



Series 2

Episode 30

Alphabet Soup

A is for...

Kennerji Allawalla scanned the Chapel of the Holy Unwarranted Assumption, but caught no sight of Tucker Gallstone. His mother, standing next to him, was scanning a copy of the schematic for round one. What she caught no sight of was her own name.

"I'm not on here," she said, frustrated, suspecting that her name really was on there but she just couldn't find it.

"You're not going to judge many rounds, Ma. It's mutual judge preference." Tucker had to be here *somewhere*.

"Are you saying nobody mutually prefers me?"

"I put you down as 'Mrs. Allawalla' in the signup. Everybody always strikes people whose first names are Mr. or Mrs."

"That's discrimination!"

Kennerji shrugged. "Not when you're trying to win a debate tournament. Let me see that for a second."

His mother handed him the schematic, and in a second Kennerji found his own code. Then he double-checked to ascertain that his mother wasn't listed.

"You have the round off," he told her.

"So what should I do then?"

"You could have dinner."

“What about you?”

“I’ll catch something between rounds.”

“I can wait for you.”

“No, don’t. I’ll find something. You just make sure you check to that you’re not on the next schematic when it comes out.” Which, of course, he thought highly unlikely. Mr. and Mrs. were essentially code names for “Random Parent in the Judge Pool.” His mother would be lucky if she ended up judging a down six round.

“Where are you going?” she asked him.

He looked at the schematic again and shook his head. “I don’t know. Some building. I need to get a map.”

“Who are you debating?”

“Some random person.”

“Good luck, Kennerji.”

“Thanks, Ma. I’ll catch you back here after round two, okay.”

“Okay.”

And with that, Kennerji scooted over to one of the tables in the chapel and grabbed a map. He had to go debate. He’d catch up with Tucker sooner or later. They had all weekend, after all. Before it was over, he would have a talk with her. Or better put, The Talk.

In the meanwhile, he had some random person to debate.

B is for...

Kimchi Bokkeumbap poked his head into the tabroom. “Hello?”

Tarnish Jutmoll suddenly appeared next to him, apparently coming from some corner of the room that Kimchi hadn’t seen. “Yes?”

“Oh,” Kimchi said.

Jutmoll stared at him, waiting.

This was not good. Kimchi had snuck away from the other Veil of Ignorance Samurai and come to tab to block himself against Tucker Gallstone. But how could he tell Tucker’s coach the reason for the conflict, that unbeknownst to her official coach that he was also coaching her? That couldn’t possibly sit right, and Tucker might end up paying the price for it.

“Men’s room?” Kimchi asked.

“Beats me,” Jutmoll said. “If you find it, let me know.” The old coach turned around and walked back into the room toward his colleagues who were huddled around the computer.

“Right,” Kimchi said.

He left and walked down the hall. That was close. Now he just had to hope he didn't get assigned to judge Tucker any time during the tournament. What were the odds? There were dozens and dozens of judges and almost two hundred kids. The likelihood was—

About a hundred percent, in debate land.

Damn!

C is for...

Halefoil Cumcut had found himself a quiet corner of the chapel and opened his computer. He tapped into the open Pup Guest Wireless and logged into VictoriasSecretBriefsQuotidian.Org.

WELCOME HALEFOIL, MEMBER #1

It was always a joy to be on the site—his site, his home on the web.

He created a new posting. **Live from the Pup-a-Roni** he typed.

For the next three days he would report every round, post photographs of every pairing, share results, pass along trivia about Pups from the past—whatever it took for people who weren't at the Pup to know as much, if not more, than people who were there.

And were there people who weren't at the Pup who wanted to know as much, if not more, than people who were there?

Well, that was the question, wasn't it.

D is for...

Raga Dikeskroner was back outside on his bench. The first round was about to start, although he himself was not assigned to judge yet. He knew that Tarnish Jutmoll was engaged in setting things up, so this was no time to introduce himself and talk about the coaching job. Not that the coaching job was on his mind at the moment. He was still trying to absorb the fact that he was not the only Old One on the premises.

As far as Raga knew, high school debate was not a particularly popular activity with those of his...persuasion. There was no code of conduct for the Old Ones, but children were generally considered unfair prey. After all, the Old Ones relied on the Willing as their preferred sustenance. Willingness implied the autonomy to make a choice, and children were not considered autonomous agents for this particular choice. They might *want* to be counted among the Willing, but they were unable to

grasp all the fine details of what that might mean to them, both in the short run and in the long run. Of course, Raga had felt the draw of young blood today, and obviously he couldn't have been the only one to ever be in that position. But for all he knew, it was mere coincidence that the other Old One was here at this tournament. While the other Old One might be, at the moment, living among children, that wasn't absolute proof that he was living *off* of them.

Raga made a small smile. It would be interesting to find out more. And, before the weekend was over, he was sure that he would.

Let's go back to B again, seeing that we don't have any E's...

Geronimo Botch and Joe Wednesday were stuck in traffic on I-95.

"We're never going to get there at this rate," Wednesday said, tapping his fingers on the driving wheel.

Botch sat staring straight ahead. "Friday afternoon traffic," he muttered.

"You think we're really going to get anything out of this?" Wednesday asked, slowly easing a few feet forward.

Botch shrugged. "Everybody who worked with Mr. Lo Pat who is still in the activity will be at Pup this weekend. If they have anything we can use, we can find out about it now."

"And if they don't have anything?"

"Then we stop looking at the competition. Maybe he didn't have any enemies among his peers, or at least enemies who would kill him."

"Who else, then?"

"We should look at the people who followed him in the job more closely."

"And maybe the kids that he coached?"

Botch nodded. "Them too, I guess."

There was a fairly large opening all of a sudden, and Wednesday took advantage of it. He swooped along a good twenty yards before stopping again.

"At this rate, everyone will have died of old age by the time we get there."

"We'll get there, Joe. Be patient."

Wednesday sighed loudly, shaking his head. "We need to get off this cold case crap and get something with some action now."

“We solve this, it’ll happen. Or we prove it’s unsolvable, same difference.”

“We solve this, it’ll be a miracle.”

“Maybe,” Botch agreed.

Somebody honked a horn, and for a moment, Botch was tempted to jump out of the Crown Vic and arrest the idiot. But he controlled himself. There was no room for a hothead on a cold case.

And whatever happened to M...

Lily Maru sat with Tucker Gallstone on a rail fence near the front door of the chapel. They were both flight B, that is, the second half of the first round. They had a few minutes before they had to go to their rooms.

“You look as if you’re a million miles away,” Tucker said to her teammate.

Lily tilted her head. “I feel a million miles away.”

“You know we’re both going to bid up this weekend,” Tucker said.

“I wouldn’t mind it.”

“I wonder if I should have gone junior varsity.” Tucker had her laptop cradled in the crook of her left arm, and she was reading through a new piece of evidence Kimchi had sent to her.

“No way,” Lily replied. “You are so varsity.”

“I crapped out at the Monteverdi.”

“What do you mean? You broke!”

“But I dropped right away. I was terrible.”

Lily shook her head. Tucker tended to think she was basically terrible, whereas in fact she was basically an *enfant terrible*. There was a big difference.

They sat quietly for a while, then Lily asked, “Did you notice anything about Hautboy on the trip today?”

“Hautboy? Like what?”

“I don’t know. Like, maybe, something was bothering him.”

Tucker shrugged. “Can’t say as I noticed one way or the other.”

“I thought he look distracted.”

“What do you care? I thought you hated him.”

“I do hate him. I was just wondering about him.”

“You two are too much. You should either get a room or get some dueling pistols.”

“Get a room? Are you serious?”

“Well, you’re always obsessing on him. I mean, like, I don’t know.” Tucker went back to her computer and scrolled down through Kimchi’s evidence.

Lily stared into space. Get a room? Her and Hautboy? No. The dueling pistols were more like it. Hell, forget the dueling pistols, just give her something to shoot him with, period. Or a sledge hammer to bop him over the head. Or whatever.

Get a room. Yeah. Right.

And the last letter of the alphabet, so to speak, P...

Ramchen Chowder, once again the sole representative of Punxsutawney Phillips Exeter Academy, was sitting on a stairway in the chapel far from the hustle and the bustle. Beside him was his private coach, Boner Corkzit.

“Veil is running pure science,” Corkzit was saying. “I’ve got all their flows from the Monteverdi.”

“But these are all different kids,” Ramchen said.

“Different kids, same team. They won’t have exactly the same cases, but they’ll close enough.”

“What about Nighten Day?” Ramchen asked.

“Tucker is running theory.”

“What theory?”

“With Tucker, who knows. She’s got twenty-seven different variations of her cases posted on the disclosure wiki. None of it is any advocacy; it’s all defense, no offense.”

“So that’s my offense then, her defense.”

“Duh.”

“What about Lodestone?”

“Mostly Malthus.”

“What the hell does Malthus have to do with anything?”

“Something about overpopulation of jails.”

“You got an answer to that?”

“Duh, again, Ramchen.” Corkzit reached into his messenger bag and extracted a handful of manila folders. The top one said A/T Malthus. “The answer to Malthus,” he announced grandly. “Among other things.”

“When did you write this?” Ramchen asked, taking the folders.

“Don’t worry about when. Just worry about what’s in them. You got my check, by the way?”

“Oh, right, sure.” Ramchen padded his pockets for a minute before coming up with a check, folded and wrinkled and quite the worse for wear. He handed it to Corkzit, who opened it, glanced at the figure, then tucked it into his own shirt pocket.

“Double it if you bid up this weekend, right?”

Ramchen nodded. “Double it.”

“Tell your parents they couldn’t spend their money on a better cause...”

Will Ma Allawalla ever get to judge a round?

Will Kimchi have to judge Tucker Gallstone?

Is anyone following all the news that fits on Halefoil Cumcut’s website?

Will Raga and the other Old One visit the Pup City Blood Bank together?

Will Botch and Wednesday make it to the Pup before the tournament is over?

Will Lily bop Hautboy over the head with a sledge hammer?

Will Boner Corkzit double his fee when Punx Phil Ex bids up?

Do the writers of this material have any idea how the alphabet works?

Somewhere in the material cut from the Harry Potter movies is everything but the answer, so you might as well simply wait for our next episode: “Are there any Palins not doing reality TV at this point, or, if Sarah Palin married Michael Palin, would she change her name to Sarah Michaels?”