



Cramped inside a small boat which was making its way from Ecuador to the remote Galapagos Islands, Jeff Probst was looking at the 16 contestants he had a hand in picking for the second all-star season, when he suddenly found himself asking - not out-loud, of course - "What the fuck am I doing here?"

*Obviously, he thought, the reasons I give the press every season for doing the show are absolutely rubbish. It **isn't** the best job in the world, as I always insist, it's **not** a fascinating experience to watch 16 bartenders butt heads with each-other as if the game is played for the first time, and I **don't** think the social aspect of the show has a tremendous influence on modern culture as we know it. Nowadays, it's just a quest for ratings, a reality show in a sea of thousands of other reality shows, a game that has lost all the meaning it once had. It's just a bunch of people winning challenges and writing other people's names on paper until one of them wins the game. Nothing more.*

As he stood there, watching the people he'll be stuck with for the next 39 days, the "best of the best" so to speak, he started to wonder - best compared to whom?

Tom Westman, now sitting at the front of the boat and staring sharply into sea, would probably be considered by the vast majority of viewers as one of the "best". But in real life, does it really give you any credibility to win in physical competitions against Katie and Janu, or to beat mentally people like Caryn and Ian?

And speaking of Ian, How can Jeff keep a straight face while promoting the new all-stars season as a season with the "best" players from seasons 9 through 14, when a guy who quit the game a day before it ended is in the boat right now, one of the 16 players about to be stranded in the middle of nowhere?

Jeff heard a terrible sound from behind him and quickly turned around just in time to catch Cirie vomiting like crazy over the deck. Sure, Cirie was very lucky and went very far three seasons ago - but that was it - luck! How can anybody think more of it?

It's not a game of "outwit, outplay, outlast" anymore, all there is left to it is "outluck". It's just a matter of being in the right place at the right time, of being surrounded by people stupider than you, or louder than you, or more self-destructive than you. Just sheer luck, that is what's needed to succeed in the game, and anyone who claims they went far due to their skill, strength and mind-power, is just lucky enough not to be proven otherwise, that's all.

Eliza, now watching Cirie puking her guts out and looking a bit sick herself, is a great example of how random this game is. She made unforgivable mistakes, like betraying her alliance six days into the game, and like being an annoying loud-mouth, but still managed to get to day 37 just by being a number when people needed a number. Is this the criteria for an all-star season? What exactly are they playing at? At that moment, Jeff didn't feel too good, and it had nothing to do with being sea-sick. Well, maybe just a little, as it was a very windy day.

Shane and Courtney sat at the back of the boat, shooting quick glances at each other. Jeff was sure that neither of them thought the other one deserves to be back for a second round. Truth was, they *both* didn't deserve it. They were brought back just to add craziness, bickering and tension. They certainly weren't "all-stars". Jeff felt a little ashamed that two people who probably wouldn't even be hired as babysitters can make it on Survivor, and even worse, all-star survivor. Was this show really that cheap?

Yes, Jeff thought to himself as he caught a glimpse of Jonathan, the only contestant back from Cook-Islands, *it is really that cheap*. Jonathan was a terrible social player who made terrible game moves in his season, and yet he was the best choice to bring back from Cook-Islands simply because he was surrounded by boring non-entities. And to say that Katie, who was sitting next to him at the moment and who was even worse of a social player, was not a cheap way to bring in some negativity - and in doing so, drama - to the season would be lying.

And lying is something that Dreamz knows too well. Dreamz's back was turned towards Yau-man as Jeff observed the two of them from afar, but Dreamz had no problem facing Yau-man just a few months ago when he betrayed him near the end of Fiji. Yau-man was a great character and Jeff was more than happy to bring him back, but after all, he was fooled by a guy who was so tangled and messed-up he even believed his own lies. Jeff looked from Dreamz, who was staring blankly into space, to Courtney and Shane once again, and then to Ami, who dominated her season, but had done so in a cold, disconnected, intimidating way, and he started to feel he was stuck, not in the middle of the sea, but inside a mental institution.

Rafe and Cindy were the ones brought from Guatemala, frankly because they were the ones who said "yes" when asked. Sure, Cindy may have had the potential to be one of the toughest chicks ever to play the game, and sure, Rafe may have been a surprising dominant social and physical player considering his background and his frail body, but in seasons like Borneo and Australia they wouldn't even be considered All-star material, especially Cindy. Once, they had so many great characters to choose from, and now, Cindy somehow makes the show. Then again, Jenna Lewis was a far worst casting choice last time. So maybe, Jeff thought, I'm being too hard on myself and the other producers. He started to believe his own words when his and Terry's eyes met. Terry may have been a great physical power-house in Exile-Island, but he couldn't beat a 3 year-old in a mind game if his life depended on it. Is this really the best cast they could come up with after six seasons, are these people really the best players and characters out of 109 contestants, and if so, what does it say about the show? What does it say about the *host* of the show?

And, of course, Julie. Julie sat alone in a corner, observing everyone as Jeff observed her. He didn't even want to think about Julie participating in this season, and how hard it's going to be. So he didn't. He turned his glance away from her, and his eyes rested upon Twila instead. Ah, Twila.

Twila was the one person who made Jeff feel differently about this season. If only she could make it to the end again, and this time with the 1,000,000 in her pocket, it would all be worth it. She was the one person who truly needed the money. The one person Jeff felt this season was meant for in the first place- to right the wrong that was done last time. It was no coincidence Chris wasn't brought back this time around.

Twila needed to win. Twila *had* to win.

But the chances for that to happen, Jeff knew, were slim. 1/16, to be precise. And either way, 16 self-absorbed drama queens are going to be his company for more than a month. What the *fuck* was he doing here?

The boat was getting nearer and nearer to the beach. Jeff could see the cameramen getting ready to catch his self-important and meaningless introduction to the season. He stood up, took one last look at the people that were going to make him miserable for a very long time, sighed, and started shouting something about an experience of a lifetime, battling the elements, out-something, out-something-else, out-one-more-thing, 39 days, 16 all-stars, and one survivor.



**Ami - Cindy - Cirie - Courtney - Dreamz - Eliza - Ian - Jonathan
Julie - Katie - Rafe - Shane - Terry - Tom - Twila - Yau-man**

Chapter One -They came at us with nothing!
Days 1-3



The boat bumped against the shore. The 16 all-stars, once they left the boat and their feet touched the soft sand, weren't sure what they were supposed to do. Fortunately, Jeff faced them and started his speech before anyone had time to react.

"This is it", he said dramatically, "the game's about to start. You're probably waiting to hear about the big twist this season. Well, the twist is- there is no twist. We're going back to basics, guys. You'll be starting off as one tribe, and that ain't gonna change until only two of you remain. There will be no switch. No merge. No hidden immunity idol. No exile Island. Let's see which one of you can win a clean, simple game of Survivor, with no unexpected turns that can harm or help your game. It is simply all up to you. Good luck."

And without further explanation, and without any shocking announcement, just like that, Jeff turned the boat away from them and went off.

There they were - the best of the best, stuck on an island and given nothing, absolutely nothing. No machete, no flint, no pot for boiling water, NO WATER, and, worst of all, no instructions whatsoever. All of them expected something, they didn't know what exactly, but surely *something*... but there was nothing. Nothing at all.

So for a few long seconds, they all just stood there on the white sand, some staring into the sea to the spot where Jeff was slowly disappearing, some looking down at their feet, which was very uncharacteristic for an all-star cast, but then again, they were caught completely off guard. Where was the grand opening they were all expecting?

Jonathan, though, was just delighted, and could hardly hide his enthusiasm. How beautiful it was, the simplicity of it! 'Back to the basics', as Jeff worded it. How befitting! It made absolute sense to him, but judging from the others' faces, he was in the minority with this particular opinion.

"Well," he broke the silence, and everyone's gaze went immediately in his direction, "let the game begin!" and he actually raised an imaginary glass at this. "To us! The only people alive who are self-centered and fame-hungry enough to go through this crap again! And may the best man - or woman - ", he added quickly, catching Ami's expression, "win!"

The ice broke at once, as all of them started laughing and cheering, raising empty hands into the air and shouting: "to us!", and the season began at that exact moment.

Fifteen minutes later, Eliza was surrounded by fewer trees than she would have liked, accompanied by Yau-man, and moving faster than a bullet. But no matter how fast she was moving, her mind was racing much, much faster. If we could get inside it, we would hear something along the lines of: *Oh my god. Oh my god. Oh my god I can't believe it. This is happening. This is actually happening. I made it, I made it, I'm in, it has started, and now I'm gathering wood for the fire and Yaw-man is two feet from me gathering wood as well and we're both gathering wood on an island full of the best characters and players in recent seasons and I'm one of them and oh dear god it can't be all true, this is too much, this is all just too much.*

I wanna hug Yau-Man. He's so awesome. I wanna hug him right now and tell him how I rooted for him, how I screamed at my T.V when he got booted out, I didn't get a chance to talk to him at the Fiji wrap party and now I've got 39 days to talk to him and I gotta tell him exactly how awesome he is right now! I can't. I need to control myself. Remember, Eliza, You vowed to be calm, cool and collected this time around, to think through every word, every action you make, to not get on people's nerves. Just smile at him. A smile would be enough. You can worship him at the end, after your calmness, coolness and collectedness will earn you a million dollars. For now, a smile would do.

She threw Yau-Man a quick smile, and he smiled back.

He smiled back! I can't believe it, this is so big, he actually smiled back. I smiled, and he smiled right back at me. Eliza, calm down now. This means absolutely nothing. He was just polite; of course he would be polite, he's Yau-Man, he's such a gentleman, he's truly awesome. Hugging him and worshipping him would be too much, surely, but what if I just start a conversation with him? After all, we're walking in silence for more than ten minutes; it wouldn't be too far-fetched to talk to him a bit, just a casual, non-committal chat.

"So," Eliza was so concentrated on sounding casual she almost tripped on a low branch, "what do you think, Yau-Man? About the cast, I mean? Do you think it is All-Stars-worthy?"

"I find it very interesting", Yau-Man replied. "There are the obvious ones, of course - Tom and Ami and Terry and Cirie - but there are also some that baffle me a little - Katie is a weird casting choice, I must admit. And bringing both Courtney and Shane back raises a few questions."

"I SO agree", Eliza said; she seemed to forget all about her new self-awareness. "I mean, it's a bit strange people like Judd and Chris and Rory and Yul weren't brought back, but I LOVE some of the people they did choose - obviously, I was a big fan of half of them - Rafe, and Cirie, and you-"

She blushed a little, and then went quiet and continued to pick up dry wood. She was moving too fast, too soon. She needed to let Yau-Man do the talking. Thankfully, this didn't take too much time.

"It is a curious position to play against people you watched from your couch back at home", he said. "I was rooting for you on your season, you know. I didn't appreciate the way Scout and Twila were treating you at all."

Eliza actually stopped in her tracks to look closely at Yau-Man, who was quite startled by her reaction. As they stood there, in the middle of the island, holding piles of wood that reached their chins, Eliza couldn't have been less calm, cool and collected even if she tried. The words ran out of her mouth before she could do anything about it: "I want to have a final-two alliance with you."

Yau-Man continued to stare at her.

After another fifteen minutes, they were both back at camp, where things didn't seem to be going very well. Some of the castaways were trying to do the little work that didn't require any sort of equipment, like emptying the camp from big rocks and thorn-bushes, while the others sat there, watching them and talking among themselves. Only Twila and Katie, who went scouting the island, weren't there at the moment.

"No use", Terry said as he and Dreamz tried to literally pull a small tree out of the rocky ground by its roots. "We need a machete to do this. We have no chance at building a shelter without one."

Up until now, they all ignored the little fact that they were doomed without any equipment to help them survive, but once Terry had said it out loud, it seemed to hit them all hard on their heads. What were they going to do? There was not one person on that beach that didn't feel like they were sentenced to death by Jeff earlier that day. Except for Cindy. She was too busy noticing something moving in the bushes quite near her. She could hear peculiar drumming noises coming from the rattling plant. She took a step closer, more excited than afraid, and moved a few branches with her hand. A bird was standing in front of her, the weirdest and most amazing-looking bird she has ever seen - and she witnessed a lot of weird and amazing-looking birds during her career as zoo-keeper. The bird might have looked normal if it wasn't for a huge red gular sac attached to its front - like a balloon about to burst at any minute. Cindy, being the animal expert she was - was of course familiar with this kind of bird - a male Frigate bird - but seeing it so up-close was overwhelming for her. So overwhelming, in-fact, she didn't notice Tom standing up at that moment, about twenty feet from her, and calling in his low, slow Bostonian accent: "Can I have everyone's attention for just one moment?"

Everyone there turned to face him, and Ian actually started to laugh - he thought his old friend was about to make some kind of a bad joke.

"I know this is a little awkward, addressing you all so... bluntly like this", Tom said, and he was right - it *was* awkward, "but I feel like I have no choice. It's pretty obvious

I have a target on my back the size of all our egos combined - I know it, you know it, and the people who cast me on the show knew it. I feel like there's a good chance you might go the same path as the previous all-stars and target the winners first, who are... only me this time. But before you do that, I have two questions for you:

"One, do you *really* want to go the same path as the previous 'all-stars'? Do you really want to be left in the end with Jennas, Ambers and Robs? Or do you wanna take part in a *real* all-star season, to be able to take pride in the show you are participating in? I don't want to name names, but wouldn't it be great if all 14 of us that are here right now, will still be here in six days?

"And two, wouldn't you want to take advantage of the situation in which I am powerless, desperate, and ready for negotiations? Wouldn't it be smarter of you to use me rather than just vote a dead man walking out?

"Just food for thought, I guess", Tom finished, and none of the others said a thing, maybe because of respect, maybe because they didn't know what can be said.

Tom sat down once again, still unsure if he should have done this, but he knew he couldn't just sit there and do nothing at all - and besides, this wasn't the end of it. There was more to his plan, and he was biding his time until the right moment arrived. Meanwhile Cindy, oblivious to what just went on not very far away from her, followed the Frigate bird to a nearby tree, on which it flew and continued to make the low drumming voice still more loudly. A female Frigate bird, the same greenish-black color but without the weird-looking gular sac, came flying out of nowhere and sat beside the male, who, instead of stopping with the drumming, drummed even louder. Cindy stood there for a moment, appreciating the scene and glad that for now, all 16 of them could all concentrate on the beautiful surroundings they're in and save their strategic, backstabbing, cutthroat sides for later.



Twila and Katie made their way across the shoreline in silence. They didn't know exactly what they were looking for, or if they had a chance of finding anything at all. Usually they weren't that hard on themselves, but they couldn't help it - seeing the other all-stars, most of them heroes in their respective seasons, and the way they looked at them both...

Twila and Katie didn't exchange words during their walk, but it was like they were in each-other's minds. They both were women with big personalities who reached the final two only to get ripped apart by the jury, against a man who got praised for his game, or for his comeback. And here they were, brought back against all odds, brought back for a chance to right the wrong, to do it the way it should be done this time, to come out on top. But what if they end up going the same path as last time? What if nothing changes and they still remain as hated, as unappreciated as before, or even more? The first time around, they could argue that the editing did them wrong, that people misjudged them, that it was bad luck. What if it happens again? What will it say about them as people?

But all of this was unsaid by the two women now walking on the beach and having more in common with each-other than they would ever know. They weren't the type of person that would spill their heart out the day they meet, so they just walked, making footprints on the white sand, a sea breeze caressing their faces, scared of things to come. It was a rude awakening for Katie when Twila suddenly stopped in her tracks, looking suspicious.

"This ain't looking right."

Katie looked to where Twila was pointing, and saw it too: to their left, where the ground began to rise and was obscured almost entirely by trees, a small opening was barely visible, a route free from plants that looked as if...

"Hand made", Katie concluded, Twila nodded, and they both turned left and started going up the hidden route, excited, a bewildered cameraman trying to keep up with them.

"What do you reckon is waiting for us in the end?" Twila asked, out of breath, as they avoided branches and roots on their steep way up.

"Why that would be one million dollars, of course! Preferred in cash, but a check would be fine as well. **You hear that, Jeff?!**" Katie yelled to the distance, as though Jeff was waiting for them at the end of the route. Twila didn't know exactly what to make of Katie, so she continued her quick pacing. The path was distinctly used before, but for what?

"Maybe it's some kind of joke pulled on us", Twila said aggressively, "maybe it leads to nowhere, and we'll be walking in circles 'till we have no legs for the challenges no more..."

"Well", said Katie, now smiling, "since my legs didn't exactly help me in challenges the first time around-"

But she stopped talking at once, and as this is Katie we're talking about, this was a big deal. In front of them there was a well, a well full of water, with a bucket inside it held by a reachable rope. And although Katie and Twila were too full of awe to say anything, it was like they could read each-other's minds, as they both thought the same thing at the same time: "We're saved."

Courtney hasn't been this excited in a long while: she, too, felt like she was saved.

"Look what I've found!" she called to the camp in general, appearing out of the trees and holding a large amount of some kind of fruit.

Some contestants stood up at this - they haven't eaten since the day before, and the

hunger was beginning to gnaw at them. Julie was the first to react: "It looks just like-" "Apples", Courtney said without being able to hide her smugness. Who would have thought? She was the one who found this treasure on the big tree not far from camp, and therefore, she was the provider for her tribe, at least for now. There couldn't be a better way for her to start off the game; this was a sign from god, an omen, for sure... "I am familiar with this kind of fruit", said Yau-Man, who leaned closer to see what Courtney was carrying and had everybody's eyes follow him.

"Well, what is it called?" asked Courtney, a little louder than she had intended.

"I'm not sure the name would please you", Yau-Man replied, and Courtney scoffed and looked at him fiercely.

"Why would I care what it's called? I only care what it tastes like!"

"It is called Poison Apple, so I would guess that its taste isn't very good."

"Oh."

Disappointed and somewhat amused, the other castaways went their separate ways. That is, except for Shane.

Shane's strategy this time around wasn't very complicated, but it was very definite: he knew everyone on the island saw his season and had a sense of what he was made of, he had no way around that. so instead of trying to be different this time, to be considerate and calm and... well, sane, he decided to go to the other extreme - to be meaner, harsher and crazier, to make everyone get tired of him - but seeing that this is an all-stars season, he counted on the other players to see it benefited them to keep him around, and hoped that his demeanor wouldn't get him a ticket out, but rather a ticket to the final two, where he could explain that it was his plan to be the perfect person to take to the end all along, that it was the safest and surest way to get there, and wouldn't it be refreshing if an intentional goat will win it all? Wouldn't it be something else, a satisfying, if unexpected, conclusion to the season?

Shane felt that now was the right time to start executing his straight-forward strategy, so he walked over to Courtney, who was standing knee-high in the sea, scraping her hands from poison with sand and salt-water and looking a little on edge.

"So, it was you all along!" he said, acting all surprised, "It was you who poisoned Snowwhite! I should have known!"

Courtney looked around to see who was addressing her, and actually smiled at the sight of Shane, who now was genuinely surprised.

"It's so good to see you, Shane. How've you been? I'm glad they chose you to come back, it wouldn't have been the same here without you."

"Of course it wouldn't, you moron! You wouldn't even be here if it wasn't for me, they only added you because we're great entertainment together, didn't you watch our season at all?!"

Courtney decided not to respond. She knew Shane, and this was his way to say "hello". She was sure that if she had ponytails, he would've pulled them just to show his affection. So she just smiled at him again.

This seemed to irritate Shane even more.

"Well, aren't you gonna contradict me?" he barked at her. "Aren't you gonna explain to me that you were brought back here because this is the way the universe works, because of karma or the Yaya sisters or some other spiritual shit?"

Courtney's smile faded at once. "I'm not that kind of person anymore", she said, holding out the cross she wore around her neck. "I've changed a lot in the last year or so. I'm now a believer in the ways of Jesus Christ."

This was too much for Shane. He just stared at Courtney for a couple of moments, thinking that it must be some kind of joke.

"You? A Jesus freak? Well, it figures, you tried being all kinds of freak in the past, so I guess it was just a matter of time..."

"You wanted something?" Courtney interrupted.

"Huh?"

"I asked if you wanted something in particular, since you did come to talk to me, and up until now you haven't said anything of substance."

"Well, I thought you might want to make an alliance with me. Thing is, we both know you haven't got a fat chance of winning against anyone else besides me."

Courtney couldn't believe what she was hearing. "Shane, you *do* realize you're not the most admired player yourself, don't you? But at least this time you're saying I'm a good person to take to the final 2 to my face and not to the cameras behind my back. And I've thought about it the last few days before the game started- I think it's a good idea, as there are much bigger threats than us. We actually have a chance of making it."

She held out a hand, and Shane shook it extravagantly.

"Gee, that's great, Courtney! I'm now officially aligned with the tribe's *provider*! Tell me, what are you planning to provide us with next, huh? Maybe some snake-venom soup?"

Shane couldn't help himself returning a smile to Courtney at last. One final-two pact down, fourteen to go.



When Twila and Katie returned to camp, it was to a bleak one. Few people were working - some were gathering firewood, which was now a pile five feet high, and some were collecting rocks for the fireplace - but without fire, it was no use.

Ami was the center of attention at the moment. She had built a fire-starting device: two pieces of wood that, when spinning one in a niche in the other using a rope made of strong leaves, should in theory produce a spark. Unfortunately, no one in the tribe was successful in proving the theory true that day - by nightfall, they didn't have fire in their hands, but rather a bunch of blisters.

Therefore, it was a comfort to learn that they weren't going to die of thirst. Katie was the one who delivered the happy news, and received a big hug from Ian in return. The other survivors were entertained by the sight of what looked like a giraffe squeezing a badger, but the amusement didn't last long - they quickly realized that without fire to boil it in, the water wasn't very helpful. It was just another incentive to start a fire.

By the end of the day, the tribe would probably have gulped down snake-venom soup if Courtney had provided them with some, they were that hungry.

Without food in their stomachs, without water wetting their dried throats and without

shelter to protect them from the strong, icy wind, the castaways clang to one another under the huge 'Cordia Lutea' tree and tried to get some sleep. It wasn't an ideal situation for Cirie - the wind rattled the tree, and leaves often fell on them and around them. She had completely forgotten how much she hated leaves. But this was different than the last time she played the game. On her first encounter with leaves, she thought that maybe she was too weak of a competitor. And now, she started to think she was too strong. The leaves weren't her real threat, nor were the lack of water and food - it was her reputation that's going to get her torch snuffed. At first, she was relieved to see Tom as part of the cast, for he was an easy first boot - but after his little weird speech, she started to think: What'll happen next? Wouldn't she be an easy target once Tom's gone? She made a mental note to talk to Tom the next day, and removed a big leaf that fell right on top of her shoulder.

Dreamz was also reminded of his first day his first time around, or rather, the first night, when they were all huddled in their shelter (back then, in the good old days, they were actually provided with a machete) and he had to make those stupid jokes that made him the center of attention immediately. What was he thinking? But no worries, it was now a different game, a second chance, and he now knew how to play the social game, he knew racial jokes weren't a great move, and neither is alienating yourself from the rest of the tribe, or taking someone's car and then vote him out even though you promised you won't. This time, he was going to play a clean, strong game from start to finish. He, unlike Cirie, didn't mind at all getting rid of Tom, and then the next big target, and the next. Besides that, he was going to prove his word means something now, by giving his word to someone early on and then staying true to that word. The first chance he gets, he is going to make a promise to someone, no matter who it is or how big the promise is.

But until the next day comes and he has a chance to make that promise, it was all he could do to stop himself from shouting: "Raise your hand if you're white!"

About ten hours later, the spectacular sunrise brought with it a promise of its own - a promise of a better day than the one before. Today, the sunrise said, was the day that they were going to succeed in starting a fire - or, at least, that's how Rafe saw it. He was the first one up, and didn't waste a second: he went right to the two pieces of wood and started spinning one against the other, using the leaf rope. The second person up was Ami, and she sat next to Rafe and started taking turns with him in trying to start a fire, so that neither of them would get too tired.

"It's beautiful out here, isn't it?" she said as the sun began to rise out of the sea, painting it with yellows and oranges.

"It will be even more beautiful 38 days from now, I'm sure of it", Rafe responded.

"Think about it", Ami said, "if we both make it to the end, it will be the gayest final two ever!"

"Nah, even with both of us in it, Borneo was still gayer, with Richard in it."

"Yeah, you're probably right. He's awfully big."

"And gay", Rafe reminded her.

"And gay", she agreed. It was nice to talk so freely and lightly on the subject - she could have never done so with Scout. As for Rafe, he didn't have anyone in Guatemala to talk about it at all - if you don't count Brian, that is. He still didn't know if he should count Brian. But the thing of interest was, when Ami said: "if we both make it to the end", what exactly did she mean?

It didn't take long for the rest of the tribe to get up. With the piles of firewood and rocks big enough, there wasn't anything to do except sitting around and taking turns in attempting a fire. Everyone was so excited to be stuck with their favorite survivors, however, that there wasn't a dull moment all morning.

"Well, if we don't start a fire soon", said Ian between intakes of breath, as he was the one spinning the wood at the moment, "we will literally die one by one until only one of us survives."

"Maybe this was the intent from the get go", Cindy suggested. "It's much more dramatic than just voting people off. And that way they won't have to pay us our fee."

"Guys, don't talk like that, we aren't going to *die*", Katie said. "If at some point we hit starvation, we'll just send Tom into the sea and he'll catch us a few sharks with his bare hands, like he always does."

"The Yau-Man could have cracked up some coconuts for us by now, if there were any", Dreamz said, and took the sticks from Ian, who seemed exhausted.

"What are we going to eat?" Ami asked, "Besides poison apples, there doesn't seem to be anything that even comes close to being edible on this island. What were they thinking, dumping us in here with absolutely nothing?"

"Any minute now," Terry said, "we'll get tree-mail notifying us of some challenge, and we'll have more information. I'm sure of it."

"Speaking of tree-mail", Julie said, standing up, "where exactly is it? Shouldn't we go looking for it, seeing that it might tell us what's next?"

"I'll come with", said Eliza, standing up at well. It was the perfect opportunity to catch up with her close friend.

"You know what?" said Ami sweetly, "why don't we make it a little Vanuatu reunion? Twila, you want to come too?"

"Sure, what the heck", said Twila after a short pause, then jumped on her feet. Ami followed.

The four women made their way uphill, deeper towards the center of the island. It was a bright, cool day; a perfect day to take a hike, but the atmosphere was a little tense between the Yasurs. Two of them haven't talked to one another ever since their season's finale three years ago, and to a passerby, it wouldn't have been hard to guess who those two were.

As Ami looked at the other three, the inevitable question popped up into her head, even though she knew she shouldn't: is an all-women alliance possible? Will they be able to pull it off this time around? Was it even worth the try? She still didn't get over the fact that the last time she tried, the conclusion was that "women can't stick together". She wanted to correct that assumption, but what if she tried again and failed? She didn't have the patience to watch herself on T.V as the man-hating lesbian queen bitch yet again. But what if she does succeed? What if she gets all the women to the end, and they'll be portrayed as strong and individual for a change? Wouldn't it be all worth it?

But it was too early for thoughts like these. Ami needed to wait for things to unfold, to see where everybody stands. To ask the other women right now if they wanted to make a pact would be too much, too soon. Instead, Ami made a pact with herself: if the first voted-out is a female, she's gonna give it up and try a whole new way of playing the game. But if it's a male, it'll mean there's a female majority of eight versus seven, and she's gonna give it a try.

The four were making their way through rocky grounds up a hill in the middle of the island. Eliza started talking the minute they had left camp, and hasn't stopped since. Ami finally stopped contemplating the game, and got around to listen to what Eliza

had to say to Julie, which was, admittedly, a lot.

"...So I was like, 'yeah, law school is important, but you only get one chance in a lifetime of doing Survivor!' Well, actually two, but you know what I mean - That's not to say that I won't finish with my studies, I'll just have to put them on hold - to be quite honest, it's nice to take a break, it really takes a hold on you, mentally, but of course, that's nothing compared to this game, I was mentally exhausted by the end of it the first time, but it was worth it, look at us now, Julie, the four of us searching for tree-mail, it's so surreal, but it makes sense, I knew they would bring back Ami because she was such a strong presence on our season, and Twila, well, she was quite the character, and Jeff loves her, and me, I can see why I'm considered to be entertaining, as I say what's on my mind..."

"All the time", interrupted Twila, and Eliza looked at her as though she had just realized she was there. She wasn't going to take her bait so easily, though.

"...well, yeah... and you, Julie, I knew you were a good casting choice as you had potential that wasn't really used the first time around, but I thought that the whole thing with Jeff..."

"Oh, Jeff and I broke up, so there's no conflict of interests anymore."

"NO! When did this happen?"

"A few months ago. I didn't wanna make a big deal out of this. We just felt it was enough. Besides, it gave me a chance to come out here and play, so no complaints." That shut Eliza up for a while. She didn't see this coming - she talked to Julie a lot during her years together with Jeff, and she seemed so happy, all the time. On the other hand, it *would* have been unfair had they still were with one another and Julie was allowed to participate. So the break-up couldn't have come at a better time for Julie.

Julie was silent too. Were they buying it? Was she convincing enough? She thought about it a lot before the game started, they both did, and there was no other way. They had to stage a break-up. For one, people would have accused Jeff of favoritism in the casting if they hadn't. This wasn't true, of course - Jeff didn't even mention her name during the whole casting process. People would have accused Jeff of favoritism during the game as well, and this wasn't true either - it would've been too obvious had he helped his girlfriend out, and besides, Julie didn't want any help. So a staged break-up was the only way, but now that she had to say the words out-loud, it felt wrong, even dirty. *And could they tell?*

Twila was also quiet. She didn't care one way or the other about Julie and Jeff's relationship, and she didn't care one way or the other about Eliza's law school. What she cared about was the fact that when the four of them left camp, people were eyeing them and then beginning to talk quietly to one another. What was going on and why wasn't she a part of it? But like Ami, she too felt that it was too early to strategize her ass off. Last time her big move was in the final 7, right where she needed to make one. And this time - she decided as the tree-mail became visible on top of the little hill they were climbing - she was going to wait until, hopefully, they take Tom out at the first tribal council and then see where the chips fall.

But Twila was right. The camp was buzzing with whispers and secret discussions that day. Right now it was divided into three: Courtney, Jonathan, Dreamz, Cindy and Shane were washing themselves in the water; Terry, Cirie, Rafe and Yau-Man took shelter from the sun under the big tree; and The Palau three - Tom, Ian and Katie - were still attempting to start a fire. Their hands were already so injured, though, that they didn't stand much of a chance.

"We're not exactly in Koror anymore, are we?" Ian pointed out. "This time we actually have to work for something we want instead of it being handed to us. And we can't be on the winning tribe, as there are no tribes..."

"Yeah, what's up with that?" Katie jumped in, "do you think they're gonna separate us into two teams for each immunity challenge? Or are we already playing for individual immunity? If that's the case, would you let us win once in a while, Tom?"

Tom smirked at her. "Oh, Katie, I don't stand a chance against you, you're like a challenge monster."

"Yeah, I suck at challenges so much it's monstrous!"

Ian was so happy to have his two best friends with him on the island one more time. He was also proud that they were the only final three that made it to all-stars. But were they gonna stick together this time? He wasn't sure. None of them talked about it so far. He guessed that Katie didn't because last time, she was crucified for aligning with two of the stronger players, and that Tom didn't because having such a strong alliance would put even a bigger of a target on his already-pretty-targeted back. But besides that, there was something off about Tom, who was now eyeing the four people under the 'Cordia Lutea' tree. Was there more to Tom's strategy than he was letting on? Ian was sure there was, because he knew Tom pretty well, but also because Tom was now actually getting up and walking towards the tree. "I'll be right back", he said and walked away, leaving Ian to wonder exactly how much he could trust Tom right now.

Katie knew she couldn't trust Tom, as well as she knew he couldn't trust her. As well as she knew she was writing his name down tomorrow.

It was time for Tom to execute his second part of the plan, as he sat under the tree besides Yau-Man and looked from Rafe to Cirie to Terry. They all hushed up the moment he came.

"What's the matter? Did I interrupt the talk in which you decide exactly how to vote me out? Exactly what to say while writing my name down?"

He looked at them kindly, but they all looked somewhat guilty.

"No worries, it's OK. I kinda accepted my fate - that is, if I don't win immunity. But let's think together for a second about what'll happen after I'm gone. Who do you think will be targeted then? Getting rid of me is just digging the grave for players like you. It's making sure they get rid of you next."

A short silence occurred, in which you could practically hear the wheels turning in the players' heads, and then:

"It's the only way, of course it's the only way. We should stick together. That's just the only way for us to stay. We *have* to stick together."

Rafe looked terrified at what she said, but Tom wasn't surprised at all that it came from Cirie. After all, it wouldn't be the first time Cirie used the strategy of getting rid of the people that are about to get rid of you for being a threat.

"I'm glad you're seeing the logic of it. Taking out the biggest presence only to become one is short-sighted. Look at what happened at the last all-stars. It depresses me just to think about it - waiting to be taken out isn't how you play this game. Doing something about it is how you play it. We have a chance to do something about it. What do you say?"

Tom, the expert, the one who always has things under control, looked at his potential partners like a little kid pleading his parents to let him go out and play. This *was* his only chance to go out and play. Yau-Man was the one to speak first. "If we go through with it, we must have a 6th, a 7th, an 8th and a 9th. It's just simple math. I think I can

get Dreamz to vote with us, he did try to pay me back ever since our season ended, and it would be the perfect opportunity."

"That'll do. And Ian, of course, wouldn't say no if I asked. He already looks at me, like he's waiting for orders."

When Rafe joined in, it was slowly and thoughtfully.

"I... I think we should include Ami as well. I mean - the way she played the game in Vanuatu, she'll be targeted pretty early as well, so it would make sense to her."

"And Eliza", Yau-Man quickly added, "Ami won't have a problem bringing Eliza in as another vote; she has a hold on her. Eliza will go wherever the majority is; she does not want to be left out."

Everyone looked at Terry, the only one who hasn't spoken yet. He seemed to be thinking really hard, and at last he said: "Well, that's nine right there. I think it's awesome, finally the ones who deserve it will actually get to the end!"

"So, are we all in it?" asked Tom casually, although the answer to that question meant life or death to his game.

"Hell, yeah!" responded Terry. Rafe and Yau-man nodded, and Cirie said: "if we want to stay in this, it's our only way."

Right at that second, over at the place where Ian and Katie were sitting, a fire has started.

Soaking in water, Dreamz was making his way back to camp when he was approached by Tom and Yau-Man. Their plan sounded to him like suicide at first, but then:

"We need you to promise us you're with us, Dreamz, so there would be no mistakes."

Not long after that, The Vanuatu women returned to camp, bearing a message that the first immunity challenge will take part tomorrow, first thing in the morning. A few minutes later, Rafe took Ami to the side and whispered something in her ear. Another few minutes, and Ami did the same to Eliza. For the rest of the day, Eliza's eyes were bigger than usual.

With a fire on, but no pot to boil water in it, the castaways were reminded just how thirsty they were. It's been almost two days, and it was now hard to even walk a straight line. Luckily for them, the weather was very cool that day, with the sun barely coming out from the clouds, so they weren't completely dried-out, but just close enough.

That night, the only conversation taking place under the big tree was about tomorrow, and what it would bring. How was Jeff going to divide them for the immunity challenge? Was there going to be only one winner? Hopefully, Jeff was going to announce tomorrow that the "no help whatsoever" part was just a joke, and he would shower them with machetes, pots and some kind of food. It started to sink in that they were literally starving out there. Did CBS think that it was good entertainment that way?



The next day, the challenge was to take place in the middle of the sea. The same boat that abandoned them on the island came to fetch them right at the moment that the sun came out. Jeff waited for them on a platform with a covered-up table at his side and a huge grin on his face. "Welcome", he said, "to our first challenge."

Even though it was so cold they didn't get any sleep last night, and even though they were a bit angry at the producers for marooning them with nothing, they couldn't help but cheer and clap their hands to show their excitement. It was, after all, an adventure of a lifetime, and they all got a chance to go through it twice. They all truly felt lucky at the moment.

Jeff approached them. "Dreamz, how is it so far?"

"Miserable, Jeff, thank you very much!"

They laughed, even though crying would have been appropriate as well.

"Yeah, we weren't exactly easy on you guys, huh? Well, you did sign up for an all-star season, so it shouldn't surprise you that we don't give you everything right away. You *will* have a chance to earn something today that will make life at camp much easier, but we'll get to that later. Right now we have an immunity challenge to get to.

"You will be randomly divided into two teams, each with an even number of men and women. Both teams will take their place on the balance beam-" he pointed to another, thinner, platform a few feet from him, "-and hold on to a rope. It will be a simple tug-of-war game, which requires strength, favoring the men, and balance, favoring the women. The team that makes all the other team-members fall into the water, or lose their hold on the rope, wins, even if only one of the winning team stays on the platform, holding the rope. If you fall into the water with the rope, you're still out. It's as simple as that. Once we have a winning team of eight, we split this team into two new teams of four, and so on, until we're left with only one man and one woman to battle it out. Everybody clear on the rules?"

They all nodded. Jeff then divided them by pulling their names out of two bags, so that the teams would have the same amount of males and females in them. When he finished, on one side of the beam stood Terry, Twila, Rafe, Yau man, Cirie, Ian, Eliza and Katie, and on the other - Tom, Courtney, Jonathan, Julie, Cindy, Ami, Dreamz and Shane.

Both teams held on to their ropes, and exchanged whispers concerning their tactics for the challenge. Both teams placed their strongest members - Terry and Tom,

respectively - in the rear, and their women at the front.

When he looked at those 16 children, excited to compete again, Jeff's strong opinions against an all-star season softened a little. He had a feeling it was going to be a different experience than the last. When he raised his hand to signal the start of the competition, he felt a little excited himself. "Survivors ready?" he shouted, and when they all nodded, looking fiercely into the other team's eyes - **"GO!"**

The rope probably didn't have a very enjoyable time when the challenge had begun. Each team hoped that if they pulled hard enough right at the start, the other team would lose control - but because both teams gave it their all right away, the position of the rope barely changed.

"And... pull! And... pull!", Eliza ordered her team, as she was the one at the front. They had a consistent rhythm and it seemed to work - the other team was getting nearer and nearer to the golden-marked center of the balance beam. But for some reason, the other team didn't seem concerned about that at all... the reason for that was soon discovered, when Tom revealed his team's plan from the back of the pack: "ready? One... Two... THREE!"

At Tom's mark, the eight of them gave it all they got - they were clearly keeping their best efforts for that moment alone. The other team didn't expect that - half of them lost their hold of the rope, and fell into the water due to the strength of the pull. Only the four women of the team - Twila, Cirie, Eliza and Katie - still remained holding on to the rope, but even they knew they had no chance whatsoever. And in a few seconds, despite trying their best, it was over - The other eight were too strong together, and the whole rope was eventually on their side. Twila was the last one to hold on to it, but it was no use. Down in the water, Terry eyed Tom and splashed the water in anger. He wasn't used to be taken out so early.

The winning team was then divided into two new teams, which consisted of Shane, Julie, Shane and Dreamz against Courtney, Jonathan, Ami and Tom. Again, the strongest member was positioned behind, with Dreamz now taking the place of Terry. Again, some whispers were exchanged. And again, Jeff asked them if they're ready, and then ordered them to begin the battle.

To everyone's surprise, Tom, Jonathan, Courtney and Ami didn't seem to try and win it this time - they let the other team slowly get more and more of the rope to their side. But then -

"One", Tom said.

And the other team quickly realized that the trick used last time was to be used once more, this time on them.

"Two..."

"Hold on tight!" demanded Shane, ready to pull as hard as he could.

"THREE!"

But Shane was completely wrong: instead of pulling the rope with all their effort, the other team simply let go of it - sending the four people that still held tight to the rope right into the ocean. "Well", ruled Jeff, "I did state that once you're in the water, you're out. I'm sorry, Shane, Cindy, Dreamz, Julie."

Jeff said it so matter-of-factly, that Julie looked at him in surprise from the icy water. She was the one who asked him to treat her like any other in this game, but nothing could have prepared her for the way it felt.

It was now down to Ami and Tom competing against Jonathan and Courtney. It was easy to predict who would win this time, there was no suspense whatsoever. The round began, and both teams pulled, but Ami and Tom simply pulled harder, and it took no time for the entire rope to reach their end, despite Courtney's and Jonathan's

best efforts.

It was down to two. Tom sized up his competition. Ami was clearly not as strong, but she did have a better chance to outlast him on the balance beam, as it was only about three feet wide. If she succeeds in off-balancing him, that'll be it.

"Survivors ready?"

No, survivors not ready, thought Ami. *How could I be ready against Tom?!*

"GO!"

Ami positioned herself safely on the beam, with her knees a little bent, and pulled harder than ever. Tom, however, did something different. He sat himself on the beam, wrapped the rope around his upper body and started advancing towards the golden line signaling the middle. Ami wasn't ready for it, but adjusted quickly. She pulled the rope as intensely as she could to one side, trying to make Tom lose his balance. But Tom was settled so firmly on the beam he was almost a part of it. He gave a stronger-than-usual pull and Ami, unable to keep her balance and keeping a strong hold on the rope at the same time, gave him the opportunity to pull it all to his side. It was over, and the inevitable occurred - Tom won.

The immunity necklace, uglier than ever with a huge, dried-out sea-star in the middle, was put around Tom's neck by Jeff, who was congratulating him along with the others. Ami gave him a hug and told him he deserved it. They were all ready to make their way back to their island when Jeff spoke.

"There is one more thing." He removed the cover from the table at his side and revealed items that made the players gasp. "Tom, you won immunity fair and square, but you have a decision to make. Before you, are a pot for boiling water, a machete and a huge bag full of edible potatoes. You have a chance to reward your tribemates with one of these items - if you give up your immunity.

Nobody spoke. It was hard for them, especially for Shane who wanted to shout: "The potatoes! Take the potatoes!" but nobody spoke. It had to be Tom's decision.

Tom didn't speak at first either. He had a big chance of going home, and yet, if he keeps the immunity he deprives his tribemates from necessities *and* shows his new alliance-members he doesn't trust them. If he keeps the immunity this time, he'll need it *every* time from now on.

"Jeff, there's really no question. Obviously I'm gonna keep it."

"I'm just kidding. Of course I'm letting go of the necklace. It's not even that good-looking."

Tom gave the necklace back to a smiling Jeff, then was passed around from person to person, each hugging him or patting him on the back, thanking him but saying that it would've been okay if he didn't give it up. Ian said to him: "Who in their right mind would throw away such a crucial immunity?! Quitter!"

"Well, there's only one thing left to decide - what are you taking with you back to camp?"

Tom didn't hesitate this time. "We'll take the pot. There's no use for the potatoes or the machete if we all die of thirst."

"Well", said Jeff, handing Tom the boiling pot, "now that you're all candidates for the boot, I'll see you tonight at tribal council, where someone will become the first all-star to be voted out. Goodbye."

And they all sat inside the boat, the words *the first all-star to be voted out* echoing inside their brains.



When they returned to camp, the fire was out but the coal was still burning white, so it wasn't a problem recreating the flames. Twila and Katie took the boiling pot from Tom and ran to find the way to the well once more. They returned twenty minutes later, panting but holding a pot full of dirty water. When it was boiled and passed carefully from survivor to survivor, it was a group consensus: drinking hot, tasteless water never felt better.

Gradually, people went their own way, leaving only Ian and Tom by the fire.

"Remember yesterday?" Tom asked. He looked at Ian closely.

"Of course I remember yesterday, it was only the day before."

"No, I mean, yesterday when I left you and Katie and went to sit under the tree."

"Yeah, I thought it was a little weird."

Ian didn't want to bring this up, he didn't want to act like he was married to Tom, but it did bug him a lot.

"Well, we talked about how the big players need to take care of one another. How we should get rid of the weakest, so that they don't seize control."

"Yeah, I figured that much. You and me together is for sure considered dangerous, we need to stick with the people most likely to be considered dangerous as well. So who did you have in mind for the first vote?"

"The thing is..." Tom paused. He was trying to think of the right words. Ian looked at

him and understood.

"You want Katie out."

"Well, think about it!" Tom was already on the defense. "We're already the pair most likely to be targeted; you want us to be a trio? That's like begging to get voted out! It makes sense, Ian. It'll show the rest of the alliance our good intentions. It just makes sense."

"I know it does", Ian said quietly, "but I can't, not right now. You know I can't do that to Katie."

Tom looked at Ian, at the pathetic look on his face, and knew that he wasn't going to be convinced.

"Fine. But you *do* realize we'll have to get rid of her at some point. That this is a game in which you either vote people out or get voted out."

"Yes, and I'm ready for it, just - not right now. It's too early, I can't."

"Then I think Twila would be the second choice. Eliza the loose cannon won't have a problem with getting rid of her nemesis, and besides, she's not the most likable in the bunch. She probably didn't start enough relationships with people for them to want her to stay."

Ian was relieved, in an anxious sort of way. "Twila's a good idea. She's dangerous when it comes to changing the tides; she's a good one to dispose of early. But do we have a nine to do so?"

"Yes. We have a nine. I just hope that we'll have a nine when it counts."

Time until tribal council went short. Tom informed the rest of his alliance of the plan to oust Twila, and it was pretty much received well, but he had to wonder - if they were planning to get rid of him without telling it to his face, wouldn't they behave the same?

Twila wasn't acting like a target. She was in the water with Dreamz, laughing at what he had to say. She liked the fact that she didn't start off at a female-only tribe, and she liked the fact that her chances in the game looked even better that way. But was it all too easy? Was getting rid of Tom too good to be true? Too obvious?

"...I mean, at least when I lived in the streets there was garbage to be eaten and plastic bags to crawl into in a bad weather, but here it's like homelessness for the poor! It's like homelessness-less or something."

"You're lucky you're talking to me about poor, if you said that word to the others they wouldn't even know what it means. I'm still paying debts with my cash prize, and I ain't even close to being done..."

"I hear you, same here."

He looked at her, and his heart did a back-flip. He wasn't used to feeling guilty about voting someone off, especially this early in the game. They had so many similarities - both of them from a tough background, both of them ending up losing to players who were full of shit, both of them doing everything in their power to get to the end, no matter how many promises they broke on the way, both of them so close to winning the money they actually need, but then falling short - it almost felt like, by voting her out, he was voting for himself.

"It's still Tom, right?" Twila asked as though it was unnecessary to ask, "It's still Tom that's going tonight, everybody's going through with it, right?"

"That's what I know", Dreamz responded quickly. Maybe too quickly, he realized.

"You promise that's what's going on?" Twila asked almost jokingly. She didn't know

how lucky she was to use the word 'promise' in her sentence. In that moment, Dreamz decided: Twila didn't know it, but she was going to be saved.

Tribal council took place on a nearby island, on top of a cliff overlooking the sea, and the only way to reach it was to climb a rope ladder. Cindy was so sick of ropes by the end of her climb that it took her a minute to get over her frustration and notice the view of the ocean from which the moon was coming out at the moment: it was definitely worth it. Then she turned around to look at the actual tribal council, and her mouth dropped open.

It was a mess, but a spectacular one. Elements from all tribal-council sets from the last six seasons were incorporated into it: on one side, a sunken ship's deck; on the other, an airplane's wreck; on top, a Fijian cabin's roof; all around them, stones bricks who looked like they were taken from a Mayan temple; and red candles inside skulls scattered as part of the complete havoc.

"Behind each of you is a torch, go ahead and grab it, and approach the flame." Jeff said it almost automatically; he was so used to it. The part about fire representing life was actually painful for him to say: he felt like jumping into the fire and ending *his* life every time the words came out of his mouth. That'll show them.

"So", he said as he looked at the sixteen all-stars finding a seat, and his smile at the moment was genuine. "Here we are. Me hosting another All-stars. Who would have thought.

"Rafe, how does it feel to be back?"

Rafe's grin was taking half his face. "Jeff, it's the best feeling in the world. I was such a huge fan of this game even before I played it the first time, and I didn't even dare to dream of being asked to participate in an all-star season. I'm still waiting for someone to wake me up."

"Who are you most excited to see here?"

"Well, Eliza and I are pretty much alike in terms of being students of the game, and our age as well, so it'll be interesting to see how both of us will do. And I cheered for Cirie out-loud during her season - I'm still finding it hard to believe she's sitting next to me right now. It just feels like I'm locked in a candy store."

Cirie giggled and gave him a pat on the shoulder.

"Cirie, how was it for you to return?" Jeff asked.

"To be honest with you, Jeff, I forgot how hard it is! I got sick right at the start, and then to be abandoned with no food, no water and no shelter - What were you trying to do to us, Jeff?"

"Yeah, let's talk about that for a bit. Terry, do you feel it is fair to let you guys literally fight for your lives?"

"It is survivor, so everything goes. It's only appropriate that the best of the best really have to survive in order to win this game. It's also a wake-up call to those of us who thought that because they're all-stars, they'll have it easy. It certainly will help keep some egos in check."

Cirie looked at Terry disbelievingly. *Him?* Telling *other people* to keep their egos in check?!

"Cindy", Jeff turned to face her, "what's your input?"

"I love it, I absolutely love it." She was radiating as she answered Jeff's question. "I don't see what there is to complain about. Galapagos's just a beautiful place, with beautiful animals and vegetation, and I honestly feel lucky just being able to be in this end of the world, let alone as part of an all-star cast. It's so surreal, I can't even process

it."

"So", concluded Jeff, "we have people who don't understand why we're torturing them, and on the other side, people who feel they're the luckiest in the world for just being here. Where do you fall in, Shane?"

"I think it's bull-crap to be excited about the surroundings, Jeff. Get an airplane ticket if you want to see the world, this is a whole other game we're playing. But obviously it's better for me- while people admire the shells on the beach, I'll be able to vote them off without them even realizing- I can't believe I'm saying it about an all-star season, but people need to start realizing why they're here instead of being star-struck by the other players or the surroundings. It's just ridiculous."

Shane was pretty proud of himself. If people didn't hate him until now, they are sure starting to now.

"Let's talk about the immunity challenge..."

As Jeff was asking meaningless questions about who fell to the water when, Eliza was deep in thought about what Rafe was saying earlier - if she was a student of the game, then why on earth was she allying herself with people she can't beat at the end, with people who'll take her out the minute she stops being beneficial to them? It was so tempting to take out Twila at last, to get revenge after all this time, and that's why she initially said 'yes', but at what price? She thought about her discussion with Dreamz that took place right before tribal council. They needed to do what's best for them, not for their alliance. She could turn it all around right now, at tribal council. After all, her first tribal council in Vanuatu, she did just that. She thought about the people watching her at home in a few months, screaming at their TVs for her to make the right decision. But what was it?

Eliza was caught off-guard when Jeff addressed her. "So, Eliza, what are you basing your vote on tonight?"

That's not very nice of you to ask me that, Jeff, she thought to herself, but her answer was different: "I'm voting tonight based on what I feel is right for me. This is a selfish vote, Jeff. This is a vote for Eliza and Eliza only."

"Katie, do you think it's a smart way to vote?"

"Of course - that's the only way to vote! I'm honestly surprised that not everyone is voting that way! Even if you're voting as a block, it should be because it benefits you, not because it's a group consensus. 'Survivor' is a selfish game, basically, no matter how you put it. Tonight I'm in luck, because my best interest is also the others' best interest. I just hope they see it."

Behind Katie, Twila nodded. Jeff, of course, didn't miss it.

"Twila, you nodded."

"Yes, Jeff. I think it's obvious who should be going tonight, there's no room for mistakes. Each and every person here should think how to save themselves in this game, and voting this person out tonight is the best way. It's clear as crystal, this is."

"Well, on this note," Jeff announced, "it is time to vote. No immunity tonight-" Tom shifted in his seat "-so everybody's fair-game. Yau-Man, you're up."

After everybody voted, there was a tense sort of silence, tenser than usual. To be voted out first on Survivor wasn't a happy feeling, but to be voted out first on an all-star season... They all hoped that they wouldn't have to know what it feels like. But one of them was about to.

Jeff came back with the voting urn safely in his hands. Tom hoped there wasn't going to be any sort of surprises. So did Twila. They just thought about different kinds of surprises.

"Tom" was the first vote read out-loud by Jeff. *One vote is fine*, thought Tom. *Any number of votes under nine is fine.*

"Twila."

Twila knew there was the possibility, she knew Tom had to target someone, but she couldn't help but think to herself: *Why me? Of all people, why me?*

The third vote was for Twila as well. So was the fourth. *So it wasn't a random vote. There's something going on.*

Then Tom again. And again. And again. And again. And again. He expected this. It was all expected.

And then, as expected, Twila's name came out of the urn four more times. It was tied, as Jeff announced, seven for Twila, seven for Tom.

It all came down to the next vote. Even Eliza, who knew the outcome, found herself sitting on the edge of her seat in suspense.

Jeff opened the fifteenth vote, looked at it and showed it to the others - it was for Twila. It was over with. She needed the next one to be for Tom for it to be a tie, but she knew there was no chance of that happening, that it was pre-organized. She just didn't understand why.

And sure enough: "The first person voted out of Survivor all-stars: Galapagos - Twila. I need you to bring me your torch."

She brought him her torch. It was done. She lost the first time, and the second, and there ain't gonna be a third. But it wasn't as painful as it could've been: at least it was completely illogical, so there was no way she could've predicted it and done something about it. That's just the way the chips fell.

Smoke still came out of Twila's torch as Jeff faced the remaining fifteen contestants, smiling at them. "No one could have predicted this boot. No one. I'm scared to see what other tricks you've got, but one thing's for sure - this is *not* gonna be predictable. Grab your torches, head back to camp. Good night."

His smile faded the moment they left. Twila, the one he most wanted to win it all, was ousted before it even began. His heart was broken, but he couldn't help but feel a little intrigued at what went on tonight, and even more intrigued at the thought of what might happen next.

On the dark way back to camp, as people talked about how they're going to miss Twila, Tom walked with his head held-up high. It wasn't that he was victorious once more, or that he had done the impossible. That wasn't the case at all. It was that he's been saved.

