.*

We'll handwave and say "blowing winds" is the ventilation system pushing the tobacco smoke around.

What is Kristen doing in the chancellor's residence instead of the library? Seems Very Likely that with Marvin missing and Kristen the next of kin, the chancellor insisted on a meeting to extend his condolences. If No, then… Kristen is the one who requested the meeting with the chancellor?

Result: Yes, the chancellor requested Kristen's presence to share his thoughts and extend his condolences.

I need some breathing room for stuff to happen in this obstacle scene, so let's ask if the chancellor has another event happening concurrently (since it's a random question, odds are 50/50 moderate)?

Result: No. *There isn't another event going on concurrently.*

<window dressing: big fluffy throw pillows, overstuffed sofas, tea & tea tables & biscuits, attendants in attendance, crystal chandelier, high ceilings, silver cutlery… >

I've decided without rolling that the university chancellor is the scene's person of interest, without rolling. He'll need a trait (d20): Mysterious/secretive. He'll need a name: Chancellor Marshall Herrod.

Plot stress is 16. Test plot stress. Scene opens.

<unexpected event> F:call for backup. *(any "F:" result can generate a foe is one is not already present). So I'll generate a foe for the scene. I'll roll randomly for the details, but try to link the result to the dinner help that gave Alyssa the bum's rush way back in part 1, scene 1 (opening cutscene). It's a loose thread on which Marvin never followed up.*

I rolled a 5-point foe, so will convert that to an average NPC. The % is "native minority" and "academic specialist", so will handwave an African-American professor with +1 profession. I flipped coins and he is a professor in a science field (let's say theoretical physics). I'll give him a name: Professor Clement Colson.

It seems like we should ask if Professor Colson is involved with Sutton Farm and if that is the source of hostility. But that is exposing the unknown: It would have to be revealed (e.g.,

through a skill check). So for now all we know is that Professor Colson is at some level hostile against Kristen.

I don't know that we'll be able to use the same ante of skill checks that I'd initially planned. But let's see what happens. First things first, let's pause and check for any 'ask for trouble' opportunities. How about if the hostile professor and the chancellor are good friends? That will stack the deck against Kristen right from the start. Default ask for trouble is at 50/50 moderate.
AfT Result: No. *The professor isn't a good friend of the chancellor (whew!)*

Now for our first skill check attempt… Kristen will try to detect Professor Clement Colson's hostility so she isn't caught off guard (in RPG terms, I've decided on a Spirit roll to get a read). On success, Kristen can be proactive. If failed, she'll be on the receiving end of an out-of-the-blue (subtle but serious) intimidate attempt by the professor.
RPG result: <FAIL>. *Kristen doesn't see it coming.*
That means here comes the intimidate vs. Spirit skill check. On success, Kristen recovers. If failed, she's going to be shocked into silence. She won't get productive conversation done with the chancellor in this scene, as the professor is running interference.
RPG result: <SUCCESS> *Kristen can proceed despite the professor's presence. But the skill check was not challenging enough to qualify as meaningful success).*

Ok, I have lots of options, but the best one seems to be Persuade, to convince the chancellor to have a discussion about her missing brother in private. That would get the professor out of the conversation. If it fails, this time we'll let the conversation continue, but obviously Professor Colson will stay and hear every word - and of course continue to cause trouble.
RPG result: <FAIL>. *The chancellor doesn't see reason to dismiss the professor. This scene is going sideways and too many options are getting shot down. It's time to start thinking of throwing in the towel.*

Kristen can still try a separate persuade skill check on a different topic. How about that she'd like to clear out his personal effects? That seems an easy and reasonable request, so we'll give it a window dressing bonus. Failure would end any meaningful conversation for this scene.
RPG result: <SUCCESS> *(but again, not enough of a challenge to qualify for meaningful success).*

Reviewing the structured questions for persons, I can only see one question that works in this context: "is there another person to contact with more information?" We'll see if the chancellor might reference the Professor Robert Delaney relationship, or Janet Sanders, or Dexter Blaine, or the (unnamed) co-worker who turned down the invite to go to the Parker residence in Peter's Junction. I've decided this requires a RPG skill check -- the chancellor wouldn't mind, but Prof. Clement Colson is still there running interference.

RPG Result: <FAIL> *(botched but not fumbled). The chancellor started to consider names but then got distracted by the professor.*

Too much fail here that's cutting off too many options in the scene. Add to that, Chancellor Marshall Herrod is secretive -- that's a terrible trait when it comes to trying to get information. This isn't going my way! Time to throw in the towel for this scene and try a different tack.

Plot stress is 22. Test plot stress. Scene closes.

Quick Summary: Kristen planned to do some library research but was intercepted by a request to meet with the university chancellor who wanted to express his concerns personally about Marvin Peele having gone missing. Besides platitudes she couldn't get anything meaningful out of the chancellor, and a science professor at the meeting was downright hostile, cutting off her attempts at meaningful conversations and requests with the university chancellor.

Scene 3: Cutscene

I'm coming up with a strategy, or at least hoping for one. Kristen will talk to Marvin's colleagues and pick up more clues. Hopefully I can pick up something salacious or alarming enough to go back and get Bailey, and come out guns blazing.

I'll treat this as a follow-up scene, even though it doesn't need to be. For practical purposes, in this case it doesn't make a difference.

Opening: Civilized scene. Kristen goes to the IT department to claim Marvin's things, and speak with his boss, co-workers and/or anyone else in the area.

Ante in with expected skill checks: Persuade (to find out more about what colleagues might know); Investigate (to find out more about any one of the increasing number of clues); Notice (look around the IT department offices for any possible clues.)

<Scene qualities> Fence/hedge, foggy, dry.

How to make sense of this? Fence/hedge resembles servers in racks in an IT data center -- they hem in sort of like tall hedges, right? Dry is obvious in an IT department. Foggy? Well, there's a humidifier going over in the cubicles where the workers sit, to counteract the dryness.

Even though there are plenty of persons of interest to choose from, I chose to roll for a random person of interest: "Mercenary/arms guild". That sounds like an IT contractor! Let's say that's

either Dexter (50/50 moderate), or if not, it's the unnamed co-worker that didn't accompany Marvin to the Parker's house.

      Result: No. *(It's not Dexter but the unnamed co-worker, so after flipping a coin to find out she's a woman, she now needs a name: Loretta Madsen. She also needs a random (d20) Trait: Nervous/awkward).*

<window dressing: server racks, constant loud whirring, cubicles of gray panels and colorless decor, silly IT gadgets, coffee & mugs…>

Plot stress is 27. Test plot stress. Scene opens.

Kristen goes through Marvin's personal effects at work. With a notice roll (an attempt to expose the unknown), does she find anything? Consequence of failure is minor: she'll just have used up her chance to Notice anything that exposes the unknown in this scene.

      RPG Result: <FAIL>. *Kristen doesn't notice anything unusual in Marvin's personal effects.*

Next, she strikes up a conversation with Loretta. I'll handwave that Kristen needs to Persuade Loretta of anything, so it's just a matter of asking structured questions and/or other YNQ: Does she remember Marvin's request to go visit the Parker family? That seems Likely. If yes, I'll next ask the 50/50 moderate follow-up, does she know where the visit was (nearby Peter's Junction)? If yes again, I'll try for the Unlikely YNQ, whether he confided in her about Alyssa Smith, or Jessup Sutton, and she has that information to pass along?

      Result: Yes. *She remembers and passes along the Parker family visit invitation.*
TRIGGERS UNEXPECTED EVENT. (plot stress was 28, is now 14).
<unexpected event> P:Trait positive, self/rival. There's nothing here that would trigger Kristen's personality, or edges and hindrances, so I'll decide there is no effect and move on.

      Result (follow-up): Yes. *She knew and reveals the details of the Parker family residence in Peter's Junction.*
      Result (follow-up): No. *She didn't know about Alyssa or Jessup, or other things.*

Before we give up on Loretta, ask if she knows Professor Colson. That seems Likely. If Yes, then we'll try for a follow-up Persuade skill check to drag it out of her. If successful, then I can try a 50/50 moderate YNQ whether Loretta has more insight to disclose about the professor. If the skill check fails, the consequence is that that's cutting off this conversation.

      Result: Yes. *She knows the Professor.*
      RPG Result: <FAIL>. *Conversation over unless Kristen wants to do something like press with Intimidate. I won't risk that because Kristen wants to do some research in the IT department.*

Kristen will instead do some Internet research on Alyssa Smith and the Sutton Farm. I'll handwave that she doesn't need to ask IT for permission, she seems to be welcome enough. Consequence of failure to Investigate is relatively minor: She just doesn't find anything useful

and gives up after a while of searching. Kristen can't search again for information in this way for now.

      RPG Result: <FAIL>. *The search for additional information on these leads was fruitless. Dang.*

Hmph. I am getting really lousy luck on my RPG skill check rolls. I'll try one last thing: Kristen gets on the phone with gun enthusiast Bailey to recruit him to go to the Parker's house. I'll rule that takes a fresh Persuade, then check if Bailey is available.

      RPG Result: <SUCCESS> *("with a raise". I'll say that's worth a +1 bonus shift, which counteracts Bailey's naturally "lazy" inclination to make the final check 50/50 moderate).*

      Result: Yes. *Bailey volunteered to come along. Yay I got a gun-toting ally!*

TRIGGERS UNEXPECTED EVENT. (plot stress was 20, is now 10).
<unexpected event>Trap/Ambush, damage/incapacitate. This seems very unlikely, but lets roll for whether something related to Professor Clement Colson's directive, since Kristen was asking too many questions. If "no", then we'll ignore this unexpected event and go ahead and close the scene.

      Result: No. *The unexpected event doesn't happen.*

Plot stress is 10. Test plot stress. Scene closes.

Summary: Kristen spoke with Marvin's freelance IT co-worker Loretta, who noted that Marvin had invited him to come visit the Parker family at nearby Peter's Junction - something about safety in numbers. She decided to call up Bailey Draver and convinced him to come along so that she would have her own 'safety in numbers' for a visit to the Parker's house.

Scene 4: Obstacle Scene (became an Encounter Scene)

Opening: Civilized scene. Kristen called ahead. She and Bailey drive over to the Parker's house to interview the family members.

Ante in with expected skill checks: Persuade (to get whichever the Parkers she can to spill the beans on the Sutton Farm relationship); Notice (snoop around the house for possible clues); Intimidate (take persuasion to the next level for additional clues/answers).

<Scene qualities> Square/meeting hall, memorial, sight-blocking.

Ok, this one is challenging. The most obvious answer I can think of is that Kristen goes to the Parker's house and finds out they're not there at the moment; they're down at the Peter's Junction town hall/town square, which is under renovation. It gets them to a place that meets all

the scene quality criteria. I'll say that's Likely. If no, the alternative is that Kristen gets stopped by something happening at Peter's Junction town hall, and doesn't get to the Parker's house.

Result: No. *Kristen wasn't directed here. So she and Bailey are waylaid at Peter's Junction, just short of reaching the house.*

Hm, YNQ to see if the car is stopped because of someone having an issue with Bailey? Seems like a gun enthusiast could make enemies, too. We'll say that's 50/50 moderate. If no, the alternative assumes the stop is directly related to Kristen poking around regarding Marvin's disappearance.

Result: No. *So whatever happens, it is all about Kristen's investigation.*

Ok one more YNQ: Is Professor Clement Colson here? It seems a stretch but he has been involved up until now, so let's say the chance is as high as 50/50 moderate. If yes, I'm starting to think it may make sense to flip this into an encounter scene. If no, then we can ask if it's the Parker family punks from Part 1, Scene 3 that threatened Marvin (also 50/50 moderate)... If that's also no, I'll come up with a third option to invoke the rule of 3.

Result: Yes. *The good professor is directly involved in whatever is happening here. Hmm...*

It's in the middle of the day so I'm going to make this an encounter scene. I think I can stand it down to a non-deadly social encounter with a foe group, seeing as it's the middle of the day. So the "conflict" may not come to blows, but will end up with one side cowed. I can live with that.

<window dressing: copious chain link fencing with fabric privacy screens, town hall building, scaffolding covering the building, piles of dirt and gravel, pipes, construction vehicles, street congestion...>

Foe budget: Oy, 49?!? That's not good. The professor as average NPC = 5. 44 points to go.

I need something to chew up points. So let's ask the YNQ (at 50/50 moderate, since it's unknown): Is there/are there supernatural influences, i.e., beasts/monsters in the area?

Result: Yes. *So next we'll roll up a beast/monster.*

Monster: Conflict 5+special ability; Levels of damage 3. That totals 45 points. Gaah! That's cosmic horror proportions. I'll translate that into something about equal in terms of Savage Worlds-y. The template is a demonic-like creature they can't hope to defeat. I need to figure out some way that it can exist in the scene. Maybe it's insubstantial, or else it has some other form? Let's try this: Follow-up YNQ (50/50 moderate): Is the professor "infused" with the monster?

Result (follow-up): Yes. *So "Professor Colson" is not the professor at all, but a shell for the horrible thing from beyond!!*

If there's a bright side, I'll handwave that the special ability is the creature's having melded and taken the form of a human host. That's bad enough...

Plot stress is 18. Test plot stress. Scene opens.

My goal is to throw in the towel and get Kristen out alive, without forcing a follow-up scene. Let's ask the obvious: Is the professor in control of the creature? (50/50 moderate, since it's unknown). If yes, then maybe it can be reasoned with. If no, the creature is working on base evil instincts alone).

Result: No. *The creature, inhabiting the professor's body, is not human at all and is moving in on Kristen for the kill.*

I'll give Kristen & Bailey a Notice roll to figure out there's something really wrong here before the professor intercepts. Success means they see Professor Colson in time and figure out whatever it is, it's not human. Fail means they don't see the Professor or don't figure out something's wrong, and the professor enters melee with them in the car. At conflict 5, that's tearing doors and roofs off cars territory. Or throwing cars.

RPG Result: <SUCCESS>

Ack, I wrote 'street congestion' as window dressing. I'm going to try and get the two out of there with a driving roll, but the skill check has a penalty. Good time to spend another Savage Worlds bennie, if it helps.

RPG Result: <FAIL> *(spent bennie 2 of 3 , and failed, and 3 of 3, and failed. There goes my quick getaway. There's only so much you can do when you roll snake eyes twice in a row.)*

I'll have Kristen run like heck and get Bailey to open fire on the Professor-thing as an attempt to distract. That's why you have allies, in cases like this you throw 'em under the bus so the protagonist cna survive. Now we go off board to the combat system.

Combat round 1 (ineffectual gun shots -- the thing moves to gut Bailey and comes close. Kristen runs.)
Combat round 2 (Bailey recovers quickly, shoots and hits but doesn't affect the beast. He's hit with another terrible but glancing blow. Kristen runs.)
Combat round 3 (The creature tears Bailey's arm off. He's a goner. Kristen runs.)
Combat round 4 (Kristen tries and fails a Stealth roll, even with the "Sight Blocking" bonus. Professor-thing pursues. I won't use Chase rules, but I figure might as well drop out of combat rounds. She's unarmed and in a fight it's game over).

Trying to figure out an escape for Kristen. Are there any vehicles across the square that aren't in the jam, and are moving (50/50 moderate).

Result: Yes. *That's good! I'll have Kristen's make an Agility roll to jump on a moving vehicle, preferably something large where the driver won't notice and raise a fuss, but will just keep moving. Consequence of failure is lost time and the creature closes some of the distance. I'll also need to consider a follow-up check to see whether the vehicle driver notices Kristen's attempt to board and raises a fuss.*

RPG Result: <FAIL>. *It's bad to be out of bennies.*

Does the vehicle driver slam on the brakes and raise a fuss?

Result: No. *Guess they didn't notice.*

That didn't work. Time for another plan. Kristen's reasonably close to the memorial and can get a bonus doing stuff related to "memorial" because it's a scene quality. I'll have her try and climb the memorial, for what it's worth. If it can be climbed.

First a YNQ at 50/50 moderate: Is the memorial climbable/defensible?

Result: No. *Well, that settles that.*

Ok, I'm scrambling for anything at this point. Kristen can swim, maybe the beast doesn't like water? Is there a body of water around here? That's creating window dressing and seems unlikely, at best.

Result: No. *Ok, so much for assuming safety in water.*

Let's try again to create useful window dressing. Are there business buildings in Peter's Junction? The way I envisioned the area, Kristen can't get to the town hall because the Professor Colson-beast is in the way. But she could run to buildings that are elsewhere in the square.

Result: Yes. *Ok, not a good option but an option.*

Hm, I have a better idea to create window dressing. Since it's a town square, Is there a church nearby and can Kristen get to it? This is a compound question and both parts are at 50/50 moderate. So the combined chance is Unlikely; but I have to make just one roll.

Result: Yes. *But based on how close the roll was, I'll say the chance for Kristen to get to it will also be close. Kristen and the creature will need to make opposed Vigor rolls to see who gets there first. The consequence for failure here is obvious -- and very bad for Kristen.*

RPG Result: <SUCCESS>. *By a hair.*

Now for the big question. Seeing as this is a supernatural being. Does the / can the creature pursue Kristen into the church? Set the likelihood at 50/50 moderate, which is as generous as I think I can get.

Result: No. **pause -- victory dance!!* That was too close. We don't know if it doesn't like churches, or just doesn't do doors, but whatever the reason, I'll take it.*

I could ask "does the Professor Colson-monster eventually lose interest?" but we can handwave that away. The creature got involved in a gunfight and tore someone's arm off in broad daylight in a town square. That got a lot of attention, and creatures from beyond time and space don't like a lot of attention. So we'll handwave and say the creature very soon lopes away. Kristen cowers inside.

Plot stress is 33 (without triggering - yikes!). Test plot stress.
TRIGGERS UNEXPECTED EVENT. (plot stress was 33, is now 16).
<unexpected event>Foe: Start/Cease Hostilities. That confirms what we were just going through -- the hostile creature exits the scene.>

Though I didn't do it until after scene close, there's a post-mortem that's necessary. To wrap up, instead of official sanity rules I'll just make a direct Spirit roll to check whether Kristen kept her cool after the scene, or whether she has completely lost it and ends up in a psych ward for a while (ending the story).
RPG Result: <SUCCESS>. *(with a raise for what that matters).*

Summary: At Peter's Junction, Kristen and Bailey get caught in a traffic jam. They see Professor Colson, but something about the way he looks doesn't seem right. There's something inhuman in his movements. Bailey tells Kristen to run, draws a pistol and begins firing. He weaves and dodges, and then the professor gets his hands on the man and tears his arm off as if he were a stuffed toy. Then the professor-thing turns and comes for Kristen. She casts about for anywhere to run or hide, and finally makes a beeline for the church. She gets through moments before the Colsen-creature, right on her heels. And then -- nothing. She stays in the church, shaking. Only after she hears all the police sirens blaring does she tentatively crack the door. There are police cars and ambulances all over the town square, and no sign of the creature.

Scene 6: Final Cutscene

I've decided that Kristen is going to throw in the towel. She kept her cool but realizes there is more going on here than she is capable of handling. She needs to be there for her husband and children. This is not a matter where the police could help, so she puts distance between her and Petersville, hoping that it translates to safety for her and her family. She can grieve Marvin's disappearance from her home up North.

Opening: Some time later, Kristen is back with her family in her home (and home town). She is taking more time to go through Marvin's personal effects, and is keeping an eye on newspaper headlines coming up from Petersville.

<scene qualities: arena/sport-place (x2!), Rationale:guard/vigilance)

We'll loosely interpret this as Kristen watching her kids playing soccer one day back home weeks/months later, and listlessly checking some electronic device for news about the southern town while watching the kids. She'll either read headlines and/or get an email from someone, probably Loretta.

We'll go sideways from the regular structured questions here… and just ask a series of 50/50 moderate YNQ to see what comes up. *"is there news about Sutton Farm?*

Result: No. *It ain't the farm.*

"Is there news about Professor Colson?"

Result: No. *Not him either.*

"Is there news about missing Marvin Peele?"

Result: Yes.

TRIGGERS UNEXPECTED EVENT. (plot stress was 24, is now 12).

<unexpected event>P: Skill Check (Focus: Self or Rival). *I'll say self, and ask the follow-on (because it's in the context about news about missing Marvin): Does it require a sanity check? (at 50/50 moderate since it's unknown).*

Result: Yes. *(with flying colors. Though it means whatever the news, it's dark.)*

Was Marvin Peele (what's left of him anyway) found? If yes, we'll continue to follow up. If No, we'll ask if it's his stuff that was found and refine; if no again, rule of three means some other revelation (true or planted) about Marvin comes to light.

Result: No. *(not Marvin himself).*

Result (follow-up): No. *(not Marvin's stuff).*

Rule of 3, it's some revelation about Marvin. Revelations are best rolled as (d20) Rationales if rolled at all, and the result is "Argue/Debate". Seems to me a misdirection that Marvin supposedly got into an argument/debate with someone and that caused a crime. Let's give that a 50/50 moderate? If no, then it's not a crime, but they pin Marvin's disappearance on the argue/debate.

Result: Yes. *So the article claims Marvin committed some crime, but against whom? The claim is he murdered Alyssa? That would sure be a frame-up! Let's say 50/50 moderate because it's downright evil. If no, then Professor Colson makes some false claim? Rule of 3, with another no, we can go to one of many other people.*

Result: No. *He's not framed for murdering Alyssa.*

Result (follow-up): Yes. *Professor Colson is interviewed about Marvin and he having a nasty altercation where the professor was attacked, and Marvin disappeared after that.*

TRIGGERS UNEXPECTED EVENT. (plot stress was 17, is now 8).

<unexpected event>Monster/Beast. *Really?!? Could the creature that used Professor Colson's body tracked Kristen all the way back here -- to wrap up loose ends? Was it an incarnation of the same shapeless creature that killed Marvin in Sutton Farm?*

Well, you know what? Given the genre, this is a real good place to fade to black. This should be a YNQ that's Unlikely to be true.

Plot stress is 9. Test plot stress. Scene closes.

The End